Positive Aspects of Menopause

by ANGELA FINLAY

Looking on the Bright Side

The end of your reproductive years brings a big change in hormonal activity, and as every woman knows, hormones have a huge impact on your quality of life. However, there's a big difference between perimenopause (the years leading up to menopause) and menopause itself; for many women, menopause means more balance, and a chance to explore abilities without annoying discomforts.

While physical changes are inevitable, it's the way you perceive the changes – and rise to the challenges – that will make all the difference. Set your sights on the positive aspects of menopause, and learn how to handle common menopausal concerns in healthier, more productive ways.

How Quality of Life Improves in Menopause

It's true that menopause imposes some biological limits, but it also brings some new freedoms. As your body transitions into this new phase, relish the relief and comfort that's coming your way:

- **No more periods.** Menstrual periods – and the PMS symptoms that come along with them – are never fun to deal with, but they can be especially bothersome during the perimenopause phase. Luckily, menopause brings an end to the painful cramping, heavy bleeding, and unpredictable spotting that many women experience in the preceding years. And the fact that you don't have to worry about tampons, pads or potential embarrassment is very liberating!
- **Hormonal stability**. Perimenopause is typically a volatile time in terms of hormonal activity. Spiking and dropping levels of estrogen and progesterone can wreak havoc on your physical and emotional wellbeing, which often affects mood, self-confidence, and even relationships. Although much less estrogen is produced once menstrual cycles end, your body will appreciate the constant level.

- **Worry-free sex.** Well, perhaps not entirely worry-free (STDs are a threat at any age), but you won't have to concern yourself with pregnancy prevention any longer. It may seem like a small concession, but studies reveal that most women report more sexual enjoyment, since they can focus on the moment and not a potentially unwelcome outcome.
- **Fewer migraine headaches.** If you suffer from migraines, you'll be pleased to know that the road ahead will probably be much more comfortable. Fluctuating estrogen and progesterone in a regular menstrual cycle will trigger headaches in 70% of migraine-prone women, so once that cycle comes to an end and hormones even out, those menstrual migraines will be a thing of the past.

Next page: turning challenges into positive opportunities.

Turning Challenges of Menopause into Positive Opportunities

No matter how positive you remain, menopause does bring some uncomfortable challenges. From changes in libido to empty nest syndrome, the post-menopausal path can be bumpy, but instead of ignoring the hard parts, take the physical and emotional changes in stride. The key is to focus on your strength, and find ways to build it up even more.

- **Use the transition to develop a new perspective.** Don't ignore the "pause" in menopause. This is a natural stopping point, a time to take stock of your life and envision what you want the next years to bring. Therapists suggest that women take the opportunity to look at their professions, personal lives, hobbies and the ways they care for their own health.With the onset of menopause, many women feel more energetic and self-assured, which can (and should) translate into greater self-confidence. Use the wisdom you've accumulated and your newfound physical freedom to try new things, or take on a new challenge at work. Some experts insist that this is a time to take risks; instead of focusing on the amount of life you have lived already, think about how much more there is to experience.
- **Give your body a fitness makeover.** Changes in hormone levels can mean weight gain, bone loss and general discomfort, so when menopause begins to bring some relief from perimenopause symptoms, take some time to get a good handle on your health. Be sure to schedule annual check-ups, pap smears and mammograms, and consider ramping up your regular fitness routine.Osteoporosis becomes a concern once your estrogen levels drop, but there's a lot you can do to keep your bones healthy. First, inject your diet with bone-friendly foods, like calcium-rich kale and broccoli, and soy products, which can boost your natural estrogen levels. As for exercise, try to incorporate some weight-bearing activity that works against gravity to increase your bone density and muscle mass, like jogging, tennis, or moderate weight lifting.

- **Funnel personal frustrations into a bonding experience.** Physical discomforts and cognitive problems are all too common as you reach the end of your reproductive years, and they can be both annoying and isolating. But while it seems like you're dealing with hot flashes, memory loss, mood swings and sleep problems all on your own, there are lots of other women who share your plight.Talking, joking and sharing your thoughts with other menopausal women will help you relieve your stress and learn to cope better. Women who exchange stories and sympathy with their friends gain courage, self-esteem and confidence to face the world – many of same positive results that come with formal therapy.

Be Your Own Woman

Society's attitude toward menopause is one of the biggest barriers to a healthy and happy post-menopausal life. Cultural expectations and negative stereotypes can be difficult to overcome, but it's vital that you keep a positive outlook and focus on your unique abilities. Remember that menopause isn't what it used to be: women today are healthier and more active, and there is a wide range of holistic and complementary therapy to help you through the rough times.

Psychological states have a lot of influence over physical symptoms: studies have shown that women with high self-esteem at midlife actually experience fewer menopausal symptoms, so take time to relax your body and mind. Try daily meditation to center yourself and take charge of your physical symptoms. Build a good support network with friends and family, but also look to local groups that can provide a helpful outlet. A well-rounded routine will keep you energized and in control of your daily routine, but can also help you reach your full potential in the second half of your life.