

Menopause

Understanding the Transition

by Noelle Robbins

Gaby Sankovich knows it is never too early to prepare for the mid-life transition, menopause. “I wish I had started managing menopause in my 30s,” says the Richmond resident, now 46. And so, apparently, does her husband. “He kept asking, ‘Is this the woman I married 20 years ago?’ ”

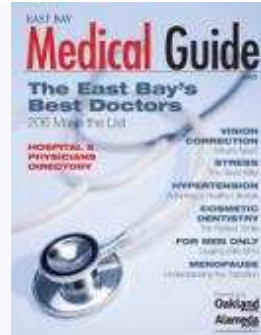


After enduring troublesome mood swings, stress and anxiety—not to mention leg cramps and tender breasts—she says, “I wish I had had more knowledge about what my body was going through.”

Turns out Sankovich was going through perimenopause, the time leading up to a woman’s final period, which can last 10 to 15 years. A woman is considered menopausal one year after the cessation of her period. The average age of menopause is 52. Nationwide almost 5,000 women enter menopause daily; more than 20 million will be menopausal by 2010. Although the length of perimenopause varies, distressing physical and emotional changes that can accompany this phase of life are common.

“There is no need for women to suffer,” says Berkeley chiropractor Lani Simpson, who conducts The Heat Is On seminars, which demystify the menopause transition. Good nutrition and attitude are vital. Simpson advises eliminating trans fats, simple carbs, simple sugars and fructose corn syrup; adding omega-3 fatty acids and vitamin D. “There is no quick fix, but embracing aging is important, and even simple diet changes can add years to a woman’s life and ease symptoms,” she says.

According to Berkeley gynecologist Risa Kagen, “A woman may spend the last third to half of her life post-menopause; and



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it can be a life of quality including dating and new jobs." On using hormone therapy, she says, "The No. 1 reason women request and use HT is for hot flashes." Decreased libido and vaginal dryness may also prompt use of HT. To reduce risk, Kagen recommends the lowest dose of hormone therapy to ease discomfort, for the shortest time possible, and encourages slowly tapering off to minimize withdrawal symptoms.

Judy Lane, R.N., N.P., at the East Bay Menopause and PMS Center, notes, "Some perimenopausal changes may start in the late 30s, early 40s. Women need to be in tune with their bodies and become aware of changes. New onset of PMS symptoms may be a harbinger of perimenopause. Each woman will experience perimenopause differently, and treatment has to agree with personal philosophy." Stress reduction, exercise, good nutrition and a willingness to experiment are key. Some women use natural or bioidentical hormones. "During perimenopause a lot of tweaking goes on; managing the menopause transition is an art as much as science."

These practitioners agree: Menopause is a natural transition, not a disease. Women should listen to their bodies and find a health-care provider who listens to them. It's never too early, or too late, to make lifestyle changes that enhance menopause management, and set the stage for many happy, healthy years to come. Sankovich says following these recommendations definitely improved her mood and energy, adding, "My husband likes me a lot more now, too."

Closer to Home

Lani Simpson, D.C., www.lanisimpson.com, (510) 898-0933. The Heat Is On seminars for lay people and health professionals cover hormones, natural remedies, nutrition, emotional well-being, heart health, osteoporosis and breast cancer.

Judy Lane, R.N., N.P., M.S., East Bay Menopause and PMS Center, (510) 450-1144. This clinical practice offers consultations, testing, nutrition counseling and hormone options for premenstrual, perimenopause and menopause concerns.

Alta Bates Summit Medical Center, http://altabatessummit.org/health/audio_womenshealthtips.html; (510) 204-4444. Audio health tips on topics including menopause, midlife health and hormone therapy.

The Permanente Medical Group, Midlife and Older Women's Health, www.permanente.net/homepage/kaiser/pages/f46041.html. Links to educational Web sites and Menopause—A Kaiser

Permanente Guidebook for Women.

General Resources

Books

Menopause and Beyond: New Wisdom for Women by
Christiane Northrup, M.D.

Our Bodies, Ourselves: Menopause by Judy Norsigian,
Executive Editor

National Organizations and Web Sites

The North American Menopause Society, www.menopause.org,
(440) 442-7550. This nonprofit scientific organization promotes
women's quality of life and health through understanding the
menopause transition, and publishes a monthly e-newsletter,
Menopause Flashes.

Christiane Northrup, M.D., Women's Health Wisdom,
www.drnorthrup.com. This nationally known author and
menopause visionary stresses emotional, spiritual and physical
aspects of women's midlife experience on her Web site. She
also publishes a monthly e-newsletter, Women's Health
Wisdom.

Women in Balance, www.womeninbalance.org. This national,
nonprofit association of doctors, health-care professionals and
national organizations helps women achieve optimal health,
wellness and hormone balance.

Project AWARE, www.project-aware.org. This site disseminates
comprehensive health information on perimenopause,
menopause and post-menopause.