



WHAT WE NEED TO KNOW ABOUT MENOPAUSE

What is menopause?

Menopause is the period in a woman's life when her menstrual cycles completely stop. The menopausal transition begins a few years earlier, usually in 40s or 50s and is characterized by decreasing levels of female hormones, particularly estrogen. Menopause is said to have occurred when there has been no menstrual bleeding for at least 1 year.

Is menopause normal?

Menopause is a natural process caused by declining function of the ovaries with age. The number of ovarian follicles (that normally develop to release egg) and estrogen secretion decreases as a woman grows older. The normal age of menopause can be variable but is usually between 45-55 years. However, menopause before the age of 40 years is premature and abnormal.

How does menopause affect a woman's health?

Menopause is a major milestone in a woman's life and is associated with the stopping of menstrual cycles and a decrease in fertility. Due to decreasing levels of female hormones, many women experience hot flashes, night sweats, disturbed sleep, fatigue, mood swings, anxiety, depression, vaginal dryness, painful intercourse, stress incontinence and recurrent urinary infections. In addition, the risk of weight gain, diabetes, heart disease, osteoporosis and fractures may increase.

How can a woman manage these symptoms?

A balanced diet, active lifestyle and stress reduction strategies (such as meditation, yoga, dance or hobbies) can be very helpful in making the menopausal transition smooth. Women who have disturbing symptoms should consult an endocrinologist or gynecologist who can guide them on the use of appropriate supplements, antioxidants, isoflavones and menopausal hormone therapy (MHT).

Does MHT have side effects? Is it safe?

MHT is very effective in the treatment of symptoms. When used early after menopause, it is quite safe and may also reduce the risk of osteoporosis. However, caution is required in elderly women who have had menopause several years earlier due to risk of blood clotting. There is also a small risk of breast cancer and MHT is avoided in women at risk of breast cancer.

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