

Are You Experiencing Hot Flashes?

Many women experience this symptom along with many others when facing menopause. I will attempt to describe this process as it relates to females. Menopause is the natural cessation of the female reproductive cycle. It starts when the ovaries produce less estrogen and progesterone which regulate monthly ovulation and menstruation. Females naturally go through a biological change in which they could experience hot flashes and or moodiness, with the change starting as early as in your 30 and 40's lasting into your 50's and 60's, with the average age being 45-55 years of age. One form of treating the signs and symptoms of menopause can be helped by using hormone therapy. Research suggests that estrogen is still safe on a short term basis.

Women experience different signs and symptoms, looking at some of them individually:

- The symptoms of hot flashes occur when your natural estrogen level drops and your blood vessels expand, thus raising your body temperature. The duration of the hot flashes can last from a few seconds to several minutes, occurring several times a day. Along with this, you possibly could experience difficulty sleeping or night sweats.
- Females also will experience irregular periods in which we may stop menstruating suddenly or have erratic periods for several years. Your flow can be light to heavy at any time. You might also experience vaginal changes in which the vaginal tissue becomes thinner and drier making sexual intercourse uncomfortable. This can be made more comfortable by using a lubricant.
- Females may also experience decreased fertility. While this is a time when you are less likely to become pregnant, you should still practice birth control as pregnancy is possible till you have gone without a period for one whole year. Although rare, there have been cases in which a woman has gone beyond one year without a period and then inexplicably have another menstrual cycle.
- Physically and emotionally you may also notice a difference. You may be more emotional and irritable because of your hormonal fluctuations. You may notice mentally, a decrease in concentration and physically you might notice you have gained weight. Many females gain on the average around 5 pounds and the fat concentrates at the abdominal area above the waist. There could also be thinning of the hair, along with decreased fullness of the breast or you may

notice hair developing in your upper lip, chin, chest or abdomen. If you have experienced adult acne, it possibly could become worse.

Menopause entails numerous changes that a body must go through, but it is all a natural process. If a female goes through a hysterectomy and the uterus and ovaries are taken, then cessation of periods will follow. As long as one working ovary remains, then menopause shouldn't start. If a female receives chemo and radiation, then menopause can be induced.

Most women can tell when they have been through the change, but if you have any doubts, your physician can do a blood test that measure the follicle stimulating hormone, (FSH) and estrogen level in your blood. Normally the FSH level will increase and your estrogen level will decrease indicating menopause. Your health care provider could also do a blood test for the thyroid to determine if it is in working order because those symptoms could mimic menopause. Should you have any doubts, see your health care provider.

Menopause can also bring about an onslaught of other medical conditions which you should also be aware:

Urinary incontinence can occur with sudden urgency or frequent urge to urinate. You may notice that you are incontinent when you sneeze, laugh or cough. This is a result of the tissues of the bladder are thinner and lose their elasticity.

Besides noticing weight gain you possibly could experience loss in bone density. This increases your risk for osteoporosis which causes bones to become brittle and weak leading possibly to fractures. Researchers have found that when your estrogen levels decrease, your risks of cardiovascular disease increase. You can combat this by taking steps to reduce high blood pressure by stop smoking, eating healthy and getting daily exercising.

Treatments for these conditions consist of relieving the signs and symptoms. Doctors often prescribe hormone therapy or low dose antidepressants to effect treatment medically. Or, you can engage in self directed therapies. Besides implementing the cardiovascular interventions, practice tightening of the pelvic floor muscles, get plenty of sleep, and treat your hot flashes.

Remember that menopause is a natural transition of the female body, every female will experience it. It is a new chapter in your life. As always, if you have any questions or comments, eMail me at gheffelmire@dearborncounty.in.gov