

MENOPAUSE: *A time of Change*

by Nedra Downing, D.O.

Menopause is the time when menstrual periods end. It's official when there has

been no period for one year.

American women go through menopause naturally about age 51,

give or take four years. The average age of menopause has remained fairly constant over the years. What's changed, however, is longevity. At the beginning of this century, women were expected to live only about 13 years after menopause. Now a woman can expect to live another 32 years. At the turn of the century, only 6.1% of women had stopped menstruating; now that number has jumped to 35%.

Menopause is a turning point in a woman's life. By anyone's yardstick, it signals middle age. It marks the loss forever of fecundity, the end of the childbearing years. For some, this is a joyous release, the start of new freedom. For others, it's a time of sadness as this life chapter ends. It's always a time of change: to assess the past and to get on with those important things not yet done.

A major health concern at this time is osteoporosis. This disease is the silent thinning of bones—leading to loss of height, stooped posture, and bone fractures. Risks of bone loss are increased for women with small stature, fair skin and hair, family history of the disease, early menopause, menstrual irregularities, stress, and taking certain medications.

Before menopause, two major hormones are produced by the ovaries: estrogen and progesterone. Cycling of these hormones is responsible for menstrual periods, but they have many other effects in the body. At menopause, production of both hormones drops.

Declining levels of these hormones can bring unpleasant symptoms such as sweating, hot flashes, mood swings, irritability, depression, trouble sleeping, fatigue,

headache, and bladder problems. Symptoms are severe in some women and minimal in others. Replacing the lost hormones slows bone loss and helps control unpleasant symptoms.

An important choice at menopause is whether to take hormones or not. Medical wisdom supports the use of hormones stating that benefits outweigh risks. While there are benefits such as better quality of life, reduced osteoporosis, heart disease, and dementia, there's also concern about increased risk of breast cancer.

Commonly prescribed forms of estrogen are estrone and estradiol. Another less-used form of estrogen therapy is called triple estrogen. It contains a third estrogen, estriol, which has some protective effects against breast cancer.

Progesterone is used to protect the uterus from cancerous changes that may occur with estrogen alone. Synthetic forms of progesterone are commonly used in the United States, but not in Europe because they are considered too toxic.

Natural progesterone is widely available in the form of a skin cream made from wild yams. The hormone is absorbed through the skin and gradually finds its way into the blood stream. Its many benefits include reducing symptoms and protecting bone. Estrogen plays its part by reducing bone destruction, while progesterone promotes bone renewal.

For women who don't want to take hormones, there are many good choices. Herbs can help to balance hormones and control symptoms.

Commonly used are dong quai, black and blue cohosh, damiana, false unicorn root, raspberry leaf, sarsaparilla, alfalfa, red clover, licorice root, sage, ginseng, gotu kola, fenugreek, and wild yam.

Homeopathic remedies are extremely effective. They can be used for both acute and chronic symptoms. Calcarea phosphorica and silicea are used to help protect bones. Sepia, pulsatilla, lycopodium, lachesis and others can be used. Which one works best depends upon the individual.

Caring for mind and body are important all through life, but especially so at menopause. Most

important is a good diet full of vegetables, fruits, nuts and seeds, fish, whole grains, and yogurt. But adding supplements helps even more. Vitamins E and C, bioflavonoids, B-complex, and B-carotene are basic. But calcium and other minerals are necessary to protect bones. About 1200 mg. of calcium daily is usually recommended. Besides foods such as beans, broccoli, collards and dairy, which contain calcium, a good balanced mineral supplement with calcium may be added to boost intake of this important bone-builder.

Providing what the body needs can help prolong the good years. Choices at menopause can dramatically affect this last life phase to help make it the best of all.

Nedra Downing, D.O., is a physician/nutritionist.

Healthy Living Tips for Menopause

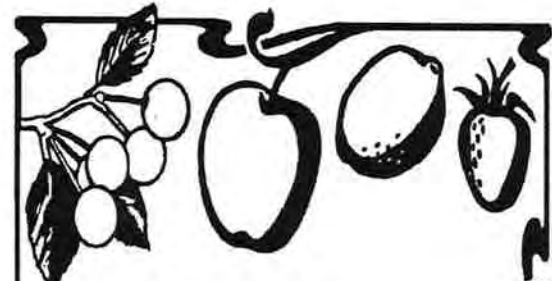
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- Get moderate, sustained exercise 3-4 days per week.
- Eat 5 vegetables per day; try for all colors.
- Eat 4 or 5 fruits daily (not if you have diabetes).
- Eat locally-grown organic vegetables whenever possible.
- Out of season, use frozen organic vegetables.
- Take vitamin and mineral supplements.
- Use natural herbs and homeopathy.
- Drink plenty of pure water (not tap water.)
- Get lots of fresh air.
- Remove chemicals from your environment.
- Don't spray your lawn or home.
- Eat boiled or poached eggs; beans; non-fat yogurt; and essential oils daily from nuts, seeds, fish.
- Drink green tea.
- Avoid all margarine and hydrogenated oils.
- Cook with olive oil or organic butter.
- Don't heat liquid salad oils.
- Avoid bleached paper products.
- Use natural care for your pets.
- Use nontoxic cleaning agents.
- Use natural herbal shampoos/cosmetics.
- Avoid perfumes.
- Don't smoke.
- Get plenty of rest.
- Watch your posture.
- Do stretching exercises.
- Balance your life between work and play.

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Bones are more than just calcium...

Be sure to get the following bone nutrients: calcium, magnesium, and potassium; silicon, manganese, vitamin C for cartilage formation; vitamin K to attract calcium to bone; vitamin D to help absorb calcium from the diet; zinc and copper to aid repair; natural progesterone cream to aid bone renewal; adequate protein for bone matrix; weight-bearing exercise daily to strengthen bones; slow calcium loss by limiting coffee, pop, salt, sugar, alcohol, and meat intake.



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In 1982, Dr. Nedra Downing left a 30-year career in pharmacy to pursue her interest in nutrition and herbs as alternate ways to treat illness. She returned to school at Michigan State University where she completed her master's degree in Science for Human Nutrition and subsequently received her doctor of osteopathy from the school in 1986. Today Dr. Downing, who interned at Flint Osteopathic Hospital, has her own family medicine practice in Clarkston where she stresses the importance of nutrition for lasting health.

Here she helps sort through the growing variety of treatment specialties.

ALTERNATIVE MEDICINE

Is it for you?

by Nedra Downing, D.O.

Most people get routine medical care from an *allopathic* medical doctor (a traditional medical doctor, an M.D., who treats diseases by administering remedies to induce conditions different from those accompanying the disease) or an *osteopathic*, D.O. physician. Both types of physicians use medication, diagnostics and surgery to diagnose and treat disease.

Osteopathic physicians also treat the muscle and skeletal systems with non-drug treatments called manipulation.

In recent years, however, the differences between the two types of physicians have been fading. Medical school curriculums and basic hospital training are similar, but osteopathic physicians take extra courses learning hands-on diagnosis and treatment for the muscle-skeleton systems. Hospital staffs often are a mixture of physicians with either an M.D. or D.O. degree.

Following medical school, osteopathic physicians in Michigan must spend one year in a rotating internship, working in all departments including obstetrics, surgery, intensive and cardiac care.

Then they may choose general practice or take additional training and specialize. Like-

wise, allopathic physicians may practice as general practitioners after medical school, or take a residency and specialize. This requires an additional two to four years of training. This type of care is the "gold standard" for infectious or acute disease processes. It has been less successful for chronic illnesses where there are no drugs to reverse the disease process.

Americans embraced treatment with medications in the 1920s when some of the first wonder drugs were discovered. Later, penicillin saved lives and changed the face of medical care forever. Prior to this, Americans used herbs, home remedies and homeopaths (drugs which produce effects on a healthy person similar to the symptoms of the disease being treated).

Today Americans, frustrated with traditional care—either because of side effects

or fear of medication, or because they see little improvement—are turning to more natural types of medical treatments. According to a recent study, these people, who are typically college-educated, make slightly more visits to their non-traditional health care providers than to their regular physicians; meanwhile, they don't tell their "medical" doctors they are seeing someone else. Who are these other physicians they are turning to?

They may choose to see a holistic or homeopathic M.D. or D.O., or turn to a *naturopathic* physician, N.D., who is skilled in the use of herbs, or an *Ayurvedic* physician trained in the ancient medical care system of India. Many also choose such other treatments as chiropractic, massage and acupuncture.

Holistic physicians try to foster natural good health with the patient as partner.

They are concerned with the total person—mind, body and spirit, believing all these elements are connected and must be addressed. They also feel there is more to medicine than statistics and facts and may use many kinds of medical care, including traditional medications, diagnostics or surgery, right along with herbs, vitamins and various non-drug treatments.

Interest in this type of care is increasing and gaining acceptance in the traditional medical community as evidenced by the January 1993 cover story for *Medical World News*. The story, "Vitamins, Emerging as Disease Fighters, Not Just Supplements," addressed the fact that more and more research supports the use of vitamin supplements to combat or prevent disease. And recent studies from Harvard showed Vitamin E to be beneficial in treating heart disease. Interestingly, there were similar reports some 40 years earlier but they were rejected by the medical community until now.

Homeopathy was founded in the late 18th century by Samuel Hahnemann based upon ancient principles dating back to Hippocrates and to Ayurvedic medicine.

Homeopathic physicians consider their patients as unique individuals and may use different remedies for the same symptoms in different people. They rely heavily on the wisdom of the body and choose remedies to help the body heal itself. These remedies actually imitate the body's own healing processes.

Remedies are carefully tested to determine effects on healthy people and are selected when illness presents similar signs. Remedies are energized by many careful dilutions. This energy is important for the remedy's success.

Many senior citizens remember using remedies as children. Indeed, we have an official compendium of homeopathic remedies in this country, just like we do for chemically defined drugs.

An alternate care provider may well be in your future. The gentle non-drug treatments often have powerful results, and usually with no side effects. By calling forth the healing powers and spirit within an individual, often surprising improvements occur where no medication could have worked. Alternative medical care is filling in the gaps left by traditional medicine, which has focused on treating the disease—not the whole person. ■