**ALL ABOUT MENOPAUSE: SIGNS & SYMPTOMS AND MORE**

If you are a woman above 40, feeling hot, sweating bucket loads and don’t even have the weather to blame, it is most probably your body telling you that you might expect your menopause. This is usually a classic sign. Menopause signals the onset of many trying symptoms for women which usually begin when women hit their 40s and may well last for over a decade. But first, let us see what is the definition of menopause:

**So, what is menopause?**

Menopause occurs usually after a woman enters her 40s (sometimes also beyond 50s) and hasn’t had her regular menstrual cycle for more than 12 consecutive months and therefore, can no longer become pregnant naturally. The very first signs of menopause could be when the menstrual cycle becomes very irregular in terms of not only the duration but also the flow.

**When does menopause begin?**

The first signs of menopause may begin developing about four years before a woman’s last period. Women may experience this condition very differently as it is dependent on genetics and their ovary health.

**How long does menopause last?**

Women may have symptoms of menopause for a duration of 4-10 years on an average. Usually, perimenopause occurs before menopause which is a time when a woman’s hormones start preparing the body for menopause. There is no hard and fast rule as some women may hit perimenopause in their mid-40s or even skip it altogether and enter menopause directly and suddenly. Some women may start getting the symptoms even before the age of 40 and this is called early menopause age or primary ovarian insufficiency.

**Why does menopause occur?**

During menopause, a woman’s body goes through a major upheaval in the production of hormones like testosterone, follicle-stimulating hormone (FSH), luteinizing hormone (LH), estrogen, progesterone and a loss of active ovarian follicles. These ovarian follicles are responsible for the production and release of eggs from the ovary wall, thus allowing menstruation and fertility in a woman’s body. Sometimes, menopause can be induced by pelvic injuries that severely damage or destroy the ovaries or caused by surgical removal of the ovaries and related pelvic structures. These changes can bring about many unwanted symptoms and cause much discomfort for a woman.

**What are the symptoms of menopause?**

There are many symptoms of this condition. Women may experience all the menopause signs or only some of them.

* Less frequent periods
* **Weight gain - https://www.medplusmart.com/healthy-life/info/7764/control-weight-gain-during-menopause**
* Depression
* Hot flashes
* Night sweats
* Flushing
* Vaginal dryness
* Anxiety
* Difficulty concentrating
* Memory problems
* Reduced libido
* Dry skin, eyes or mouth,
* Increased urination
* Sore or tender breasts
* Headaches
* Heart palpitations
* Urinary tract infections (UTIs)
* Reduced muscle mass
* Less full breasts
* Painful or stiff joints
* Hair thinning or loss
* Hirsutism
* Reduced bone mass
* Insomnia

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**What are the common complications of menopause?**

* Vulvovaginal atrophy
* Mood shifts or sudden emotional changes
* Painful intercourse or dyspareunia
* Slower metabolic function
* Periodontal disease
* Urinary incontinence
* Cataracts
* Heart or blood vessel disease
* Osteoporosis

Related read: Osteoporosis is a silent killer because many times, it shows no symptoms especially in the early stages hence the patient does not even realize until there is a bone damage/accident. Early awareness can help in **better management and even prevention of osteoporosis - https://www.medplusmart.com/healthy-life/info/6339/osteoporosis-causes-symptoms-risk-factors-n-038-measures-to-prevent**.

**How is menopause diagnosed?**

When a woman begins her 40s and starts experiencing debilitating symptoms, it is advisable to consult their doctor as soon as possible. Your doctor will diagnose your condition based on severity of symptoms, your medical history, and your menstrual information. Your doctor will need to order these tests before making a correct diagnosis of your problem.

* Thyroid function tests
* Blood lipid profile
* Liver function tests
* Kidney function tests
* Testosterone, prolactin, progesterone, estradiol, and chorionic gonadotropin (hCG) tests

**What are the treatments for menopause?**

Most women deal with symptoms on their own and do not take any medical help. But, if your symptoms are causing extreme discomfort and are disrupting your daily routine, then you may need to consider a treatment plan as per the recommendations of your doctor. There are treatments which women may benefit from incase the menopause signs become severe or unbearable.

1. **Hormone replacement therapy:** Hormone replacement therapy is medication that contains hormones which the female body no longer produces during menopause. Hormone therapy is mostly used to treat common menopausal symptoms, including vaginal discomfort, hot flashes and night sweats. Though hormone therapy has its benefits, the long-term use of this therapy may have some cardiovascular and breast cancer risks. It is best to talk to your doctor about the benefits and risks of hormone therapy before you choose it as an option.
2. **Vaginal estrogen:** This condition can cause extreme vaginal dryness. When estrogen is administered directly to the vagina, it can greatly reduce the discomfort. A small amount of estrogen is released which is absorbed by the vaginal tissues. This therapy can help relieve vaginal dryness, some urinary symptoms and discomfort with intercourse.
3. **Antidepressants**: There are certain antidepressants which belong to the class of drugs called selective serotonin reuptake inhibitors (SSRIs) which may assist in decreasing the severity of menopausal hot flashes. For women who can't take estrogen for health reasons or for women who need an antidepressant for a mood disorder can take a low-dose antidepressant for management of hot flashes.
4. **Treatment for osteoporosis:** Bone loss is a common menopausal symptom and depending on individual needs, your doctor may recommend appropriate medication to prevent or treat osteoporosis. There are many medications that are available to help reduce bone loss and risk of fractures. Your doctor might prescribe vitamin supplements to help deal better with osteoporosis.
5. **Medications for hair loss:** Hair loss is quite common in women after they hit menopause. Mediation to aid in reducing hair fall might be prescribed by your doctor.

**What home remedies can be followed for menopause?**

There are many methods which can be employed to deal with menopausal symptoms naturally. Here are some things which you can follow:

1. Wear comfortable and loose clotting to stay cool and manage hot flashes or night sweats.
2. Exercise and manage your weight
3. Supplement your diet with vitamins and minerals
4. Practice relaxation techniques such as yoga and meditation
5. Take extra care of your skin with products made for your age
6. Manage sleep and get lots of rest
7. Quit smoking and limit alcohol use

Menopause can be trying to say the very least for most women. It is important for women to communicate about their needs as issues such as depression, anxiety or identity changes may arise. Stay connected to your close family members and take their help to overcome the upheavals caused by this phase.