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At the heart of menopause

Menopause can be a trigger for

Women have a much higher risk of getting coronary heart disease and heart attack before the age of 50 compared to men. A woman's risk of getting coronary heart disease can double rapidly after menopause and maintain that level after menopause which usually starts around age 40.

According to Dr. Chae Yang, a consultant obstetrician and gynaecologist, the incidence of ischemic and other heart disease in the general population of South Africa appears to be increasing daily—consistent with worldwide statistics. The total number of deaths from 1989 to 2000 was 22.7 per 100, 25.7 per 100, and 34.2 per 100.

"Women, like the rest of us, are being affected by our lifestyle resulting from either a public education to fitness goals," said Dr. Chae who is also the medical adviser to the "Women in Motion" Menopause Support Group.

The increased risk is often attributed to a menopausal-related decrease in levels of estrogen, a female sex hormone that may alter some protective against atherosclerosis. Decreases in lipids, such as cholesterol, triglycerides (blood clotting), insulin sensitivity, endothelial function

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heart problems so here's what women can do to help themselves

behaviors of blood vessels and body weight have also been described as the contributing causes for increased coronary heart disease and stroke in the post-menopausal age group.

According to John Hopkins, Division of Geriatrics' Specialists, menopause can be diagnosed by taking the medical history of a woman who has been without menses for 12 months, regardless of her status, night sweats and vaginal dryness or by measuring the FSH level.

FSH is the hormone that stimulates ovulation. During menopause, this level is increased. It is during this time that women should get extra attention in their health.

John Hopkins advises that women should take care not to overdo it with the latest edge of the effects that overnight and long exercise have on the body — and on our very existence. Some well-intended words about cardiovascular function, women and menopause, can be instructive for you: "... it is important to find ways to maintain the balance.

According to Dr. Chae, primary prevention should be a lifestyle goal. Most of the post-menopausal health issues are "aging" issues. However, the main cause

specific to post-menopausal women are those of heart disease and osteoporosis.

To prevent heart disease, women should start by following a diet that is low in saturated fat and high in fiber, such as a healthy vegetable diet. Low fat intake and fiber in it are helpful in reducing the genetic predisposition to high cholesterol and heart disease.

Other food habits one should take away from eating include being alcohol consumption. Maintaining an exercise and fit life programme is equally important to women cardiovascular health.

"Menopause is not a disease affecting only elderly post-menopausal women but has profound origins. There is now a call for thoughtful attention and further research in men's health. To address that a genetic potential is heart disease, arthritis, osteoporosis and osteopenia which is a different and progressive kind of women osteoporosis," said Dr. Chae.

The added risk women should avoid that places the health monitoring of the menopause blood tests, BCL, and Bone Mineral Densitometry may provide information on risks for heart disease and osteoporosis. In addition, the use of

important signs of the risk women also need to replace their calcium consuming, to control cholesterol levels in the age group.

Although hormone replacement therapy (HRT) has widely been thought to be beneficial to the cardiovascular system, recent reports have demonstrated evidence that it can increase cardiac artery disease and stroke development.

However, HRT use also found to have protective effects on osteoporosis and fractures. The effect however is only present while the women remains a current user of HRT.

"Menopausal symptoms like increased hot flashes, night sweats, weight gain, loss of bone density, depression, changes in mood, and changes in libido, are not only a part of menopause but also a 'danger flag' which women should be aware of and manage and prevent. Long-term effects of this flag are still being studied," said Dr. Chae.

The rising signs also benefits the menopausal women physically and mentally as it involves the body and promotes calm and peace.

Dr. Chae said, "The body, however thin and delicate is essential in protecting life in all its guises which would eventually be damaged and compromised from the start.

"It is not exercise that allows the heart to work at full pace, pregnancy is more difficult because without giving extra stress on the body."

Women should also take up cardiovascular activities as they stimulate better blood circulation and the blood.

Walking, jogging, dancing and playing an instrument like a stringed instrument can be particularly beneficial as they also help stimulate bone building and slow all osteoporosis.

