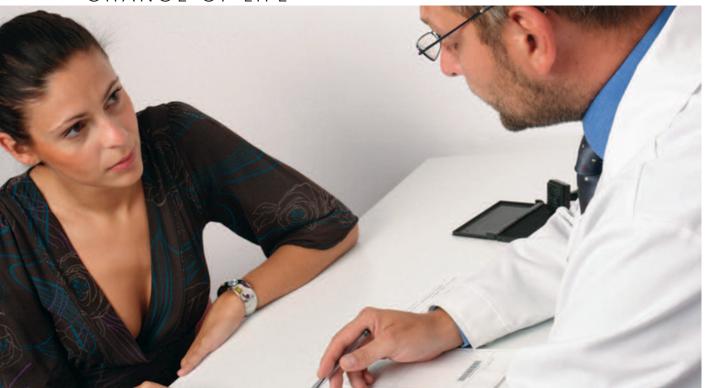
CHANGE OF LIFE



MENOPAUSE: IT REALLY IS A "CHANGE"

At first blush, **menopause** may not sound like a topic for a magazine about making a **good** appearance. But stop and think: In the first place, if you're bloated and retaining water, you're flushed red all over, your fingernails are breaking, and you've gained weight, all of which are among the symptoms of menopause, you certainly aren't looking your best. And in addition, if you're experiencing discomforting physical conditions and mood swings, you're not going to be in a good place in your own head...and you won't project the glowing, attractive personality you want people to see.

So, you see, there definitely is an appearance factor to menopause. Perhaps that explains why so many readers have asked us to address this subject. In fact, it is probably the single most requested topic we have heard about from our readers.

BY DR. EVAN SHAPIRO

The signs and symptoms of perimenopause and menopause can vary from woman to woman, with some symptoms being more common than others

olloquially known as "change of life," or "the change," menopause is the phase of a woman's life when she has no fur-→ ther menstrual periods. The symptoms that may be associated. with menopause, however, can go far beyond simply no longer getting your period and may really present a big change indeed for the average woman.

Menopause is a condition diagnosed retrospectively: The diagnosis is made after a woman has been without a period for one year. The average age of menopause is 51.4 years of age, but no one can tell an individual woman when menopause will begin for her.

Perimenopause occurs before the menopause and is defined as the time between having normal menstrual periods and having no periods at all. The perimenopausal period usually lasts for five to seven years but can last as long as ten years. During the perimenopausal phase, a woman may experience a combination of premenstrual syndrome (PMS) and menopausal symptoms...or no symptoms at all. PMS is much more common in the 30s and 40s and mimics some of the changes in the perimenopause.

The signs and symptoms of perimenopause and menopause can vary from woman to woman, with some symptoms being more common than others. See the box for some of the more common ones.

A human female is born with all the eggs in her ovaries that she will ever produce in her lifetime. Over time, there is a steady reduction in the number of eggs remaining, as an egg (usually just one) is released each month. By the time most women are in their late 40s, the number of eggs remaining in the ovaries is very low. Follicle stimulating hormone (FSH) is the main hormone involved in stimulating the production of mature eggs. However, the remaining eggs are not able to respond to FSH as they did years earlier.

This results in the ovaries failing to release eggs and a greatly reduced production of estrogen and progesterone, associated with an increase in FSH. Then, the periods become irregular and unpredictable until they stop totally, since estrogen and progesterone control the menstrual cycle.

About two out of every three women experience hot flashes or flushes during perimenopause and menopause. A hot flash is a sensation of heat, usually of short duration, that can be associated with a red, flushed face and sweating. The cause of hot flashes is not known but may be related to changes in circulation.

During a hot flash, the blood vessels near the skin's surface dilate to cool, and this produces the redness and flushing of the face. Some women may also experience a rapid heart rate or chills or have an increase in sweating to cool down the body.

One of the most common disturbances for women entering perimenopause or menopause is unexplained weight gain, especially around the waist and hips. Despite attempting to diet, it is very difficult to lose the weight. The mechanism for this weight gain is also related to the decrease in estrogen and its effect on women's body fat cells trying to maintain the hormonal

There is no need to suffer from these uncomfortable physical sensations, or from the emotional reaction that can occur when you feel that you are less attractive because of bloating, weight gain, or other symptoms. Menopause is a time of change: No more periods and no more concerns about an unwanted pregnancy, either. Rejoice and enjoy it, and let that enjoyment add to your inner glow.

If you have any of the symptoms listed in the sidebar, or you have any questions about menopause, contact your physician. When deciding whether or not to use any of the treatment options, you and your doctor need to talk about the potential benefits and risks of each option. Remember to inform your physician of any medications or supplements you are already taking.

Treatment options include hormonal replacement, "natural" treatments, supplements, exercise, and dietary changes. Since there are so many potential symptoms associated with menopause and perimenopause, the treatment should be individualized for each person.

COMMON SYMPTOMS Unpredictable and

- irregular periods
- Shorter and lighter periods
- Heavier periods
- Shorter cycles
- Longer cycles
- Heart palpitations or irregular heartbeat
- Mood swings
- Irritability
- Sudden tears
- Fatigue
- Depression
- Weight gain
- Anxiety
- Hot flashes, night sweats, and/or cold flashes

- Sweaty, clammy feeling
- Sleeplessness
- Dry vagina
- Decrease in or loss of libido
- Memory loss
- Difficulty in concentrating
- Mental confusion and disorientation
- Aching, sore joints/ muscles
- Headaches
- Itchy, crawly skin
- Incontinence, especially upon laughing or sneezing
- Breast tenderness
- · Hair loss or thinning
- · Vertigo, light-headedness, or episodes of losing your

- balance
- Changes in body/breath odor
- Gum problems with increased bleeding
- Gastrointestinal distress, flatulence, indigestion, nausea
- Bloating
- Increase in allergies
- Burning tongue, roof of mouth, and bad taste in mouth
- Tinnitus (ringing in ears), bells, "whooshing," buzzing
- Fingernails that become softer, break and crack more easily.

46 IMAGE June/July 2009 June/July 2009 **IMAGE 47**