

The Menopause Support Guide to Understanding Menopause for Men

BIOCONNECT

MEDICAL CENTRE

Disclaimer – she isn't going crazy ... but strap in because this ride could have some bumps, twists, and turns!

If you are reading this, it means that you have someone in your life who is going through the natural transition we refer to as Menopause.

This transition period can be experienced with little to no symptoms for some and for others, it can be an absolute storm! This isn't all about dry vaginas and hot flashes. In fact, the conversation is much wider but we hope to provide you with a bit more of a roadmap to help in this season of life.

Perhaps you can identify with the below:

- You are standing in the kitchen and she walks in, opens the fridge door, closes it, and for the 100th time remarks, "What did I come in here for?"
- The woman that used to juggle all the balls of life now has a disco ball of reminders in her phone because the brain fog, she is experiencing makes her a slave to calendar notifications.
- Sex has gone from a pleasurable, intimate connection to now a haunting memory that is not even discussed.
- Everything is dry. Her skin, her hair, her nails, her joints, her lady parts. You hear about it because you are closest.
- Heading out to any event outside the house takes at least 20 minutes longer. When you walk into her dressing area there is a pile of clothes surrounding her feet as you hear her mumbling, "Nothing fits anymore. NOTHING!" She then has to redo her eye makeup because the dressing is now trauma and it brings her to tears.
- Every day it may feel like you are now greeted with a wild cocktail of symptoms and emotions that one moment she can be a calm cup of tea and the next moment a spicy jalapeno tequila shot! One minute your lady is fine and the next minute she could be in floods of tears and pretty much hitchhiking out of the room.

Does this sound familiar at all?

Before this stage, you knew all the ways it took to get her in the mood, to make her laugh, to do life in a somewhat anticipated and predictable way but let's start this conversation with sex! Even though the years have passed, the frequency of sex may have changed based on the seasons of life but when sex did happen, it was that special moment that you both craved. You came together. You connected! As aging started, you might laugh at first that all the positions you once could perform, now cannot happen as they did in yesteryears (HELLLLOOO hips!) But recently you notice that she is shying away altogether. She comes to bed late, she pretends to be sleeping when you both know she is not. You then start to pull away and with shame and silence, the void starts to grow. Yes, there are other ways to be intimate but when the silence overcomes the communication, well....things become really difficult. You may find yourself thinking, **"Is it me?"**, **" Does she no longer find me desirable?"**, **"Am I being insensitive?"** or maybe you actually want to scream, **" I have needs too!"**

First, let us acknowledge... you are right. Things are changing.

That's where you are correct, but let's peel the onion back on and get a bit more as to WHY this is happening. If we could distill it down to one word it would be "hormones". Hormones are something that we all have, both men and women, and they impact every area of our life. When they are out of whack, they really can throw everything off balance!

But if she knows things are changing, why doesn't she do something about it? Well, that's a complicated one. One thing to consider is that for a woman's whole life, she is told to just get on with it. For many of us women we have had at least one week a month since puberty where we have had to deal with the effects of a change in our body getting our periods. Month after month after month, we martyr on. We also know what it is to deal with pain, so when pain presents itself in another fashion, we pretty much suit up the same way, with the same mentality. We are old friends with pain so a just because it is a new flavour now, doesn't mean we are going to go rushing for help. When it comes to our bodies, we know how to press it down, put a smile on our face for the outside world and get over it.

You maybe thinking, " OMG!" but honestly, wipe those lenses, menopause now becomes an opportunity for you. Keep reading...

It's important that we define Menopause.

Menopause is like an anniversary.
It is one day and defined as exactly 12 months from a woman's last period.

This day probably won't be celebrated like a birthday and the lead-up for 75% of women is more of a rollercoaster ride than cake and candles.

On average most women will enter menopause at 51 years of age, however, women of colour may experience this almost one year earlier. Everything before this menopause day is known as **perimenopause** and everything after this date is known as **post-menopause**. Some women will start experiencing peri-menopause symptoms in their late thirties and as the years turn more symptoms can be experienced. For some women, this transition will last 4 to 10 years and this is why we said to strap in! Unfortunately for us women, even if we don't recognize all the symptoms we know that there is no "pause" instead things are constantly changing. In addition to this natural transition, some women will experience what is known as surgical menopause. This is when a woman undergoes a hysterectomy or as the result of chemotherapy or radiation therapy and many are thrown right into menopause.

GOOD NEWS ALERT! Science rocks and we have come so far in science and medicine that we can now support women better than we ever have in the past! When we look at menopause we are zooming in on her hormones. Hormones are tricky little things, with over 200 of them in the human body and the truth is, if we are breathing, we never get a break from them, and they influence just about every bodily process we make in life. At this stage, it can feel like the hormones have gone on strike or having a rave party – all within a matter of moments. When this is happening we are looking at the hormones, Estrogen, Progesterone, Testosterone and DHEA.



EDUCATION TIME!

Our bodies are hugely complex and amazing all at once. But when the equilibrium is off the disruption can really be quite impactful, varied, and specific to your loved one. Her body is changing and so is her brain with all that is happening so it is really important that you continue to keep up to date with the research that pertains to Menopause. Even we as women, don't have all the answers. We were never taught and Menopause is still a taboo subject that is underserved even by the medical community.

Estrogen. Estrogen is an important hormone – it is a steroid hormone that is made from cholesterol and helps mature, develop, and regulate the female reproductive system. Estrogen levels can peak and dip on a daily and sometimes hourly basis as we said above, and this roller coaster can feel impossible to manage. It is important to know your lady is not making this up or being dramatic, it is because of the fluctuation of estrogen that these challenges can present itself in this form. Estrogen has numerous functions in her body. It maintains bone mass, helps with cognition and memory, and affects our mood. Low levels of estrogen can result in lighter periods, vaginal dryness and soreness, increased urinary symptoms, low libido, hot flashes and/or night sweats, poor memory, mood changes, mood swings, decreased bone mass, fatigue, broken sleep, joint pain to name some of the symptoms...this hormone is a big one for women and without it being in balance you can see the spectrum it affects is huge!

High levels of estrogen (estrogen dominance) can result in mood changes, including depression and irritability, acne, infertility, increased risk of breast disease including fibrocystic breasts, painful breasts, and cancer, increased endometrial cancer risk, decreased sex drive, and weight gain. Elevated estrogen levels also interfere with thyroid function. In some cases, estrogen dominance is not the result of elevated estrogen but rather due to decreased progesterone – progesterone and estrogen have an important relationship where progesterone can act to oppose estrogen and decrease its negative effects. In these cases, correcting progesterone levels can help keep estrogen in check, reducing the risk of developing symptoms of estrogen dominance – which can help reduce those symptoms stated above.

Progesterone (aka "zen" hormone). Progesterone calms us down and keeps us sane before our period – so we don't become an emotional mess that the rest of the house buckles down for! This hormone also helps us sleep and rest. Low progesterone can cause heavy periods, feeling nervous, anxious and losing control, spotting before periods, and that lower belly pooch that is heavily detested. Witnessing that "bat crazy" period during your partner's cycle is a signal that this hormone has a high likelihood that it's declining.

Testosterone. This hormone isn't just for men and for libido – women need testosterone too; just at lower levels. With low levels of testosterone, your partner may experience a low desire for sex, lower overall motivation as well as low muscle tone and bone density. You may also notice that she gets tired super easily when she works out, and may have a hard time experiencing orgasms. Low testosterone has also been found to cause more wrinkles and "aging" in the face. Too much testosterone can cause irritability, masculine characteristics, painful sex, oily skin and/or acne and fertility issues. PCOS is a common condition that results in elevated testosterone and can affect fertility and overall hormonal health.

DHEA (Youth Hormone) is a very important hormone that is often overlooked. DHEA is important as it is converted to testosterone. So if your partner's DHEA is low, the chances of her testosterone levels being low are also very high. Also, testosterone levels then get converted to estrogen, so DHEA levels can have an effect on many of other hormones. DHEA helps your muscles and tissues aid in detoxifying toxins, plays a role in memory and learning, affects sleep, impacts immune regulation,aids in thyroid, pancreas and ovarian function, and influences body composition/ weight-fat distribution. Low DHEA can lead to dry hair, noise intolerance, handling stress poorly, weak muscles, and absent hair under both your arms and pubic areas.

But now that you have some more information on why she is acting the way she is, it's time to create a tool kit as to how you can help her through this time.

Remember your partner is a unique INDIVIDUAL. Everyone that goes through perimenopause, menopause, and post-menopause will have their own unique experience. Just as we all have our own unique DNA, her journey cannot and should not be compared to others. You may have other female friends who will have little to no symptoms yet your partner seems to have all. Be gentle and show grace and do not compare her with someone else.

Ask her what she needs – then listen. Things are changing and it can be scary and unknown. The woman she identified with for all these decades is changing to her too. Somedays she feels invisible like no one understands. This is an opportunity for you to hear what she is thinking and feeling. This is not the time for you to whip out all the solutions you "think" can help instead repeat the mantra...Just Listen.

Her body is changing. This is a big one! There is a period where nothing fits and the daily reminder when she goes to the closest that nothing is fitting can be soul-destroying. Her body is changing because her hormones are changing, not necessarily because she is eating differently or being lazy and not working out, please be gentle with her. This point goes beyond a woman's want to have a wide selection of clothing to wear – this is deeply personal. It is also complex and expensive. For her, being reminded daily that she is changing is hard and this can and will affect her mood.

Spicy – and we don't mean the cooking. There are times that she is going to snap at you. Best advice... breath and walk away or count quietly from 7 backwards. The neuro receptors in her brain that are fluctuating with estrogen can have the effect of a sharp tongue. It's hard some days but pick your battles. She will come down and it will sting at the moment. You can bring up your hurt feelings in the right time. You don't have to push them down either but a farmer knows when to plant his seeds. If you need to step away , step away and then come back to her when she has settled down.

Educate yourself. This is no joke and probably one of the most powerful things you can do to help you and her over the next few years. Education is power and having an understanding will help support her with compassion at a time she will need your love and support. Women were so wrongly affected by an inaccurate study that was done in 2002 which scared many women off one of the most effective treatment options – hormone replacement therapy (HRT). Outside of HRT there are supplements, lifestyle changes, and lifestyle management that can also help. Meet her where she is on his journey with what she wants to try but at no point make her feel less than a woman for having to now need things she didn't in her younger years. When it comes to balancing hormones it isn't always a microwave fast effect, it can be more like a slow cooker and takes time to get it right.

Encourage healthy habits. From eating, to exercise, stress-reducing activities like prayer or meditation and finally, LAUGH. Create opportunities for fun. You can start following the menopause funnies online. You can make little moments for just the two of you. With kids getting older, there may be more opportunities for just one on one time. As the saying goes, "and this too will pass." This stage of a woman's life isn't all doom and gloom. On the other side of this can be your best days. As someone once said it's not just the good times that make you stronger but the struggles too. Aging brings with it change, for both men and women, stay close, grow, change, and support one another! Menopause can be a challenging time for any couple. The key is to be prepared so that you can approach this time in your lives with the knowledge to help you support each other through it and on towards a new chapter in your life. Menopause is not just a women's issue, if you know a woman or love a woman you need to know about menopause.

Sex – yup – you know what we are talking about here and we are going to spend sometime on this topic. When it works it is great, but what's the saying – when it works it's 20% of a relationship, when it doesn't work – it is 80% of a relationship! When your partner's estrogen fluctuates so does she! One of the noticeable changes that occurs when estrogen drops can be a woman's desire for sex. And for 50% of women, sex during this stage can become incredibly painful. Sex can really hurt! Many women will press through intimacy at the start but as our hormones start to fluctuate and the lining of the vaginal wall becomes paper-thin (called vaginal atrophy) the pain can be unbearable and sex is a no-go! Add to the pain, her sleep may be off, and she is barely getting enough hours to function. Now take these two and throw in a third thing that when she does have sex, there is leakage, and now the after-party smells of urine...not fun! So what happens now...your lady shies away. One thing to note here too is that she is not always oblivious to these changes. She KNOWS something is changing both physically and emotionally. She can see it and feel it but expressing does not always come easily. The shame of this can be really devastating. Again with a drop in estrogen which is the hormone that helps to keep our vagina lubricated, the lining of the vaginal walls becomes thin and dry and this can put a hard stop to bedroom fun. To help, get lube – it really does help but be gentle. She knows this is a struggle and a bit of grace can go a long way. There are other options like the Mona Lisa Touch Laser that can transform this area. You can talk about these solutions together and support her in her choices. You can support your female partner by listening to their concerns and being patient as they navigate these changes.

She will sometimes need alone time, she will sometimes need girl time, she will sometimes just need you and her time. You may be asking, "Where then do I place myself?!" Truth is, you need to keep in communication. Communicate, communicate, communicate. There are days she will seem like an alien but hold her hand. Assure her that you see her, you love her, and you are here to support her.

Encourage her to seek help. Tattoo this somewhere! Getting help really can make all the difference between suffering and thriving! Find a specialist in Menopause who can take a holistic view of what is happening with your partner. Why do we say a specialist? It's because most physicians are not adequately taught about Menopause in their medical training. Go to someone who lives and breathes menopause and can give you the most up-to-date and accurate advice. Go with her to the doctor's visit if you can and if she will allow it and talk together about the options. For many women, hormone replacement therapy is a lifeline. For others, it is lifestyle changes and supplements that will help. But please do find a doctor and a clinic that can support you through these years. This season is not one you will capture on your annual calendar, instead, you need to be prepared. Getting her the support she needs is simply an act of love!

Tell her she is beautiful. You may be shaking your head at this moment but even if she brushes you off 1000 times, keep telling her. As we said above, it is a proven scientific fact that her brain is changing in this period (it is actually shrinking in some cases) and she needs the reassurance that in your eyes you still think she is the only one for you.

As the saying goes, "and this too will pass."

This stage of a woman's life isn't all doom and gloom. On the other side of this can be your best days. As someone once said it's not just the good times that make you stronger but the struggles too. Aging brings with it change, for both men and women, stay close, grow, change, and support one another! Menopause can be a challenging time for any couple. The key is to be prepared so that you can approach this time in your lives with the knowledge to help you support each other through it and on towards a new chapter in your life. Menopause is not just a women's issue, if you know a woman or love a woman you need to know about menopause.

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Here is your toolbox in summary:

EDUCATE
LISTEN
SUPPORT
ENCOURAGE
BE KIND
SEEK HELP
LAUGH – DON'T FORGET THE FUN

Here are some websites that can also help with more education in this area. Happy reading.

The North American Menopause Society

The American College of Obstetricians and Gynecologist

National Menopause Foundation

The Society for Women's Health Research (SWHR) tool kit

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