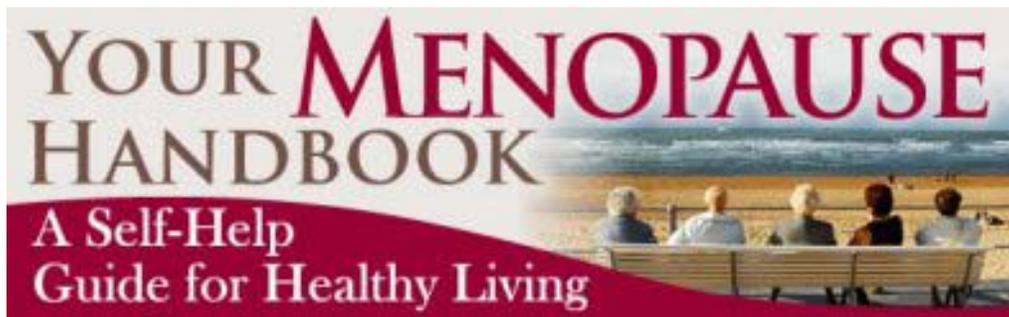


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Your Menopause Handbook

A Self-Help Guide for Healthy Living

By Lilah Borden

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About the Author

Lilah Borden

Lilah Borden has found that many women have more trouble than they should when they approach and experience menopause because of their lack of knowledge and preparation.

She believes that even more problems and distress are the result of the lack of support that many women get from colleagues and, especially, their partners and other close members of their families.

Because the effects and experiences of different women can vary greatly as they go through menopause, many incomplete or inaccurate “facts” are circulated.

Lilah hopes that this ebook will help to give every woman that reads it more confidence to make their experience better.

She also believes that putting as much information as she could gather in the book will help all readers to make better choices and help give them the confidence to get support and understanding from their families and friends.

Part-I: Introduction

1. Menopause – An Overview

Menopause is a normal biologic process. It is the time in a woman’s life when she stops having regular monthly periods. It signifies the end of her reproductive period.

Normally, women enter menopause around the same age as their mother did. This, typically, occurs between the ages of 45 and 55, although this can vary, sometimes by as much as ten years.

Hormones like estrogen and progesterone regulate menstruation and pregnancy in women. When your ovaries stop producing these hormones, menopause is triggered.

Menopause can set in earlier in women who have never been pregnant, live in high altitudes or smoke regularly. So, ladies, if you want kids but have not had any and are in your thirties ... get busy.

Usually, the first indication of approaching menopause is irregular periods. This time is called **perimenopause**. For some, this period could last for as much as ten years.

The irregularities may be in the length of period, level of bleeding and time between periods. If a woman stops having regular periods for more than twelve consecutive months and she is not suffering from any other ailment, she is in perimenopause.

Hormonal changes are the main cause for menopause. These changes can also increase the risk of:

- Osteoporosis

- increased incidence of fractures due to decreasing bone density
- higher cholesterol levels, and
- heart disease.

Common symptoms of menopause include nausea, hot flashes, mood swings, night sweats, fatigue, vaginal itching and dryness, depression, heavy bleeding, weight gain, urinary incontinence, lowered sex drive, insomnia, changes in breast shape, thinning of skin and headaches.

Gosh, did I miss any?

Natural and Artificial Menopause

Menopause usually fits into one of two categories; natural or artificial.

There is another type of menopause; **premature menopause**, but it is not very common. If a woman ceases to have regular menstrual periods before the age of forty, it is called “premature menopause”. This is most likely due to genetic causes, autoimmune diseases, smoking or exposure to harmful chemicals.

The majority of women have a natural menopause.

Artificial menopause occurs because of the surgical removal of ovaries.

Tests

There are a few tests that determine menopause in women.

Blood tests check levels of **follicle stimulating hormone** or **FSH**.

This hormone prompts growth of eggs during your reproductive

period. Their decreasing levels reduce estrogen levels and menopause sets in.

Bone testing checks bone density levels. Lower than usual levels indicate decreasing bone density, a common symptom of approaching menopause.

There are medications for helping with menopausal symptoms and menopause, there are also a few simple home remedies and certain lifestyle changes you can try to get more relief.

Soy protein is claimed by some people to be very helpful for menopausal symptoms. Drink soymilk, include soy flour or tofu in your regular diet, or eat raw or roasted soybeans.

Refrain from spicy foods, alcohol, and caffeine, as these aggravate menopause symptoms.

Consume a low-fat and low-cholesterol diet.

Regular aerobic exercise may provide some relief from hot flashes.

Strength training exercises can increase the strength of bones.

You might also try alternative therapies like deep breathing exercises, acupuncture, biofeedback, hypnosis, meditation and paced respiration with slow breathing.

Menopause is not an ailment or illness. But, if you want to alleviate some of the symptoms, you can get hormone replacement therapy.

This may bring extensive relief from osteoporosis and hot flashes. But, hormone replacement therapy may have serious side effects.

It may make you more vulnerable to strokes, breast cancer and Alzheimer's disease.

Some people claim that testosterone shots can provide great relief from the unpleasant side-effects of menopause. They say that women with high testosterone levels suffer little, or sometimes not at all, from menopause. This is not a widely held view and there does not seem to be any definitive supporting research.

Because menopause is not an ailment, you cannot prevent its occurrence. But, you can increase the likelihood that you will have a smooth transition period by reducing possible risk factors.

Increase calcium consumption in your diet. This is possible through daily consumption of reasonable quantities of milk, yogurt, cheese, calcium-fortified orange juice, salmon or calcium dietary supplements.

WARNING: Excessive intake of calcium may increase the chance of kidney stones. Therefore, always consult your health provider about what is a suitable level of calcium supplementation for you.

It is a good idea to have a thorough annual check-up once you are forty or beyond. This check-up should include pelvic examination, breast examination and mammogram.

Checking for colon and heart disease is also very worthwhile.

Part-II: Understanding Menopause

2. What is Menopause?

Normally, menopause occurs between the ages of 45 and 55. It is not an ailment or disease. It is a normal biologic process, as normal as breathing.

It does not begin within a narrow range of ages, like puberty or loss of one’s first tooth. It typically occurs over a span of eight to ten years.

Menopause marks the end of a woman’s fertility period. Her ovaries no longer produce eggs, and production of hormones like estrogen and progesterone also decrease.

There are many significant physical changes. The body attempts to continue to send hormones to stimulate ovulation for as long as possible, but it is a failing process.

Ovaries may respond erratically, causing erratic menstrual periods. Eventually, the ovaries are unable to ovulate. This restricts, and finally stops, monthly periods.

The ovaries still continue to ovulate for some time and produce low levels of estrogen and, sometimes, androgens. **Androgens** are substances, such as testosterone or androsterone, which promote male characteristics. These are often converted into estrogen in a woman’s fatty tissues.

The uterus lining also thins down due to low estrogen levels.

Sadly, menopause does not cause sudden stoppage of menstrual periods. There could be irregular occurrences spread over several years.

These may include

lengthy or very short periods

excessive or very little bleeding

bleeding with clots and

variation of the time between menstrual periods.

Useful Menopause Terms

Premenopause refers to most reproductive years in your biological cycle

Perimenopause includes the years prior to the onset of menopause, when one experiences different symptoms, especially irregular menstruation and hot flashes

Menopause is the point of permanent cessation of menstruation

Post-menopause are the years following menopause.

Causes of Menopause

There is no single cause or specific happening, which you can attribute to the onset of menopause.

Menopause may be categorized as surgical, induced or premature.

Surgical menopause is due to surgical removal of ovaries.

Induced menopause is when ovaries are damaged due to x-rays, drugs, or other factors.

Premature menopause is considered to be any onset before the age of 40. It can be either natural or induced.

Menopause is a natural biologic process that occurs over a span of time and involves various related processes.

Normally, women in their 40's experience menopausal symptoms, and attain menopause by their mid-fifties.

Although menopause is normally a natural process, it can sometimes be related to an external cause, such as medical situations like hysterectomy, damage to ovaries, cancer, etc.

Every woman is born with around two million eggs in follicles (sacs) within her ovaries. A woman may still have around 300,000 by the time of puberty. Only 400 to 500 eggs mature fully for release during her full menstrual cycle. The rest of these eggs degenerate.

A woman could be left with less than ten thousand eggs when she approaches menopause.

In the reproductive years, her brain releases specific chemicals that induce the release of an egg each month. The follicle produces higher levels of sex hormones, estrogen and progesterone, to

thicken the uterus lining. This lining will provide necessary support to the egg, if fertilized.

If there is no fertilization, the uterus lining breaks, the estrogen and progesterone levels drop and menstruation occurs.

However, a woman’s ovaries do not stop producing estrogen completely.

Progesterone levels also register varying levels.

These changing hormone levels may affect other glands of her endocrine system.

So, she may experience changes in her breast tissue, bone density, gastrointestinal tract, vagina, skin and urinary tract.

Some of these changes may disrupt her normal body functioning.

She may:

- suffer pain in her breasts
- experience vaginal dryness and itching
- develop urinary incontinence and
- have more pronounced signs of aging skin.

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