Managing the Physical and Emotional Aspects of Menopause

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Menopause and Emotions: Making Sense of Your Feelings

You already know that menopause is a time of great change and transition as your body moves from having regular menstrual cycles to none at all. Also, you know that this shifting leads to dramatic physical and emotional changes that affect every woman differently. You experience unwelcome physical sensations, and the way that you look at yourself and at the people in your life may begin to morph into something different and less desirable.

Though the process targets each aspect of your life, there is no need to panic. There is no need to seek out drastic or radical treatments to improve your situation. Rather, with some simple goals and interventions you can find success in managing both your symptoms of menopause and emotions.

Manage the Physical

The first step to managing menopause and emotions is by reducing the physical impact of perimenopause. Once your physical symptoms are under control your stress levels will come down and you can better focus on improving your mental health.

Follow Doctor's Recommendations

Your physician is the clear choice to begin treatment. Ask your OB/GYN about the best options based on your situation. Is medication or hormone replacement right for you?

Be an advocate for yourself by explaining your symptoms and being persistent until you feel satisfied with the results.

Find Home Remedies

Hot flashes and night sweats are some of the most common and problematic symptoms of perimenopause. Finding ways to limit their influence will help you find relief.

Research some popular methods and consider using ice packs, cooling pads and cold compresses to reduce your physical symptoms. Along the way, use your creative side to find solutions that have not been discovered yet.

Relax

Life is stressful enough without the added pressures of menopause. Everyone can benefit from finding new sources of relaxation.

Yoga, deep breathing, guided imagery and autogenics yield high benefits when done consistently. Meditation aids

in distraction and ignoring your physical symptoms.

You can also engage in more pleasurable activities like visiting with friends or going out for dinner and a movie. These options serve as escape and avoidance and are very appropriate during this period.

Manage the Emotional

If you have been working to identify and manage the physical symptoms of menopause then you are on your way to managing the emotional impact. Just as you are influenced by the world around you, your physical symptoms influence your emotions.

For example, many women in perimenopause report an increase in anxiety. There are two possible explanations for this. The first is that the changing levels of estrogen trigger a direct anxious response. The second is an indirect response as some misperceive the hot flashes, increased heart rate and sweats as anxiety. Though the source may be purely physical, the misperceptions trigger an anxious response that can end in a full panic attack. Other examples involving depression also exist.

Managing the emotional aspects of menopause is a multidimensional, multifaceted endeavor. It is challenging, but worthwhile. Here's how:

Self-Monitor and Differentiate

As mentioned above, physical sensations can trigger depression, anxiety and panic. Learning to accurately identify symptoms of menopause and differentiating them from mental health issues is helpful.

What does anxiety feel like? What does depression feel like? And what does menopause feel like? Consider the differences and write them down to clarify.

Concurrently, pay more attention to your body and your mind. What are you thinking about? What does your body feel like? Noticing changes and new sensations while they are small gives you the ability to respond early and reduce your symptoms.

Protect Your Identity

Menopause changes the way you see yourself. Perhaps, you previous saw yourself as an active adult, but now, in the process of menopause, you see yourself as someone that can no longer function to create life.

You may feel that you have lost your purpose. Acknowledge and accept this loss while looking for other identities to fill the hole. Your body is undergoing a significant transformation and your psychological health is changing.

Trying to convince yourself that "everything is fine" increases the strain on your identity. Once you admit that something is happening you can proceed with solutions.

Focus on the Benefits

The list of negatives associated with menopause is a long one, but listing positives can change your perceptions and strengthen your identity. Menstruating is a chore; no more periods means no more PMS. And many women find sex to be more enjoyable without the chance of pregnancy. There is a freedom found in menopause.

Get the Family Involved

No woman is an island. The impact of your menopause is felt by your family which means they will be willing to help improve your experience.

- **List your wants and needs.** Now that your family knows what you are going through, tell them what they

can do about it.

- **Be specific and concrete.** Do you want more alone time or more time with family? Would it help if someone had a cold compress ready for you at a certain time each day? Then tell them.
- **Don’t forget that your family loves and values you.** They want to help but they need some direction. Their involvement helps you feel a sense of belonging instead of isolation. Being part of a team is a great depression buster.

Conclusion

Working to minimize the emotional effects of menopause means taking a holistic view of yourself. The physical, emotional and mental aspects each trigger and are triggered by the others.

By setting a realistic goal and improving the physical symptoms, you are better able to approach the emotional symptoms more directly and efficiently. Remember, the end of one thing is always the beginning of something else.