

## Menopause

It's Women's Health Week – a chance to learn a bit more about issues relating to women's health. How much do you know about menopause?

### What is Menopause?

- Menopause, or the change of life, makes the end of a woman's monthly cycle or menstruation and the end of her fertility. It is a natural occurrence.

### Why Does this Occur?

- When menopause occurs, there is a change in the reproductive hormone levels, particularly the level of oestrogen and the ovaries no longer produce eggs. This means the woman can no longer get pregnant.

### When does Menopause Occur?

- Menopause usually occurs between the ages of 45 and 55 with 51 being the average in Australia.

### What are the Symptoms of Menopause?

- The most obvious symptom is the cessation of periods.
- Night sweats and hot flushes are common but other symptoms include: irritability, wildly swinging emotions, anxiety, weight gain, insomnia, lack of energy, forgetfulness or "foggy" thinking, itchy or dry skin, aches and pains and thinning hair.

### Do All Women Get these Symptoms?

- No – 20% of women get virtually no symptoms, 60% get mild or moderate symptoms and 20% get severe symptoms that interfere with daily life. The symptoms may change over time too.

### Are there Any Other Changes that Are Important?

- Yes – the high oestrogen level that women experience during their fertile years helps to protect them from heart disease. After menopause there is an increased risk of heart attacks and stroke.
- The drop in oestrogen may also cause a loss of bone density and a higher risk of fractures.
- Many women experience increased urinary tract infections during menopause.

### What Medical Help is there for Menopause Symptoms?

- Doctors will often prescribe hormone replacement therapy for women going through menopause. There are two issues with this: there is an increased risk of breast cancer both during and after the woman stops hormone replacement therapy and as soon as the woman stops the therapy, all the menopause symptoms return.

### What Else Can Help?

- Acupuncture and Chinese medicine has some excellent treatments to help manage the symptoms of menopause.
- Herbs have been used for hundreds of years and may provide some relief. Generally over the counter formulae are less effective than consulting a Chinese Medicine practitioner or Naturopath.
- Plant phytoestrogens, such as soy, may help but are best obtained through the diet, not in supplements.
- Exercise can help to reduce the risk of heart disease, strengthen bones, improve sleep and emotional health. Exercise also helps reduce hot flushes.
- Good nutrition – with emphasis on more protein, less carbohydrate and calcium rich foods.

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