

# Hope & Healing

## Menopause Being Informed About Menopause

---

A heart at peace gives life to the body — Proverbs 14:30

---

### Introduction \_\_\_\_\_

Most women stop menstruating completely around age 50, but menopause is not a definite date. It is a gradual process. Your body produces less estrogen after the late thirties or early forties and the symptoms of menopause may occur from five to ten years before your final period. So, menopause may happen anywhere from about age 36 to age 54 and most likely you'll have your last period about the same age your mother had hers. But, there are other factors. If you've had more than five pregnancies, you may experience menopause a year later than you ordinarily would. And, if you smoke, you may reach menopause one or two years earlier than you would otherwise. If you're only in your thirties and begin having hot flashes or irregular menstrual cycles, see your doctor for blood hormone levels and an examination to be certain that no other problem is causing your symptoms.

### The Problems to Be Aware Of \_\_\_\_\_

One out of five women experience no unusual symptoms at menopause. Their periods simply stop. Others will have irregular or heavy periods. Mild headaches, fatigue and backache are problems for some women. About 40% will suffer hot flashes, and of these women, 15% will find them so severe that they will seek medical relief. The hot flash is a sudden feeling that the body's temperature has risen. The skin of the face and chest may flush red and sweat breaks out. At night hot sweats can cause loss of sleep. The theory of hot flashes is that the body's estrogen levels will rise and fall, causing blood vessels to

dilate. Dilated blood vessels carry more blood, which causes the increased heat. Just how this happens is not clear. Other changes include:

- Thinning out of the lining of the vagina and a decrease in the natural lubrication of the vagina. This can cause painful intercourse.
- Mood swings and depression.
- An increased risk of getting a heart attack.
- A loss of bone thickness that can lead to osteoporosis, a condition where bones are more fragile and prone to break.
- Short-term memory loss.

### What Women Say About Menopause \_\_\_\_\_

Clara Wood of Greenbelt, Maryland founded a support group called "Women in Midlife and Menopause." She said, "It began in May of 1988 when I was out West visiting my children. At the airport I was gripped with a sudden feeling of dread. When I got back to work I couldn't concentrate. I started experiencing terrible mood swings. I thought, Okay, I'm having a bad bout of PMS. Then it dawned on me; I'm 50 years old. I must be going through menopause."

Increased stress and anxiety are common during menopause. Lower levels of estrogen aren't likely to send you over the edge. The emotional burden, however, gets heaviest when you're already dealing with other problems. If your parents are ailing, your bills are piling up, and your kids are leaving home, for example, hot flashes and mood swings don't exactly help matters. Still, studies show that women

in menopause are no more likely to suffer anxiety and depression than women who are having regular periods.

### Is Your Sex Life Over? \_\_\_\_\_

In 1991 a Gallup Poll survey of 750 married women showed that 71% had the same interest in sex as before. It is true that intercourse may become uncomfortable because of vaginal dryness. If this happens sexual desire may naturally fall. But, as Dr. Phyllis Mansfield of Pennsylvania State University warns, you shouldn't blame every difficulty on menopause. "You might be experiencing boredom in a long-term marriage, or you might not be as comfortable with your body as you once were." And, it could be that your mate is changing in his sexual responses with age.

### Can I Get Pregnant During Menopause? \_\_\_\_\_

If your periods come and go unpredictably, you can get pregnant until you've gone a full year without a period. Birth control should be continued during this time. But, if you are using the pill you will need to talk to your doctor about the best method to use. (Smokers should steer clear of the pill after age 35 to avoid the risk of heart attack and stroke.)

## Can a Hysterectomy Prevent Menopause? \_\_\_\_\_

If your ovaries were removed during hysterectomy you'll pass through menopause immediately and should ask your doctor if you should take estrogen patches or pills. If only the uterus and cervix were removed you will not have periods but will pass through menopause naturally when the time comes.

## Should I Take Hormones? \_\_\_\_\_

Whether or not to take hormones can be a difficult question to answer. It is also a question that your doctor cannot answer for you without knowing your desires in the matter after you have given the pros and cons a lot of thought.

### The Pros of Hormone Replacement

- Prevents osteoporosis.
- Relieves hot flashes.
- Fewer skin wrinkles.
- Vaginal moisture is maintained.
- Improves mood and memory.

### The Cons

- Possible risk of breast cancer.
- Continued menstrual bleeding.
- Premenstrual-like syndrome.
- Additional doctor visits and tests.
- Uncertainty about long-term health risks.

Remember: Many women go through menopause very well without estrogen replacement. Menopause is not a medical condition that requires drugs.

## Is There Any Good Menopause?

Many women use the menopause as a time for redefining their lives in order to find a new direction they find that they have time for things they couldn't do when their children were growing up or their careers were just beginning. In this way, it can be used as a beginning, not the end. The best move, is to get ready for the change.

## Four Moves to Get Ready

- **Cut the fat.** By reducing fat to 30% or less of your daily calories you can decrease your chances of developing heart disease.
- **Go for the calcium.** The average woman is short of her calcium needs by 400 to 900 milligrams a day. (You need 1,000 to 1,500 milligrams of calcium a day and you get about 600 on average.) Three cups of skim milk contain about 800 milligrams. Check with your doctor about adding supplements to your diet.
- **Run, walk, bike, swim.** You should exercise 30 to 60 minutes three to six times a week. Muscle building by lifting weights can help prevent osteoporosis.
- **Stop smoking, if you smoke.** This move, above all others, will help protect you against developing heart disease after you lose the protection of estrogens as their levels decrease.

## Summary \_\_\_\_\_

Research has solved many of the mysteries of menopause but others remain. You should seek to understand the basic changes that menopause will cause and the genuine health risks that these changes will produce. Your doctor can help you plan to avoid or to lessen the problems. Then, you can pause to enjoy the advantages of menopause as you sail through. As the Anthropologist Margaret Mead once said, "The most creative force in the world is the menopausal woman with zest."

## Awaken the Miracles Within You

### The Miracle of the Bible

Many doubters look upon the Bible as an out-of-date and dull book for boring people. They have usually not read it, nor been in the company of those who have.

The Bible, when read in search of spiritual interpretation, is a practical text of thrilling insight, containing clear explanations and definite guidance for every difficulty that arises in everyday life.

Religious difficulties, the healing of the body, the poverty problem, home and business worries are all dealt with and provided for in the Bible.

Read the Bible with purpose. It will give you the special message for your need of the moment.

Don't go to the Bible for confirmation of your own ideas. Learn what Jesus said about life.

"Speak Lord, for thy servant heareth."

*The recommendations and information in this handout are appropriate in most cases. However, for specific information concerning your personal medical condition, please, consult your doctor.*