

ENDOCRINOLOGY**MENOPAUSE IS ALSO A SOCIAL ISSUE**

WITH the passing of years and as a woman gets older, she undergoes different phases in life, from childhood to adulthood. Her body keeps changing on all levels; be it anatomical, physiological, or hormonal. As in puberty, menopause is just another phase of life. It is at this stage that ova are no longer produced by the ovaries.

It is neither a disease, an illness or a pathology, it is just a normal physiological phenomenon of the female ageing process. It is a transition from a reproductive stage to a stage of life when the woman is no longer able to reproduce. It has no impact on the female's sexuality. This transition occurs due to hormonal changes in the female endocrine system, predominantly estrogen which will lead to menopause.



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In women, the menopausal period is considered the climacterium, the middle stage of adulthood; a period in life characterised by a decrease in biological and physiological functions which may lead to psychosocial disturbances in interpersonal relationships.

Menopause may begin anytime from age 40 to early 50s but generally occurs between the age of 47 and 53 years.

All women will not experience menopause in the same way in terms of its onset and symptoms.

Some women will have a normal response of relief. No more pain and no more having to deal with a monthly menstruation period. Many premenopausal women have concerns that they will experience mental instability, sudden ageing and decreased sexuality.

Culture, health, previous experience of mood-related problems, lifestyle, and whether the onset of menopause was a natural process, surgical or chemotherapy induced, will have an impact on menopausal symptoms. Women who experience early menopause or surgical

menopause are at a higher risk of experiencing psychiatric problems.

According to a study of Bernice Neugarten, the famous American psychologist who specialised in adult development and the psychology of ageing, more than 50% of females described menopause as an unpleasant experience. Some believed that their lives had not changed in any significant way, and many women experienced no adverse effects while some reported feeling sexually free due to not having to worry about becoming pregnant.

Education and socioeconomic status are also important factors found to influence the intensity and symptoms of menopause. The influence of psychological factors such as lifestyle, physical body image, interpersonal relationships, role and socio-cultural factors, affecting levels of depression and anxiety, cannot be ignored.

Some studies have shown that the rate of depressive symptoms and hot flashes or sweats were significantly lower among Japanese women when compared to Americans and Canadians.

Such variations across cultures may reflect differences in:

- Beliefs and expectations regarding menopause and ageing
- Status and roles of women in a particular society
- Sensitivity to specific symptoms
- Biology, diet and health behaviours

Social interactions with family and community, a caring relationship and healthy emotional support from friends are very effective means in reducing adverse symptoms. Misconception described by some individuals as potentially difficult, embarrassing and stigmatised lead to fear and must be addressed and avoided.

Professional help from a counsellor and mental health professional is quite effective and must be available.