

Menopause: Friend or Foe?

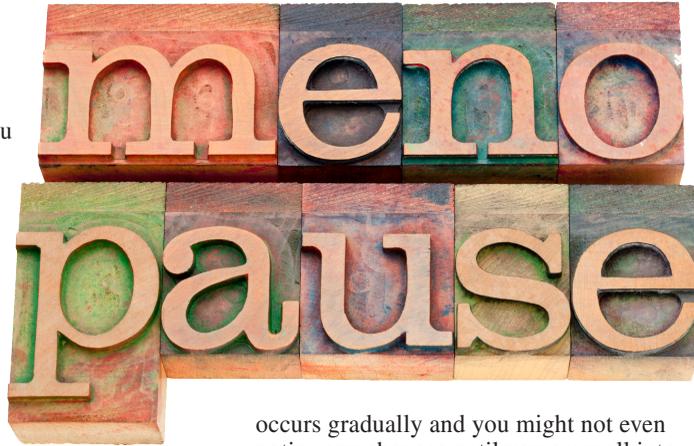
WRITTEN BY: DR. WENDY ROGERS

You are going through your day, just like any another day, when your face and body become extremely warm. You find yourself suddenly looking for a giant fan to miraculously appear or the ability to strip off your clothes for the next 30 seconds. A minute later, you are freezing and wishing you could wrap yourself in a cozy down comforter. What the heck just happened?!? Depending on your age (and sex), you may have experienced a hot flash, one of the many symptoms that mark the beginning stages of menopause.

Hot flashes, night sweats and irregular cycle lengths are some of the more well-known symptoms of menopause. But there are many other things women may also experience including migraines, foggy thinking, fatigue, muscle aches and pains, irritability and anxiety, sleep disruption, and weight gain. Now you are thinking, "Sounds like a party, where can I sign up? Not!!!" Don't despair, it's not all bad and there are a lot of things that can be done to ease the process.

First let's talk some basics and a little terminology. Perimenopause is the time

in which the process of menopause begins. Ovulation and production of hormones, primarily estrogen and progesterone becomes more erratic and decreases overall. The average age for this process to start is when a woman is in her early to mid-40's but it could begin earlier or later. It generally



occurs gradually and you might not even notice any changes until you are well into it. Perimenopause lasts until you have not had a menstrual cycle for one full year. After that you are said to be through menopause or "post-menopause" and here you will remain for the rest of your life. The average age for post-menopause is around 51 or 52 but also can vary quite a bit depending on the individual. Not only the age can vary widely, so can the level of symptoms. Your next-door neighbor may have not experienced any challenges whereas you may be unfairly having a bear of a time.

Sadly, in the United States menopause is frequently treated more like a disease process rather than the rite of passage that it actually is. In other cultures it's considered to be a time of enlightenment in which a woman can discover an abundance of energy previously used for reproduction that can now be utilized elsewhere. So what we can do to make this more of a process to celebrate vs. something to dread?

As always, you must start with the basics.

- 1. Diet:** If a good, clean diet consisting of organic vegetables, lean free-range meats, a minimal amount of whole grains, low in processed sugar and caffeine wasn't a primary focus before, it's even more critical now. Women have a higher risk of weight gain and cardiovascular disease during and post menopause due to the impact of the many hormonal changes occurring.
- 2. Exercise:** Moderate exercise for at least 30 minutes five times a week including weight bearing activities. This will help battle the weight gain, balance hormone levels, assist with stress management and help prevent osteoporosis. Women in menopause are at a higher risk for osteoporosis due to the drop in estrogen levels that were previously helping to prevent bone loss.
- 3. Stress management:** this can be a critical tool in helping control some of the symptoms of menopause. The more chronically stressed we are, the more over-taxed our adrenal glands become.

We depend on our adrenal glands as our primary hormone source after the ovaries have stopped production. If the adrenals are tapped out, this is not going to happen. Learn to let go of what you can't control and make time for yourself. Some other basic tools proven to help are deep breathing exercises and meditation.

If you are doing the basics but still struggling, there are more options to help smooth your path. These include nutritional supplements, herbal supplements, acupuncture and/or bio-identical hormones. It's important to remember there are many treatments that may not be a good fit for any one individual depending on their current health and history. It's critical to consult with a physician that is well versed with these treatments before starting. It's also important to have regular visits and lab work with your doctor so there is a complete picture of what's happening in regards to your overall health.

The doctors at True Health Medicine, PC are here to help make this rite of passage one to embrace instead of something to dread. Here's to a Happy New Year and a New you!



Dr. Wendy Rogers is a naturopathic physician and acupuncturist with a family practice in Tualatin at True Health Medicine, PC. The clinic is located at 8555 SW Tualatin Rd, 503-691-0901.