

menopause

Menopause means cessation of the menses, that is, when women's periods become irregular and eventually stop. Menopause is a woman's last monthly period and when a woman has not menstruated for 12 consecutive months, she is considered to be postmenopausal. The lead up to menopause is known as perimenopause, this occurs 2 to 6 years before the last menstrual period and is the time when most women experience physical and emotional changes. This whole process is natural and moves the body into a non-reproductive time of life.

Causes

At menopause, a woman stops ovulating and her ovaries stop producing oestrogen and progesterone. Oestrogen not only has a role to play in reproduction, but it is also required to stimulate receptors in the bladder, vagina, breasts, skin, bones, arteries, heart, liver, and brain and maintain normal function of these organs. Cholesterol levels can increase after menopause. Menopause symptoms can follow a hysterectomy, or be due to an underlying hormonal disorder.

Symptoms

Some women experience the following symptoms during the onset of menopause:

- Hot flushes and fatigue
- Night sweats
- Increased nervousness, anxiety or irritability
- Increased need to urinate
- Swollen ankles, headaches
- Loss of sexual drive
- Nausea, constipation, diarrhoea, cold hands and feet, weight gain

The changes in biochemistry after menopause also lead to an increased risk of developing osteoporosis and heart disease.

Treatment and Lifestyle Factors

There are many medical and natural approaches that can be taken to help ease the symptoms of the onset of menopause. Hormone Therapy (HT) can be an effective treatment for some women to relieve various menopausal symptoms, however, the risks and benefits for each woman must be carefully weighed up before these treatments are decided upon and prescribed by their medical practitioner.

Through diet and lifestyle changes, many women can make a difference to how they handle their menopausal symptoms.

Women should ensure their diet contains enough calcium by including low fat dairy products, broccoli, cauliflower, salmon, tofu and leafy green vegetables. Excessive amounts of alcohol and caffeine should be avoided as they increase calcium excretion and bone loss.

Phytoestrogens are plant compounds that are similar to human oestrogens. Following a diet rich in phytoestrogens can help to reduce menopausal symptoms. Soy and linseeds (or flaxseeds) are rich in phytoestrogens and are easy to incorporate into the diet. Breads rich in Soya and linseed and products such as ground flax seed I sprinkled over salads or through yogurt and the addition of tofu to stir fries can be simple ways to include these foods.

After menopause the risk of developing heart disease is higher. The maintenance of a well balanced, low fat diet, with lots of nuts, seeds and fish can help to reduce risks. Furthermore, regular exercise is important to help reduce the risk of osteoporosis, and women should take part in activities such as Power Plate, walking, riding or swimming dependant on their exercise of choice and the condition of their bones and joints. Always suggest that a client speak with their medical practitioner before undertaking a new exercise regime.

References: www.blackmores.com.au Good Medicine, Lorraine Sathicq - April 2005