

## **MENOPAUSE - How to Spot It & How to Deal with It?**



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There comes a time when every woman goes through a stage known as menopause. What is menopause and what exactly happens in this stage? Menopause is a normal process where a woman stops menstruating (amenorrhea) for at least 12 months and thus no longer be fertile. The average age of menopause is around 51 years old. Physiologically when your body reaches the menopause phase your hormone levels, estrogen and progesterone are decreased and your follicle stimulating hormone (FSH) is raised. We are born with about 2 million eggs and as we get older the quantity of eggs reduces. Hence, during menopause, our ovaries release fewer eggs.

How do you know you are going through menopause? The first and obvious sign is the absence of menses or irregular menses. Other manifestations include hot flashes, night sweats, chills, fatigue, sleep disturbance, mood swings, headaches, irritability, vaginal dryness/itching, thinning hair, dry and itchy skin, weight gain, slow metabolism, changes in cognition, loss of libido, dyspareunia, back pain, joint stiffness/soreness, brittle nails, burning tongue, dizziness, urinary incontinence, anxiety, depression, irregular heartbeat, breast pain, digestive problems, and tingling sensation. Estrogen is crucial for our bone and heart. It protects our bone mass and density but when estrogen levels lessen, there is a loss of bone mass and density which leads to a condition called osteoporosis. With dropped estrogen levels, fractures are also common. In addition, estrogen protects against heart disease. Normally, estrogen decreases LDL cholesterol and increases HDL cholesterol but with menopause, estrogen is no longer effective due to its drop. And this puts post-menopausal women at a higher risk of heart disease.

How to deal with menopause? Similarly when you have your menses, coping with menopause can be done with or without the use of medications. Do you feel stressed? Having problem sleeping? Or having mood swings? Well, meditation is one way - it cools your mind and makes you feel relaxed. Physical exercise is another effective way if you are stressed or having mood swings. The more you are physically active, the better your mind and body feel. Also, trying herbal and plant extracts helps in improving mood swings. If sleep difficulty still persists, try sedatives; antidepressants; or CPAP. If you are still feeling stressed or anxious, consider medications. Are you experiencing hot flashes? Here are some techniques you can try - drinking plenty of water; reducing the temperature; avoiding hot and spicy foods and hot places; taking slow and deep breaths; trying flaxseeds and vitamin E. Medications such as antidepressants and antihypertensive drugs are said to be useful but the most effective is estrogen for hot flashes. In addition, estrogen is effective when experiencing mood swings or having sleep difficulty or even having trouble with memory. A good sleep and a healthy diet are needed when experiencing memory problems. What about vaginal dryness and incontinence? Applying vaginal estrogen cream helps effectively and as well as performing kegel exercises help to strengthen your pelvic floor muscles and decreases urinary incontinence.

So, menopause is just another phase that all women go through at some point in their life and when you know you are experiencing that phase, try the easy-home remedies. And if the symptoms/signs still persist, do not hesitate to consult your medical professional.

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