

What is Menopause and Mid-Life Crisis?

Menopause is the process of ending menstruation. The menopause is a natural event in the life of every woman. It occurs when the level of hormone production, which has been slowly declining, drops too low to maintain the menstrual cycle and the ovaries stop releasing eggs. Female hormones are still produced after menopause, but at lower levels. **THERE IS NO SET TIME FOR MENOPAUSE TO TAKE PLACE, BUT IT USUALLY TAKES PLACE BETWEEN 45-55 YEARS – ALTHOUGH IT CAN BE EARLIER OR LATER.**

Many women experience unpleasant symptoms during menopause, and these can last for several months or even a year or more. Some of these include:

- Irregular and unpredictable periods, sometimes accompanied by increased pre-menstrual syndrome.
- Hot flushes
- Vaginal dryness.
- Depression
- Sleeplessness
- Irritability

Hormone replacement therapy (HRT) can be helpful in dealing with the symptoms of menopause and also assist in the treatment of osteoporosis. Osteoporosis is the gradual thinning of the bones caused by lack of calcium and loss of oestrogen. After menopause women can lose bone strength at a much faster rate than the normal rate for aging.

Partners of women going through menopause need to understand what their partner is going through so that they can support her through this time of physical and emotional stress. This can lead to an improved relationship.

DOES MENOPAUSE OCCUR IN MEN?

The answer to this of course is **NO**, because men do not have menstrual periods, but probably the real answer is between yes and no. Men do have a gradual lessening of production of the male hormone *testosterone* as they get older. They can also have some of the symptoms that women experience in menopause, those being:

- Irritability depression
- Sleeplessness hot flushes
- Loss of memory excessive sweating

AT THIS TIME OF LIFE YOU MAY YOURSELF SUBJECT TO MANY STRESSES, PREDICTABLE AND UNEXPECTED. THE WAY IN WHICH YOU DEAL WITH THEM WILL BE CRUCIAL TO YOUR FUTURE GROWTH AND HAPPINESS.

Firstly, your bodies are changing. For a woman there are the physical and emotional changes and for a man, there may be a marked deterioration in physical fitness and the realisation that he may be slowing down.

Such a realisation may make both men and women feel an upsurge in the need to be recognised, to be appreciated and to be seen as attractive. At this point, your children may be growing up, your marriage may be a predictable groove. Both partners may just not feel as close, as intimate as they remember feeling or would wish to feel again, yet they may have very real difficulty talking about it together.

This time of life is often referred to as **Mid-Life Crisis**. At this time for the male partner they may be sudden changes in behaviour accompanied by an increased sexual drive and desire for a younger woman – or on the other hand there may be reduced sexual drive and performance accompanied by anxiety and depression.

These altered behaviours can cause concern for other family members, particularly if the man becomes infatuated with younger women and he may even consider leaving his home and family to start a new life. Because he may have thought ‘he was past it’, he may have an affair just to prove that he is not and to boost his self-esteem.

Other men may become depressed and anxious about obvious changes and stresses and may turn to alcohol, which only aggravates the problem and may lead to impotence.

There are other factors which may aggravate the situation such as

- Job stress- queries about redundancy or looming retirement.
- There may be physical illness which can make the stress more difficult to cope with.
- Children may be leaving home and organising their own lives, leaving an ‘empty nest’.
- Concern of ageing parents can cause added stress.
- Many women see this time as the beginning of old age, as they can no longer bear children and they will be less attractive.

The key to dealing with this time of life is communication. The sooner feelings, dreams and dissatisfactions are talked about openly and honestly the less likely they are to lead to undesirable consequences.

If the stress is lasting too long or getting out of hand never be afraid to ask for help.

Asking for help is a sign of strength not failure. To name a few professionals that may be able to help are: your family doctor, psychologist, psychotherapists and ministers of religion.

MAKING OR ADAPTING TO CHANGES IN OUR LIVES, OUR JOBS AND OUR RELATIONSHIP, MEANS FINDING OUT HOW TO FEEL GOOD AND CONFIDENT ABOUT OURSELVES.