

Menopause article:

How to know when you're entering "The Change"

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One of the most important transitions in a woman's life, menopause, is still taboo. Few women talk about it. This means that not only do many women enter this important and normal stage of life unprepared, not knowing what to expect, or how to manage symptoms if they occur, but they're also uncomfortable with the topic, even with their female relatives and close friends. They may not even be aware of the possibility that health problems they're experiencing are due to the onset of perimenopause – the period leading up to menopause – and that these problems can be relieved.

Technically, menopause occurs in just one day – the day in which 12 months have passed without a woman's menstrual period occurring. Before that day, a stage occurs which lasts for several years in which a woman's ovaries begin to produce less estrogen: this is perimenopause or menopause transition. During this phase, most women will experience menopausal symptoms because of fluctuating hormone levels. These symptoms can be treated, and women can sail through this period. However, it's essential to know the signs that you're in perimenopause so you can manage this time.

Traditionally this era of a woman's life is known as 'the change' because many changes occur. Some of these changes are related to menopause, and others are related to the aging process. The age at which women experience menopause varies. Some experience it as early as 40, others may not experience it until they're well past 50, with the average age being 51.

However, menopause doesn't occur at a constant rate, and many factors can affect the onset, two of them being smoking, and genetics. Women who smoke experience menopause a couple of years before women who don't smoke, and women generally experience menopause at the age their mother did.

Common Perimenopausal symptoms

While changes in the menstrual cycle and hot flashes are often the first indications that a woman is entering perimenopause, hot flashes may occur while a woman is still menstruating regularly. In addition to hot flashes other hormone-driven symptoms include mood swings, irritability, memory problems, sleep disruptions and depression.

Project Aware at <http://www.project-aware.org/Experience/symptoms.shtml> has compiled 35 symptoms from the experiences of hundreds of women. The long list includes increases in allergies, dizziness and light-headedness, and tingling in the extremities. Check this list, and know that if you experience these symptoms, visit your doctor, because they can be treated.

Health concerns during perimenopause

During perimenopause irregular periods are common, and a woman can experience changes in her periods. For example, periods may last a shorter time, or may last longer, with heavy blood loss. The chances are that these changes are due to perimenopause, however there are other health problems which reveal themselves by abnormal bleeding. Causes of irregular bleeding include pregnancy, fibroids, birth control pills, and rarely, cancer. Visit your doctor for an assessment and diagnosis.

Although a decline in fertility occurs during perimenopause, it's still possible to become pregnant. If you don't want to become pregnant, take birth control pills. On the other hand, if you do want to become pregnant, your doctor can recommend a course of treatment to enhance fertility.

Menopause isn't a stage of life to be feared. It's a signal that although a woman's child-bearing years are coming to an end, another stage is on the horizon – a stage brimming with new freedoms and opportunities. A new book, *The Menopause Revolution*, by Dr. Martin Milner guides you through this stage of your life, focusing on you as an individual, and what you can do to make these years the best years of your life.

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