

Women and Menopause

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Abstract

Menopause is a stage in life when a woman stops having her monthly period. It is a normal part of aging and marks the end of a woman's reproductive years. Too often, myths foster misconceptions about this normal process of aging. Although menopause can cause some noticeable and uncomfortable changes, these can be effectively. But, as a result of a lower level of estrogen, postmenopausal women are at increased risk for a number of health conditions, such as osteoporosis and heart disease etc. Medication, hormone therapy and/or healthy lifestyle changes, may reduce the risk of some of these conditions. Since every woman's risk is different, learning what steps one can take to reduce individual risk through effective management during menopause is very important.

Key words : Women, Menopause

Introduction

Menopause is a stage in life when a woman stops having her monthly period. It is a normal part of aging and marks the end of a woman's reproductive years. Menopause typically occurs in a woman's late 40s to early 50s. Natural menopause is the permanent ending of menstruation that is not brought on by any type of medical treatment. For women undergoing natural menopause, the process is gradual and is described in three stages (figure-1). "Perimenopause can begin 8 to 10 years before menopause, when the ovaries gradually produce less estrogen. It usually starts in a woman's 40s, but can start in the 30s as well. Perimenopause lasts up until menopause, the point when the ovaries stop releasing eggs. In the last 1-2 years of perimenopause, the drop in estrogen accelerates. At this stage, many women can experience menopause symptoms. Women are still having menstrual cycles during this time, and can get pregnant. Menopause

is the point when a woman no longer has menstrual periods. At this stage, the ovaries have stopped releasing eggs and producing most of their estrogen. Menopause is diagnosed when a woman has gone without a period for 12 consecutive months. These are the years after menopause. During this stage, menopausal symptoms, such as hot flashes, can ease for most women. But, as a result of a lower level of estrogen, postmenopausal women are at increased risk for a number of health conditions, such as osteoporosis and heart disease. Medication, such as hormone therapy and/or healthy lifestyle changes, may reduce the risk of some of these conditions. Since every woman's risk is different, talk to your doctor to learn what steps you can take to reduce your individual risk.

Hormonal changes during menopause

The traditional changes we think of as "menopause" happen when the ovaries no longer produce high levels of hormones. The ovaries are the reproductive glands that store eggs and release them into the

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fallopian tubes. They also produce the female hormones estrogen and progesterone as well as testosterone. Together, estrogen and progesterone control menstruation. Estrogen also influences how the body uses calcium and maintains cholesterol levels in the blood.

As menopause nears, the ovaries slowly begin to run out of eggs. Eventually, the ovaries no longer release eggs into the fallopian tubes and the woman has her last menstrual cycle.

Symptoms Of Menopause

To understand the symptoms of menopause see figure: 3

Long-term health risks associated with menopause

Osteoporosis

Osteoporosis, a “brittle-bone” disease, occurs when the inside of bones become less dense, making them more fragile and likely to fracture. Estrogen plays an important role in preserving bone mass. Estrogen signals cells in the bones to stop breaking down. Women lose an average of 25 percent of their bone mass from the time of menopause to age 60, due in large part to the loss of estrogen. Over time, this loss

of bone can lead to bone fractures. There are many options, including estrogen therapy, to treat brittle bones.

Coronary Artery Disease

Coronary artery disease is the narrowing or blockage of arteries that surround the heart muscle. It results when fatty plaque builds up in the artery walls (known as atherosclerosis). This buildup is associated with high levels of cholesterol in the blood. After menopause, a woman’s risk for coronary artery disease increases. Maintain these numbers to step to your heart health

Urinary Problems

In addition to controlling your monthly periods and body changes during pregnancy, estrogen also helps keep the lining of the bladder and the urethra healthy. As we age, many factors can weaken the pelvic floor muscles responsible for bladder control resulting in urinary incontinence. The kind of bladder control problems that usually develop after menopause are: see Figure

Recomandations

Most certainly, menopause can be a positive time of life. Too often, myths foster misconceptions about

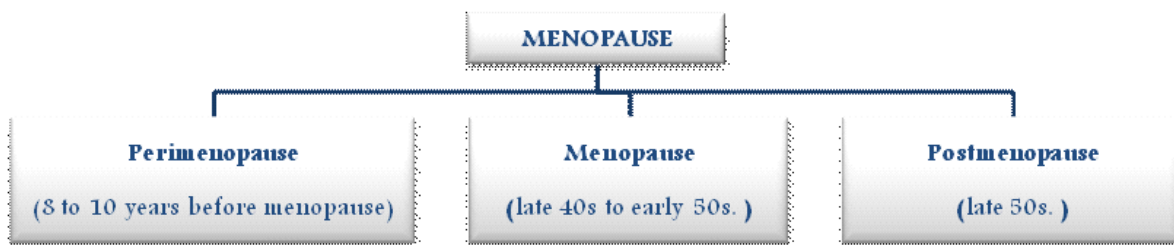


Figure 1. Stages of Menopause

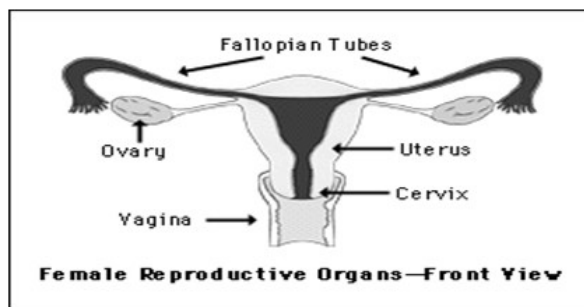


Figure 2. female reproductive organ-front view

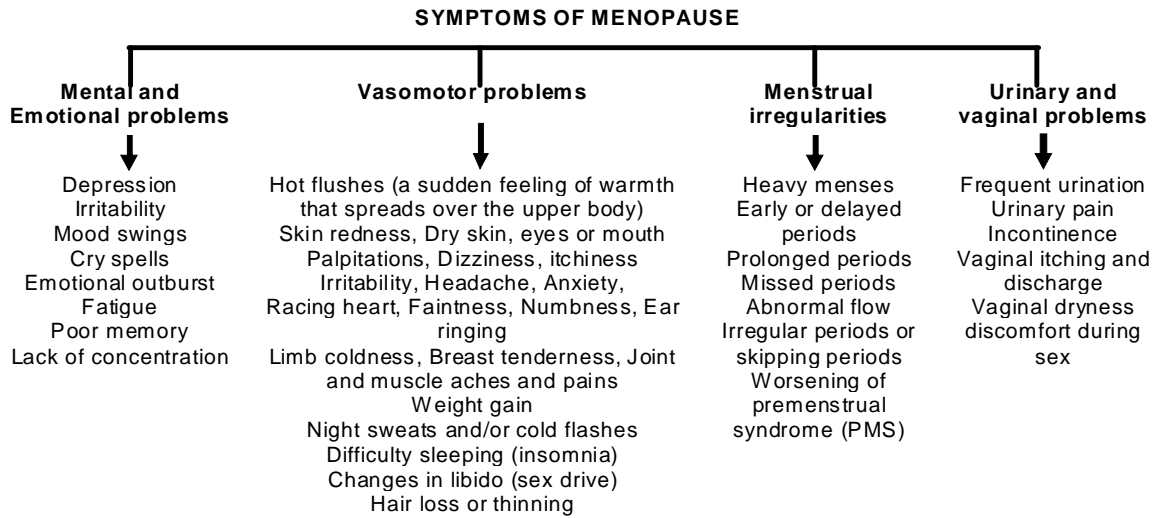


Figure 3. SYMPTOMS OF MENOPAUSE: To understand the symptoms of menopause see

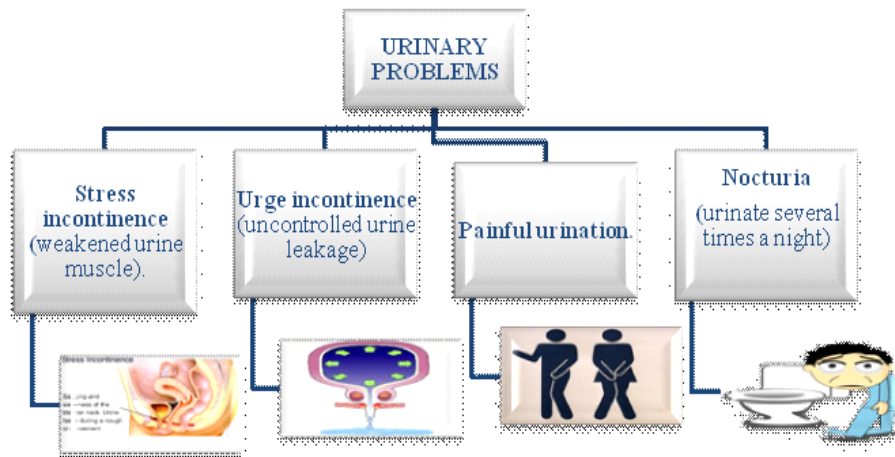
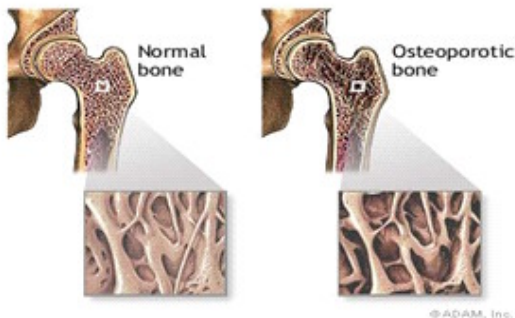


Figure 4. Urinary problems in Menopause



Maintain These Numbers: The First Step To Heart Health

- ü Waist size (Less than 35")
 - ü Blood pressure (Less than 120/80 mmHg)
 - ü Fasting blood sugar (Less than 100 mg/dL)
 - ü Triglycerides (Less than 150 mg/dL)
 - ü Total Cholesterol (Less than 200 mg/dL)
 - ü Body Mass Index (Less than 25 Kg/m2)
- Exercise (Minimum of 30 minutes most, if not all days of the week)

Figure 5. Comparative of Normal and Osteoporotic Bone

this normal process of aging. Although menopause can cause some noticeable and uncomfortable changes, these can be effectively managed.

1.Menopause and good nutrition

There are certain stages in our lives when we must adjust our lifestyle and nutritional habits in order to keep up with any changes to the body. When a woman reaches the menopause she may find that making some simple changes to her diet and way of life could actually help to decrease certain symptoms associated with menopause and could also help to protect against any related diseases. Women who are going through the menopause may find that their need for certain nutrients will have reduced slightly whilst levels of others may need to be increased. Ideally, women should be aiming to include a healthy level of the following food groups in their diet:

Calcium

As discussed in the above context, when a women enters menopause the body produces far less of the hormone estrogen which subsequently increases the risk of osteoporosis. Osteoporosis is essentially thinning and weakening of the bones which can make them more prone to breaking. Keeping your calcium levels up can help to protect against osteoporosis because of its key role in bone health. Keeping your calcium levels up is really important during the menopause because it plays a key role in not only bone health, but also in keeping your blood, muscle and nerves in working order. Good sources include dairy, canned fish, green leafy vegetables and tofu.

Carbohydrates

Carbohydrates provide us with energy and fuel, both of which are especially important for women whose hormonal changes mean they can often feel tired and lethargic throughout the day. A healthy and balanced diet should include wholegrain cereals, whole meal pasta and bread and starchy vegetables which are high in fibre and vitamins. Try to restrict your intake of refined carbohydrates such as white bread and pasta and heavily surged cereals.

Iron

Eating at least three servings of iron-rich foods a day

will help ensure that you are getting enough iron in your daily diet. Iron is found in lean red meat, poultry, fish, eggs, leafy green vegetables, nuts, and enriched grain products. The recommended dietary allowance for iron in older women is 8 milligrams a day.

Fats

Reducing your intake of saturated fats can really help to protect against heart disease. Try swapping full-fat milk for semi skimmed or skimmed, stop using butter and replace it with a low fat spread and try to choose leaner cuts of meat. In addition to this you should also try to introduce healthy fats. For instance, the fat found in certain oily fish such as sardines and mackerel can contribute to a reduced risk of both heart disease and diabetes.

Eat more of the Right Fats

Foods which are high in fat are quite often high in calories but low in vitamins and nutrients. Saturated fats are needed in the body, but as it stands most of us are eating too much of them and would benefit from reducing our intake. Cut down on the bad saturated fats and trans fatty acids which are found in processed foods, ready meals, fatty meats, butter, biscuits and pies etc and try increasing your intake of good fats such as omega-3 fatty acids which can be found in fish and olive oil.

Protein

As we age protein plays an increasingly important role in helping the body to recover from illness, infection and surgery. It can be found in meat, nuts, pulses and dairy. Below are a few examples of suggestions a nutritionist may include as part of a nutrition programme. Remember that a nutrition programme would be personally tailored to suit your needs so some of the following may be effective whilst others may have little to no effect.

Vitamins and minerals

Several studies show that eating plenty of fruit and vegetables can lower the risk of many illnesses. This may be because of the antioxidants they contain such as vitamins E and C. Eat at least five portions of fruit and vegetables a day. Surveys show that most women aged 50 to 64 eat less than this. Eating lots

of different types of fruit and vegetables, so that you get a variety of nutrients, is thought to bring the greatest benefits.

Stay well hydrated

The majority of healthy adults require between one and a half to three litres of water per day to replenish fluid levels and keep the body functioning. It is necessary for general growth and maintenance as well as helping to flush out waste and regulate temperature. Dehydration can lead to headaches, tiredness and concentration difficulties, symptoms which are common among some menopause sufferers. In order to stay hydrated we don't have to drink just water alone and juices and hot beverages with a high water content will also work in the same way.

If possible steer away from drinking too many caffeinated drinks such as tea and coffee as caffeine is a diuretic which forces the kidneys to flush out more water than they should. The same goes for carbonated drinks such as cola, and alcohol, both of which may lower the amount of calcium your body is able to absorb from food. All of these drinks are found in moderation but should be included as part of a balanced diet.

Eat smaller portions more regularly

Working lives now mean that with the exception of Sunday lunch, most of us eat our main meal in the evening. Though this makes sense in terms of time and convenience, it also means that we are consuming the most calories at a time when the body is burning the fewest. In contrast, most will start the day eating a small breakfast when this is the time the body is in need of fuel and is more likely to burn off calories in the day ahead.

It is impractical to expect people to eat their dinner at 7am, or indeed during their lunch break, but what we can do instead is eat smaller and more regular meals throughout the day. Those who do eat small but frequent meals tend to consume less calories and fat towards the end of the day and also give themselves more of an opportunity to burn off

calories. Menopausal women will often feel tired and lethargic throughout the day and grazing means that the risk of tiredness due to low blood glucose is reduced. Understandably it will be difficult to change life long habits of eating dinner in the evenings so try to eat light low fat dinners as often as possible, serve smaller portions and discourage late night snacking which is usually down to boredom.

Exercise

Keeping physically active during this time of change can help with many different health aspects; appetite, digestion, weight control, agility, heart health and bones health – and can have a powerful, positive effect on emotions, mental health and your love life. A combination of these following three types of regular exercise is recommended. Weight bearing exercise, such as brisk walking, running, tennis, stair climbing, aerobics, helps to maintain bone density, particularly important at the time of the menopause when falling oestrogen levels can lead to a lower bone density. Aerobic exercise, which raises the heart rate, is good for heart health and circulation. Keep supple by doing exercise such as yoga or pilates to help maintain core stability, flexibility and joint movement. Aim for 30 minutes per day of something you enjoy.

2. Take supplements (where necessary)

During the menopause the body may need a little help in maintaining adequate levels of all the required nutrients. In order to give the body a helping hand you may benefit from taking one or more supplements which could be of benefit on both an emotional and physical level. Supplements which are commonly taken by women experiencing the menopause include vitamin B6 for anxiety, vitamin E for breast tenderness, St. Johns wort for depression and Magnesium for insomnia. Always consult your healthcare provider before introducing any vitamin or mineral supplements to your diet.

3. Read labels

Use the package label information to help you to make the best selections for a healthy lifestyle.

4. Maintain a healthy weight

Lose weight if you are overweight by cutting down on portion sizes and reducing foods high in fat, not by skipping meals. A registered dietitian or your doctor can help you determine your ideal body weight.

5. Use sugar and salt in moderation

Too much sodium in the diet is linked to high blood pressure. Also, go easy on smoked, salt-cured, and charbroiled foods — these foods contain high levels of nitrates, which have been linked to cancer.

6. Limit alcohol intake

Women should limit their consumption of alcohol to one or fewer drinks a day.

7. Avoid spicy foods and hot foods and drinks

these can often make menopausal symptoms worse.

8. Positive lifestyle changes to help with the menopause

- a. Give up smoking (it's a big risk factor in osteoporosis and smoking doubles your odds of developing heart disease)
- b. Keep a positive attitude. Get emotional support – chat to friends or your doctor if necessary.
- c. Stress control – learn to relax, take 30 minutes each day to do something just for you
- d. Sleep in a cool room
- e. Dress in layers for easier temperature control
- f. Carry a small battery operated hand fan to help to cool down when needed. A water vaporiser spray may also be helpful, and carrying a small bottle of cool drinking water.
- g. Laugh and enjoy yourself

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