

## Menopause

The Celebration of Life! Unfortunately, for many ladies this time in life is far from a celebration.

### What is menopause?

Medically menopause is defined as “12 months since a ladies’ last period”. Occasionally women will have an isolated period after this time (which is normal) and will still be considered post menopausal. When a lady is experiencing symptoms of menopause (ie going through menopause) she is said to be peri-menopausal. The average time a lady will enter menopause is 45 years old and on average most have finished by 55. There are some women who go through early menopause (late 30s) and others who are still having periods until 60. It is very individual.

### Why we have periods:

When females are born they have a finite number of eggs (ova). When the girls reach puberty an ova is released monthly at a time called ovulation. This is a time (12-48hours) when a lady is fertile. When a pregnancy doesn’t result (ie a sperm doesn’t contact the ova), the lady experience a menses (commonly referred to as a period).

Going on the oral contraceptive pill (OCP), tricks the body into thinking it is pregnant (the pill provides sustained levels of oestrogen or progesterone similar to a released ova) so that an egg-release is inhibited as the body’s feedback mechanism is tricked. A period is experienced when the active pill tablets stop.

Over time, usually after 45 years old, the ovaries that produce the ova, begin to shrink and stop releasing eggs. The hormone levels change and some of the symptoms experienced with menopause are related to these changing hormones.

Some of the hormones involved are oestrogen (which changes form), progesterone, testosterone and DHEA. These can be measured via blood or saliva tests.

### **Let’s talk about some symptoms.**

The first signs that you may be entering menopause are a change in your period cycle. They may shorten, lengthen or become heavy or irregular.

Other symptoms can vary. You may have one, a couple or ALL of the following:

Flashes (hot feeling)

Flushes (hot feeling plus sweating)

Red face,

Dry skin,

Dry vagina,

Low libido (low or no sex drive)

Sugar cravings,

Weight gain

Mood swings

Anxiety

Palpitations

Depression

Headaches

Fatigue and many others

Far from a celebration for some!

Rest assured, all of these symptoms and more are common but not necessary.

Some ladies will talk about it and others choose not to so it is hard to find out what is “normal”. Discussing it with a friendly health professional will make you realize that you are not going crazy and that it is a phase you are going through. They should be able to offer some treatment options.

#### Treatment Options:

There are many options available.

Obviously being a nutritionist and naturopath I like using herbs, supplements and diet to help ladies. This combination is very successful, but it still make take 4-6 weeks to get proper control over the symptoms. Symptoms like low libido can take awhile to restore (6-10 months) so talking about this with your partner (and asking them for compassion) is an important step.

Naturally there are many effective ways to that may help you with symptoms. Some herbs used with great success and with studies to support their use are: Black Cohosh, Chaste Tree, Wild Yam, Sage, Zizyphus and St Marys.

Dietary changes include increasing your consumption of phytoestrogens (isoflavones) via soy products, linseeds and green leafy vegetables.

Helping your liver to break down hormones is highly beneficial so a grapefruit each morning can assist you in achieving this (please don't take grapefruit if on certain cholesterol medications). Some ladies gain benefit from evening primrose oil, indol-3-carbinol and other supplements.

Exercise and yoga (or other relaxation methods) are high on the list of lifestyle options you can try.

Medically you can try HRT (which tricks the body into thinking it is still receiving the same amount of hormones). There are side effects associated with HRT so you need to discuss this with you doctor.

Acupuncture and other body work modalities can also work well in alleviating symptoms.

#### **The best solution**

Please don't despair if you are suffering from symptoms – there are many things to try. Talking with your friends, family or husband is a good start. Being reassured that you are not going crazy can bring great relief. See a health professional. Don't try to treat this one on your own as it is difficult to get a clear perspective when hormones are involved. You need someone bipartisan and objective and someone trustworthy. Find out whom your friends use and trust and then try to be patient. Hang in there Bridget!