Stages of Menopause

by ERIC PATTERSON

Understanding the Stages of Menopause

The transition into menopause is a difficult time physically and emotionally for most women. The progress of menopause follows different courses at different rates for everyone, and can seem to start and stop along the way; it is a time of uncertainty.

Many times this uncertainty nature triggers confusion. Confusion about your body leads to stress, anger and frustration. Learning more about the steps and stages of menopause gives you a better indication of what lays ahead and allows you to begin appropriate interventions to reduce discomfort and quality of life.

Pre-menopause

Contrary to what others may tell you, pre-menopause is not the period immediately prior to menopause. Pre-menopause refers to the entire period of time that you are able to reproduce. The time from your first menstrual period to your last is considered pre-menopause.

Stage 1 Tips – During this stage your focus should surround measures of birth control and methods to manage symptoms of PMS. Always consult with your OB/GYN to manage your symptoms.

Perimenopause

This period can last up to 10 years but is usually a four-year period prior to menopause. Women typically enter this stage around age 47. In this stage, your ovaries reduce their release of eggs and their release of hormones like estrogen. In perimenopause, your periods will be erratic and inconsistent. Estrogen production will be unpredictable as well and periods of high estrogen will spark symptoms of mood changes, anxiety and irritability. Periods of low estrogen will trigger hot flashes, vaginal dryness and diminished concentration.

Stage 2 Tips – This is the stage where hormones are fluctuating to extremes. Work to find relief from the symptoms through home remedies or prescribed medications. Seek support from friends and family to assist in the process.

Menopause

Menopause does not refer to a period of time but rather a specific event. It is the date of your final period. You should not confirm the date of your menopause until you have gone 12 consecutive months without having a period. Be sure to rule out other explanations like stress or health concerns for your missed periods.

Stage 3 Tips – Menopause is more about the emotional impact than the physical. The end of menstruation is viewed as both positive and negative, a gain and a loss. Many woman experience the end of their period as a loss and move through the grieving process. Feelings of disorientation, confusion, sadness and anger are common

initially as you move to acceptance and understanding.

Post-menopause

Since menopause is the date of your last period, post-menopause is everything that happens following. Lowered levels of estrogen and progesterone are linked to long-term health problems. During this stage, you are at higher risk of osteoporosis and heart disease.

Stage 4 Tips – A refocus to physical health is seen in this stage. Consult with your doctor to understand lifestyle changes you can enact to prevent and screen for health conditions. Supplements, diet change and mammograms are helpful to ensure many healthy years of post-menopausal life.

Conclusion

Menopause is a time of great changes. Your physical and emotional experiences will change drastically from pre-menopause to post-menopause. Having the information to understand what is to come gives you an advantage. You can prepare by having supports and systems in place to identify shifting, treat physical symptoms and move through the grieving process to alleviate the emotional stress. Communication with loved ones is always key. Menopause marks the end of something but the beginning of so much more.