

Menopause and Its Management: A Holistic Approach to Women's Health

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Menopause is a universal and inevitable transition in every woman's life, marking the end of her reproductive years. It is defined as the permanent cessation of menstruation for at least twelve consecutive months, typically occurring between 45 and 55 years of age. The hormonal decline, primarily of estrogen and progesterone, leads to a spectrum of physiological, psychological, and emotional changes. Although it is a natural biological process, menopause can have a profound impact on a woman's health, quality of life, and social well-being.

The menopausal transition, often preceded by the perimenopausal phase, brings with it a variety of symptoms. The most common include hot flashes, night sweats, palpitations, mood swings, irritability, sleep disturbances, decreased libido, and vaginal dryness. These symptoms can vary widely in severity and duration. Beyond these immediate manifestations, menopause also predisposes women to long-term health risks such as osteoporosis, cardiovascular diseases, and cognitive decline due to the protective effects of estrogen being lost.

The management of menopause requires a comprehensive, individualized, and evidence-based approach. Lifestyle modification remains the foundation of therapy. Regular physical activity, such as brisk walking, yoga, or swimming, helps in maintaining cardiovascular health, bone strength, and psychological balance. A nutritious diet rich in fruits, vegetables, whole grains, soya protein, calcium, vitamin D, and antioxidants supports bone health and general vitality. Adequate hydration, cessation of smoking, and moderation of alcohol intake are essential preventive strategies.

Hormone Replacement Therapy (HRT) continues to be the gold standard for managing moderate to severe vasomotor and urogenital symptoms. However, its use should be carefully individualized after evaluating potential risks and benefits,

particularly regarding breast cancer, thromboembolism, and cardiovascular disease. For women who cannot or prefer not to use HRT, several non-hormonal alternatives such as selective serotonin reuptake inhibitors (SSRIs), clonidine, gabapentin, or phytoestrogens have shown beneficial effects. Local vaginal estrogen preparations can effectively relieve vaginal dryness and atrophy with minimal systemic absorption.

Psychological and social support play an equally vital role. The "empty nest" phase, combined with bodily changes, can evoke emotional distress and loss of identity. Family education, community support groups, and counseling play a pivotal role in helping women adapt positively to this transition. Mindfulness practices, meditation, and adequate sleep further enhance emotional stability and mental well-being. Preventive health care during menopause should include regular screening for osteoporosis, hypertension, diabetes, lipid disorders, and cancers such as breast and cervical malignancies. Early detection and prompt management of these conditions can significantly improve long-term outcomes.

In conclusion, menopause should not be viewed as a disease or decline but as a natural phase of transformation. With appropriate lifestyle choices, medical management, and emotional resilience, women can navigate this stage with confidence and grace. The role of health professionals is crucial in guiding, educating, and supporting women to ensure that menopause becomes an opportunity for renewed health awareness and empowerment rather than distress.

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