**What is the menopause?**

When we hear the word “menopause“ we immediately think of all the annoying symptoms like night sweats, weight gain, and hot flashes – but what is menopause really? Well, to put it simple, it is when a woman reaches the stage in life where her periods (menstruation) stop.

When we look at the word “menopause”, we see that it comes from the combination of Greek words mën which means “month” and pausis, which means “to stop”. This is a very fitting description of what happens.

**Going through menopause: A brief overview**

In most cases, the periods do not just stop all of a sudden, and it usually starts out by having your period late or missing one completely. It is common that periods become more intense and less regular before they end completely.

This menstrual cycle change is caused by fluctuations in hormone levels, mainly the “female hormones” – estrogen and progesterone. Along with this change in the menstrual cycle, a woman can usually expect other symptoms such as irritability, mood swings, a decrease in self-confidence, hot flashes, and night sweats.

This stage of a woman’s life is referred to as “peri-menopause”, which is the phase leading up to menopause, which is when the menstrual cycle completely stops. Peri-menopause may last for anywhere between a few months, to a few years.

**How do I know that it is menopause?**

There is no straight forward answer to this question, as women experience menopause differently. It is important to note that women can experience menopausal symptoms for quite some time before menopause, and even sometimes after.

There are however some general guidelines as to when it might be menopause:

Firstly, consider your age. Studies have shown that on average, women reach menopause at the age of 52. That does not mean that you will only reach menopause
when you are 50, as it is known that some women have reached menopause by as early as 35 and even at the ripe age of 60 years.

Secondly, genetics plays a big role. Studies have found that the age at which a woman’s mother went through menopause is a relatively accurate prediction of when she herself may reach menopause.

Lastly, although it might be quite obvious, is to watch closely for menopausal symptoms. When you experience mood swings, hot flashes, joint pains or other menopausal symptoms regularly, it might be a good idea to visit a health care professional to run some tests.

**What causes menopause?**
In order to understand what causes menopause, we first have to understand what happens during a regular monthly menstrual period.
In very basic terms, once a month, the ovary releases an egg to be used for reproduction purposes. As we age, our bodies become less fit for having children, and at a certain stage the body decides that it should stop producing eggs, in order to avoid pregnancy. This is because the woman as well as the baby would be at a much higher risk now if she would become pregnant.

When this all happens, the pituitary gland produces fewer hormones, signaling the ovaries to stop producing eggs. The whole process of menstruation eventually ends, whilst estrogen and progesterone levels fall.

In essence, it is due to these changing hormone levels that women go through menopause and have to deal with all if the side effects it brings along.

**What are hot flashes?**
Hot flashes are one of the most common symptoms of menopause, with about 80% of women experiencing them. Hot flashes are defined as a sudden feeling of heat or warmth all over the body, especially around the face and neck. It may often result in profuse sweating and can be accompanied by nausea and dizziness.
Hot Flashes vs. Hot flushes?
This is a common question, but they both mean exactly the same thing. Americans typically use “flashes”, and the British prefer “flushes”.

What can I expect?
When it comes to hot flashes, you should expect the unexpected. Although we do know that you can expect a hot feeling all across your body, probably accompanied by rivers of sweat, we do not know when or where it will strike. Menopausal hot flashes can happen at any time during the day or night, and may be influenced by our lifestyle and habits.
Hot flashes are generally expected to last anything from a couple of seconds, to several minutes.

Why do hot flashes occur?
It is not completely clear exactly why hot flashes happen, but experts on the subject to have a pretty good theory as to what might cause the problem. These scientists think that it may be due to a “glitch” in the hypothalamus, which is the part of the brain that regulates body temperature. They believe that this glitch is caused by the decrease in estrogen levels, which then causes the hypothalamus to pick up false readings of the body’s temperature, and then tries to rectify the problem via the body’s heating and cooling systems.

Triggers of menopausal hot flashes:
Although the root cause of hot flashes is still not clear, there are known triggers for episodes of hot flashes. These include things that we eat, what we wear, our environment, and many more. Some of the most common triggers for menopausal hot flashes are:

The external environment –
One of the big triggers for hot flashes is a sudden change in external environment, such as when you go outside after being in a cool, air-conditioned room. It can even happen when you go outside in the cold of winter, after you have been inside a well heated house.
**Stress –**
Whether it is stress caused by your job, relationship stress, or awaiting test results from the doctor – these are all things that can cause stress-related menopausal hot flashes.

**Diet –**
This should come as no surprise, since almost every health issue can be traced back to what you eat. There are certain foods and drinks to steer clear of during menopause, as they increase the risk of having a hot flash attack. Spicy foods, caffeinated drinks, alcoholic beverages, and warm drinks or food can lead to a hot flash outbreak.

**Clothing –**
When you wear tight-fitting and/or warm clothes, you might make it easier for yourself to have a hot flash attack. Try to wear more loose-fitting clothing, and dress so appropriately for the temperature. It is also wise to carry this advice over to the bedroom, as hot flashes often occur during the night. Wear loose-fitting pajamas made from light materials and make sure that you are not using more blankets than you need.

**Non-menopausal reasons for getting hot flashes:**
Even though in most cases menopause is the reason for hot flashes, there are instances where menopause is not to blame. This means that women can experience hot flashes that are not related to menopause, and that in rare cases, even some men can experience them. Some reasons for non-menopausal hot flashes are:

- Obesity
- Dietary problems
- Hyperthyroidism
- Anxiety
- Medications
- Heart problems
- Fever
- Tuberculosis
• Some cancers

TIPS FOR A HEALTHY MENOPAUSE

Diet –
The first thing to do is to get your eating habits in order. Some dietary changes that can help manage menopause and its symptoms include:

• Drink plenty of water. 6-8 glasses per day are recommended.
• Cut back on the caffeine. Limit yourself to 2 cups of coffee or tea per day.
• Make sure you stay regular by including fiber into your diet.
• Eat regularly. Make sure you eat small, balanced meals or snacks every 2-3 hours, as it can help your metabolism stay active and help manage your bodyweight.
• Cut down on refined carbohydrates and sugar. Things like pasta, white bread, syrup, sugary soft drinks, and sugar-filled snacks are a no-go.
• Eat more phyto-estrogenic-rich foods like broccoli, oats, & soya.
• Eat enough non-dairy, calcium-rich foods like brown rice, salmon and pumpkin seeds.

Exercise –
Diet and exercise goes hand-in-hand. It does not mean that you have to spend 2 hours in the gym every day, but it is recommended that you get at least 20 minutes of exercise, 5 times a week. Exercise does not have to be overwhelming and exhausting, and you can do it without any equipment. Some fun, easy-to-do exercises include:

• Going for a brisk walk. You can go on a 20 minute walk around the neighborhood, or even go walk in the park or along the beach. This is a great way to relax, and you can take the whole family with you – including the dog.
• Get a mini trampoline. This is a great way to make you feel like a kid again, and get some exercise! It is very convenient as you can get on at any time to jump for a few minutes.
• Get an exercise bike or elliptical trainer. Yes, I know many people buy these, only to use them for a week then put them in the garage. But if you get creative, you won’t even realize your exercising. Put it in front of the TV and just keep a mild, steady pace while watching your favorite show.

• Get some mini weights to tone your arms, and you can use the same TV watching method as above!

Sleep –
Getting enough, proper sleep is important. Some tips to help you get a good night’s rest:

• Make sure that you stay regular. There is nothing worse than having to wake up from a deep sleep to go to the bathroom. If you can keep digestion issues to a minimum, you can have a much easier time falling asleep.

• Get your mind to switch off before bed. Do something that helps you relax your mind before bed time can help your falling-asleep process.

• Steer clear of caffeine a good while before bedtime. Instead, drink herbal tea without caffeine about an hour or so before bed, to help you relax.

Manage Stress –
Properly managing stress can go a long way. It is often easier said than done, but here are a few tips:

• Take time for yourself. Me-time is a great way to get your mind off things and refocus yourself on your goals.

• Eat regularly. Irregular eating patterns can increase your stress levels.

• Stay away from caffeine.

• Practice relaxation techniques like deep breathing exercises or meditation.

• If you need further help, you might like to consider using a herbal remedy such as Calmer.

Keep your mood up –
It’s very easy to say, but not always so easy to do. Often our circumstances make us feel a bit down and moody, but it is important to do everything we can to stay positive and keep our head up:

- Make time for family and friends.
- Do things you enjoy. This can include a hobby, a sport, or just taking a day out of your weekend to watch some movies in your PJs with your significant other.

**Natural Treatment for Menopausal Hot Flashes**

**Soy isoflavones: To help you through menopause –**

Soy extracts have long been used as a natural treatment for menopause and its symptoms. Since it is a natural product, it can be used at any stage of menopause – even before or after it. Recommended supplements are those made from fermented soya beans, as the body can absorb the isoflavones better.

**Sage: For menopausal hot flashes and night sweats –**

Sage is commonly known for being a great herb to use whilst cooking in order to add flavor to food. But the lesser known fact is that it has been used for years in order to help manage sweating and hot flashes during menopause. Sage contains essential oils which form an important part in the plant’s medicinal function.

**Evening Primrose Oil: For Hot Flashes –**

Evening primrose oil is often used to help relieve menstrual issues like PMS, breast tenderness and bloating. It has been found to also help for menopausal issues, as it can promote better sleep and help prevent hot flashes.

**Turmeric: As a Phytoestrogen**

Phytoestrogens are a form of plant-based estrogens that act in a similar way as the estrogen found in a woman’s body. Phytoestrogens are often used in place of hormone replacement therapy, as it is a natural way to help supplement the estrogen levels. Turmeric is a proven phytoestrogen, and also contains
antioxidants. It is a great supplement to include into your diet, as it may help with many menopausal symptoms.

**Ginger: For hot flash relief** –
Although it has long been known to be a great remedy for motion sickness and nausea, it has been found that ginger is a great supplement to use during menopause as the anti-oxidant and anti-inflammatory properties are a great way to help relieve hot flashes. The key ingredients in ginger are oils known as gingerols and shogaols. Ginger is quite versatile and can be taken in tablet form, fresh or powdered form to use in food, or even by making ginger tea when you steep fresh ginger in hot water. Just make sure to stay under the daily recommended dosage of 4 grams of ginger per day.

**Red Clover: A good remedy for hot flashes** –
Red clover is known to be one of the best sources of isoflavones, and therefore is a great supplement for battling menopausal symptoms like hot flashes. It can also be used during menstruation to help treat some issues like PMS and breast health. Red clover is also a great source of nutrients like calcium, chromium, magnesium, niacin, phosphorus, potassium, thiamine, and vitamin C.

**Also read Hot Flashes Articles at:**
http://www.34-menopause-symptoms.com/hot-flashes/articles/