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Celebrating menopause

BY DR CHUA YANG

Menopause which usually occurs between the ages of 45 and 55 is not an illness but a very natural event

Women celebrate entering womanhood when we experience our first menstrual periods. We celebrate motherhood with the birth of our first baby. We should also celebrate entering yet another phase of our lives when we step into menopause!

But in reality, women take special care of their appearance when they hit their teens, and continue a regimented anti-ageing and health maintenance programme into their marriage and motherhood. But once the kids are old enough to be independent or leave home, many seem to ignore their looks and health, and slip into "disrepair"

Many women fear menopause as they associate it with ageing and loss of femininity. They anticipate uncomfortable symptoms, loss of health and risks of diseases.

Face the facts

In a local survey done in 2004, 300 women age between 40 and 55 were interviewed. The

majority of these women knew about menopause and cited common symptoms like hot flushes, headaches, tiredness, irritability and mood swings as those associated with the event. However, only 22% of these women consulted their doctors to find out more about menopause and a staggering 64% claimed they did not prepare for menopause.

Were these women simply choosing to do nothing and bear with whatever symptoms come their way? Were they fearful of getting stigmatised by friends? Were they rejecting the idea of screening for fear of finding medical problems? Or were they certain that doctors could only prescribe medication with side effects and risks?


Help is near

Most women I know, including my friends and relatives, patients in my clinic, members of the Menopause Support Group, and

participants at public talks have all expressed keen interests in knowing more about menopause. They want to know how best to prepare for it and the options they have to help cope with symptoms. They also want to know what long-term health issues they should take note of following menopause and how best to maintain good health and wellness.

We need to encourage our women to seek information. If they are armed with accurate knowledge a decade or even two before the actual transition period of menopause, I suspect many more will face menopause with less fear and more ease!

Menopause is by definition the last menstrual period and this marks a transition to yet another new phase of life! Women can now look forward to ridding the inconvenience brought about by the need for birth control and managing their monthly menstrual flow, as well as a



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Watch out!

The Menopause Research Society (Singapore) will be organising a menopause public forum on 30 July 2006, 3pm to 6:30pm at the Sheraton Towers. For details, call: 6256 0113 or e-mail: secretary@menopauseresearchsociety.org.sg.

more leisurely pace of life after juggling work and family for years and finally seeing their kids gain independence and starting families of their own.

Medically, the body does not just fall apart with menopause as some women believe! What we have done for and to our bodies will inevitably manifest as the years pass. In other words, if we abuse our bodies in our teenage years, we might start to experience ill-health even in early adulthood and menopause has absolutely nothing to do with this!

With menopause, there is a decline in female hormones, estrogen and progesterone. This decline may initially be erratic and then just sustained. Most symptoms occur while it is erratic and the body takes a little while to adjust to the lower levels of hormones. Some women would be able to draw parallels to this when their systems wreck havoc during the first trimester of pregnancy, which is just another adjustment period.

As women approach menopause, they should look out for disruptive symptoms and consult their doctors to assess them

individually to find the safest, most acceptable remedy or medication to help them ease any discomfort faced during the transition and improve their quality of life.

Women facing difficulties through their perimenopausal years should not stand alone! They will want the benefit of a strong social support. Hopefully, they have fostered good relationships with those around them – their spouse, children, colleagues, and "gathered" as many friends as possible.


It is important to have channels of help available for those who face difficulties. Trained counsellors are available for advice through the Menopause Support Group hotline (6394 1499, hours: 3pm to 5pm, Mon to Fri) and activities are organised for women around the same age, around and beyond menopause. These women are able to share their experiences and discuss their problems with one another.

More advice

After menopause, there are two main health issues related to the decline in estrogen. Firstly, the protective effect of estrogen on cholesterol metabolism

and therefore the health of the heart will reduce. Secondly, bone building metabolism will decelerate resulting in more bone loss than bone gain and increased risk of osteoporosis.

As highlighted previously, these are conditions which manifest if we have not looked after these aspects of health all our lives. To prevent high cholesterol, narrowing of blood vessels and heart disease, attention to eating a moderate low-fat diet and regular exercise should start from young. To prevent osteoporosis, taking a calcium-rich diet, staying active and having regular exercise are of great importance.

Understanding relieves anxiety and removes fear! When we are prepared and armed with knowledge, we are able to manage our health and wellness as we enter menopause and the many years following. Indeed, we are able to celebrate menopause! 

Dr Chua Yang is a consultant obstetrician and gynaecologist for A Clinic For Women. She is also a medical adviser for the Woman to Woman Menopause Support Group and an honorary secretary of the Menopause Research Society (Singapore).