

PENINSULA NEWS REVIEW
SEPTEMBER 2009 COLUMN
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Word Count: 500

The end of fertility in midlife ushers in the third part of a woman's life, also known as the "third age" or menopause, after the cessation of "menarche," women's monthly periods. Although it has existed since Eve, the social stigma can be as toxic as her apple.

The perimenopausal period can begin in women in their mid '30s, although the average age is reported to be in women between 43-50 years of age. Symptoms range in women throughout the globe: hot flashes, night sweats, vaginal atrophy, itching and dryness, urinary frequency or incontinence, weight gain, decreased skin elasticity, decreased libido and dyspareunia or painful intercourse. Skeletal complications can produce joint or muscle pains, back pains or osteopenia, which can develop into osteoporosis. Psychological effects include mood disturbances, irritability, memory loss, concentration difficulties, fatigue, anxiety, sleep disturbances/insomnia and depression. As well, the society perception of aging can contribute to increased psychological responses.

Even though the social and psychological ramifications of the menopause transition are frequently ignored or underestimated, menopause is **not** a disease or disorder. In fact, Asian culture treats it as a combination of symptoms that are presented individually in each woman.

One of my clients became perimenopausal in her 42nd year. She began a life-long struggle with weight gain, insomnia, back pain and occasional memory dysfunction. Although she chose to not embark on the traditional route of hormone replacement therapy (HRT), by her 52nd birthday, she had also gained new insight into managing her menopausal symptoms. It began with an acceptance of her evolution through life and surrendering to the fear of aging. Remedies included regular massage, daily exercise (which she found difficult to adhere to), open discussion of her symptoms to break down the stereotypical response that menopause is just not talked about and a support system of family and friends who accepted the transition and early symptoms. She also ingested a daily herbal tincture that included walnut oil, red clover and black cohosh that promoted better sleeping habits and lessened mood swings.

Another best practice for dealing with this female eventuality is yoga, which has become a staple for many menopausal women. Nancy Searing from Peninsula Yoga Centre views yoga as a curative and a preventative practice, Iyengar Yoga helps alleviate joint pain through specific poses that create space in joints to assist in regaining lost movement and strengthening the supporting muscles. Practicing Iyengar Yoga is key in learning how to quiet a busy mind and thereby reducing stress. A quiet mind is beneficial in every aspect of life, particularly for the menopausal woman who learns to accept her body's changes. Iyengar Yoga teaches many specialized poses that help to

reduce menopausal symptoms such as hot flashes, insomnia, mood swings and fatigue.

With more knowledge, less stress and common-sense approaches to living a balanced, wholesome life, we can transform the taboo into a healthier quality of life to promote wellness and acceptance.

October's column will look at depression and mental health. Send your questions to brittafrombach@gmail.com.

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