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Health Really Matters™

MENOPAUSE (1)

Baby boomers are reaching age 50 in dramatic numbers and with it a great demand for menopause information.

Menopause usually occurs between the ages of 45 and 55 (the average age is 51.4) but because women are living longer than ever, there could be a life of 30 years or more after menopause. Menopause, often called “the change of life”, is part of normal aging. It is a time when a woman’s body makes fewer of the hormones that regulate the monthly menstrual cycle including menstruation.

The term perimenopause describes the time of transition before actual menopause. Menstrual periods may still be erratic, ovulation can still occur so pregnancy is still a possibility. Perimenopause may begin several years before menopause with symptoms like hot flashes. Menopause literally means “last menstrual period” but since menstrual periods stop and start somewhat erratically at this time, menopause is confirmed when there is no period for twelve consecutive months.

Menopause can also start as a result of surgery. The removal of the uterus (called a hysterectomy) spells the end of menstrual periods after which menopause will begin naturally.

Signs of Menopause

The symptoms of menopause occur because of an imbalance existing among the hormones estrogen, progesterone and testosterone. The symptoms can be mild or severe. Some women, approximately 10%, will go through menopause with no problems at all. Others will experience some of the symptoms listed here:

Mood changes are characterized by irritability, forgetfulness, anxiety, panic and depression. Reduced hormones are partially responsible for these feelings but they can also be due to a sense of loss and emptiness because menopause is a sign of aging. Menopause sometimes coincides with the “empty nest” syndrome which can compound the problems.

Hot flashes are one of the most common symptoms of menopause. About 75% of menopausal women have them. These flashes of heat can last for a couple of minutes to as long as an hour. They involve the face, neck, chest or even the whole body. They are sometimes accompanied by nausea. When these flashes occur at night they are called night sweats. Hot flashes generally become less severe with time.

Drying and wrinkling is due to a thinning and loss of elasticity of the skin. There is also a thinning of the vaginal lining causing vaginal dryness and discomfort during intercourse.

Sleep disturbances or insomnia can occur often due to night sweats.

More joint pain and a reduction in the sex drive are two other symptoms of menopause that can occur.

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