

End...

Chapter 22

Menopause

Beginning

Menopause occurs when a woman's body no longer produces estrogen and menstrual periods stop. Natural menopause occurs gradually, usually between the ages of 40 and 55—the average age of menopause is 51. A menopausal state can also result from removal of both ovaries.

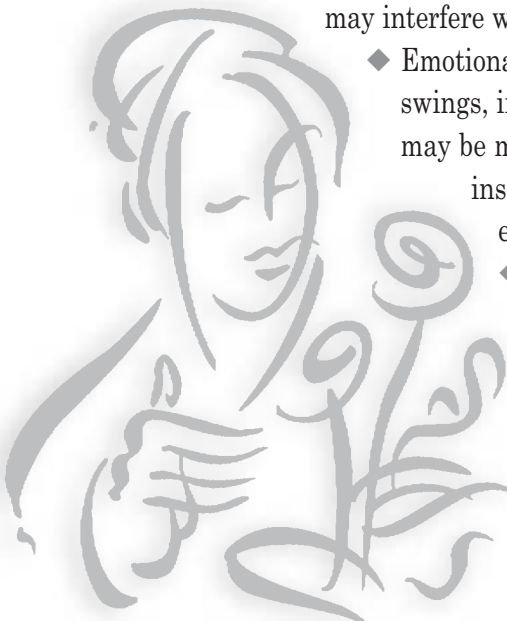
Menopausal Symptoms.

Some women don't develop symptoms at menopause. Most of the following symptoms associated with menopause are linked to a lack of estrogen.

- ◆ Hot flashes, or hot flushes, are sudden feelings of heat that spread over the body, often accompanied by a flushed face and by sweating. They occur without warning and may interfere with sleep and cause insomnia.
- ◆ Emotional changes, such as mood swings, irritability, and depression may be more closely associated with insomnia than to the lowered estrogen level.

- ◆ Vaginal tissues become dryer, thinner, and less flexible around menopause.

Osteoporosis becomes a greater risk at menopause because estrogen is no longer protecting you against bone loss, resulting



in bones that may become thinner and brittle. In addition, cardiovascular disease is a greater risk after menopause, and estrogen therapy (ET) does not appear to reduce this risk.

Hormone Therapy.

Doctors and health professionals may recommend hormone therapy (HT), which typically consists of estrogen and progestin (synthetic progesterone). In addition to reducing the menopausal symptoms listed above, ET and HT can reduce your risk of developing osteoporosis.

Recent research has changed some earlier beliefs about other benefits of HT. Newer opinions are that HT increases bone density and reduces fractures and reduces your risk for cancer of the colon and rectum. However, research now indicates that one particular HT product increases a woman's risk of breast cancer, blood clots in the veins, and coronary heart disease and may increase the risk of Alzheimer's disease. It is not known at this time if these findings apply to all HT. The American Heart Association now recommends that healthy women not take HT for the purpose of preventing heart disease and that women with heart disease should not start on HT.

Potential risks of ET include an increased risk of endometrial cancer, which is eliminated with the addition of progesterone in HT. In addition, there may be a slight increase in your risk of breast cancer.

Your choice of whether or not to use ERT or HRT will depend on your individual health history and risk factors. Since the results of research studies don't always agree, it is hard to weigh the benefits against the risks and to decide what is best for you. Some experts now believe that menopausal symptoms may be the only good reason for using HT but others disagree. You will need to talk to your doctor about whether or not ET or HT is a good choice for you.

A number of substances, including foods, vitamins, minerals, and herbs, have been promoted as cures for menopausal

symptoms. At this time, research has not supported the validity of these claims.

For those women who are afraid to take ET or HT because of a fear of developing breast cancer, a new group of modified estrogens is available. They are selective estrogen receptor modulators, or SERMS. These products have the same beneficial effects as estrogen on bone health but have no negative effects on tissues in the breast or uterus. It is not currently known whether SERMS protect against heart disease. Other agents for bone health include bisphosphonate, calcitonin, and parathyroid hormone (PTH).

Is Menopause the End... or the Beginning?

Menopause used to be the stage of life when many women considered their life to be over. But these days, when up to a third of a woman's life span may be lived after menopause, many women are recognizing that this can be an especially rewarding time of life. Some women meet their menopausal years head on—going back to school, getting their first job, changing their job or profession... the list is endless.

And yes, there is sex after menopause. For many women, the fact that they can no longer become pregnant makes sex even more relaxed and enjoyable. Some women who have experienced a reduction in sex drive at menopause may request that a small amount of testosterone be added to their HT to increase their libido.

Whatever you decide to do, remember that your life can be as full and enjoyable as ever. It's all in your attitude... Many women, to their surprise, find that this is the most fulfilling and fun time of their lives.

Additional resources include—

Could It Be...Perimenopause? by Steven R. Goldstein and Laurie Ashner. Little Brown & Company, 2000.

The Pause: Positive Approaches to Perimenopause and Menopause by Lonnie Garfield Barbach. Plume, 2000.

The Change Before the Change: Everything You Need to Know to Stay Healthy in the Decade Before Menopause by Laura E. Corio and Linda G. Kahn. Bantam Doubleday Dell Publishing, 2000.

The Wisdom of Menopause by Christiane Northrup. Bantam Doubleday Dell, 2003.

Menopause Guidebook by the North American Menopause Society. The North American Menopause Society, 2003.

The Menopause Survival Guide by Donna Rogers. Oakview Press, 2002.

Dr. Susan Love's Menopause and Hormone Book: Making Informed Choices by Susan Love and Karen Lindsey. Three Rivers Press, 2003.

Menopause: Managing the Change of Life—A Special Report by the editors of Harvard Health Publications in consultation with Martha K. Richardson. Harvard Health Publications, 2000. [order at www.health.harvard.edu/hhp/publication/view.do?name=MN]

ADDITIONAL GENERAL RESOURCES ON WOMEN'S HEALTH INCLUDE—

Healthy Women, Healthy Lives: A Guide to Preventing Disease (from the landmark Nurses' Health Study), edited by Susan E. Hankinson, Graham A Colditz, Joann E. Manson, and Frank E. Speizer. Simon & Schuster, 2001.

The New A to Z of Women's Health by Christine Ammer. Checkmark Books, 2000.

Women's Health Handbook: What Every Woman Needs to Know About Her Body by Miriam Stoppard. Dorling Kindersley, 2001.

The American Medical Women's Association The Women's Complete Wellness Book, by Debra R. Judelson and Diana L. Dell. Griffin Trade Paperback, 2000.

Bodylove: Learning to Like Our Looks and Ourselves: A Practical Guide for Women by Rita Freedman.

For additional books on the topics included in women's health, try browsing bookstores on the Internet, including:

www.amazon.com

www.borders.com

www.barnesandnoble.com

Websites that provide information on health and nutrition include:

American Cancer Society

www.cancer.org

American Dietetic Association

www.eatright.org

American Heart Association

www.americanheart.org

American Lung Association

www.lungusa.org

Centers for Disease Control and Prevention

www.cdc.gov

National Institutes of Health

www.nih.gov

U.S. Department of Agriculture

www.usda.gov

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