Why is there Cervical Discharge during Perimenopause?

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Cervical Mucus During Perimenopause

If you are entering menopause, you know that your menstruation will slowly begin to cease until you no longer have a period whatsoever. You may think because you are no longer menstruating, you will also no longer have any cervical discharge, but this is not always the case. In fact, some people have cervical mucus during perimenopause.

First, it is helpful to understand perimenopause and menopause.

Perimenopause

Perimenopause can loosely be described as “the menopause transition.” When a woman enters a perimenopausal state, her body begins to make less estrogen. It often begins in the 40s, but can begin as early as the 30s.

Initially, there are no symptoms. However, in the last couple of years of perimenopause, the decrease in estrogen will rapidly drop, causing menopause symptoms.

Perimenopause can last a few months to 10 years — every woman is different. It ends once a woman has not menstruated for one year.

Menopause

The average age of menopause in the United States is 51 years old.

As we now know, perimenopause can occur for years prior to menopause. This means that, unless a woman has had a hysterectomy, menopause does not have a sudden onset.

Signs and Symptoms of Perimenopause

The following signs indicate perimenopause. Not all symptoms need to be experienced, but at least some of the symptoms must be experienced to indicate perimenopause:

- Hot flashes
- Breast tenderness
- Worsening premenstrual syndrome and mood swings
- Trouble sleeping and fatigue
- Vaginal dryness with discomfort during sex
- Irregular periods
- Urine leakage, especially with laughing and sneezing; urinary urgency

However, irregular periods are the trademark symptom of perimenopause. When other symptoms occur with irregular periods, a physician should evaluate the cause:

- Periods that happen close together
- Spotting that occurs after sex
- Spotting between periods
- Periods lasting longer than they normally do
- Periods that are heavier than normal, or that occur with blood clots

You may be wondering, “I didn’t read anything about cervical discharge occurring with perimenopause! Why the heck is this happening to me?” There is most likely a logical explanation.

Normal Discharge

Generally, cervical discharge is a normal occurrence — even in the perimenopausal stage. We often assume that because hormones are drastically fluctuating and the length between periods is increasing, we will not have “that annoying symptom” anymore. This is not the case.

Normal vaginal discharge is clear and white, and is sticky in texture for most of the menstrual cycle. During ovulation, the discharge becomes clearer, wetter and more slippery.

While the amount of times a perimenopausal woman may have cervical discharge may decrease dramatically due to the amount of times she has her period, it does stand to reason that she will still have it for the simple fact that she is still having her period!

Infection

Any infection to the vaginal area is not necessarily “normal,” but vaginal discharge is a normal physiologic response to infection. It is the vagina’s way of attempting to clean out the infection, regardless of the age of the woman.

There are a wide variety of infections that can cause cervical discharge. Many infections can be categorized based on the character of the discharge.

For example, bacterial vaginosis (BV) can occur for a variety of reasons and often presents with a thin, white discharge that coats the walls of the vagina. In addition, the discharge has a fishy odor.

Trichomoniasis, a sexually-transmitted disease (STD) may present with no symptoms in women; in women who do have vaginal discharge, the discharge is typically yellowish-green with vaginal irritation. Other STDs and vaginal infections may also cause vaginal discharge.

Uterine Cancer

In rare circumstances, cervical discharge can be caused by an abnormal condition, such as cancer.

Uterine cancer, also called endometrial cancer, has abnormal vaginal bleeding as its primary symptom. In fact, 90% of women who are diagnosed with this type of cancer have this symptom.

This bleeding presents as a change in their typical periods or bleeding between their periods for premenopausal or perimenopausal women, and bleeding from the vagina for women who are menopausal.

However, abnormal, non-bloody vaginal discharge can also be a symptom of uterine cancer. In fact, 10% of uterine cancer cases had vaginal discharge that was non-bloody.

If you have abnormal vaginal bleeding or abnormal vaginal discharge, especially coupled with pain in the pelvic

region, a palpable mass and weight loss, it is best to be evaluated by a physician for uterine cancer.

With cervical mucus during perimenopause, it is important to note that not all vaginal discharge is abnormal. However, if you concerned about something to do with your body, please see your physician with your concerns.