

MENOPAUSE – AN UNHEARD VOICE OF WOMEN

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Abstract

Since ages females are looked upon as daughters, wives, mother, and comrade. She plays all the vital roles with great efficiency. In our country, when a girl reaches puberty, talking to her about the changes that would take place in her body is still considered a taboo. When the girl matures and enters the role of a wife, she is then expected to take care of her family and husband and satisfy everyone's needs and demands. As age advances she again reaches an important stage that brings many changes in her physical and mental state, the MENOPAUSE stage. She is unaware of the happenings and is in a stage of dilemma. The word itself is a stigma and not a much openly discussed topic. Every woman in her journey of life, when reaches late 40s becomes a victim of menopause. At this stage the woman starts ageing, catches fatigue and complains of low energy. The menstrual cycle becomes irregular, hormonal variations occur, depression, mood swings become common and women are now exposed to a host of new diseases, of which diabetes, hypertension and cancer are very common. Many women neglect this phase and become victims. Support of every family member and society is needed. But it is very alarming and surprising that this much needed support is missing. The society does not want to hear this silent suffering voice of women. This paper is an attempt to create awareness about it and help women lead a happy, normal life after her menopause.

Key Words:puberty,hormonal variations, menstrual cycle, menopause, depression

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INTRODUCTION

Menopause is the time in a woman's life when the function of the ovaries ceases and she can no longer become pregnant. The ovary (female gonad), is one of a pair of reproductive glands in women. They are located in the pelvis, one on each side of the uterus. Each ovary is about the size and shape of an almond. The ovaries produce eggs (ova) and female hormones such as estrogen. During each monthly menstrual cycle, an egg is released from one ovary. The egg travels from the ovary through a Fallopian tube to the uterus. The ovaries are the main source of female hormones, which control the development of female body characteristics such as the breasts, body shape, and body hair. The hormones also regulate the menstrual cycle and pregnancy. Menopause is a point in time and not a process- it is the time point in at which a woman's last period ends. Of course, a woman will not know when that time point has occurred until she has been 12 consecutive months without a period. The symptoms of menopause, on the other hand, may begin years before the actual menopause occurs and may persist for some years afterward as well.

AIM OF THE STUDY

The main aim of this study is to find whether women are aware about the changes that take place during menopause and also to find the effect of exercise on women who regularly practice it over those who do not practice it and also to find whether the practitioners are healthier and their stress dispositions than other women.

OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

To determine the awareness among women on overall health, and problems they face during menopause.

To compare the effect of exercise on women who do regular exercise and those who do not.

HYPOTHESIS

Awareness regarding menopause would offer higher benefits in improving physical fitness and improve immunity and reduce stress levels in women. Women performing exercise will be mentally and socially fit.

SAMPLE

500 women in the age group of 40-50 were selected, 250 were exercise performers while 250 were non performers. The women were assessed before and after the exercise programme.

METHOD

Bisht Battery of Stress Scale (BBSS) was constructed and standardized by Dr. Abha Rani Bisht (Almora). The battery has been designed to find out the stress. The battery contained the different thirteen scales of the stress.

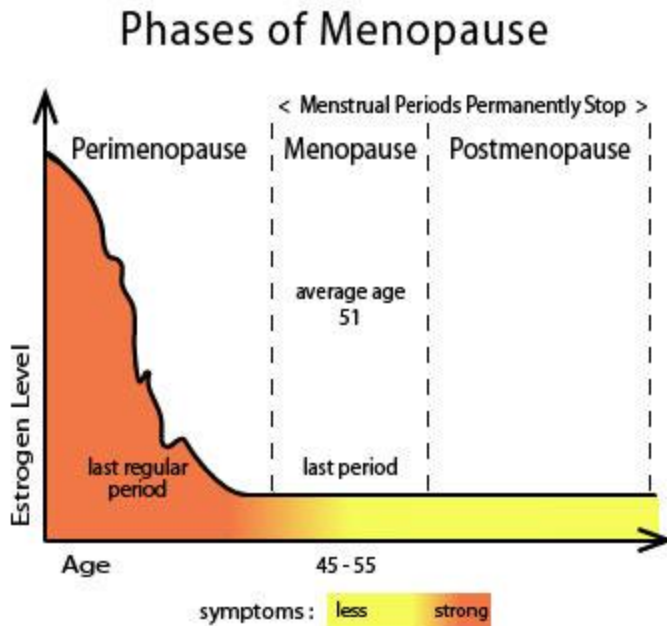
What Causes Menopause?

A woman is born with a finite number of eggs, which are stored in the ovaries. The ovaries also make the hormones estrogen and progesterone, which control menstruation and ovulation. Menopause happens when the ovaries no longer release an egg every month and menstruation stops. Menopause is considered a normal part of aging when it happens after the age of 40. But some women can go through menopause early, either as a result of surgery, such as hysterectomy, or damage to the ovaries, such as from chemotherapy. Menopause that happens before 40, regardless of the cause, is called premature menopause.

How Does Natural Menopause Happen?

Natural menopause is not brought on by any type of medical or surgical treatment. The process is gradual and has three stages:

- **Perimenopause** - This typically begins several years before menopause, when the ovaries gradually make less estrogen. Perimenopause lasts up until menopause, the point when the ovaries stop releasing eggs. In the last 1 to 2 years of perimenopause, the drop in estrogen quickens. At this stage, many women have menopause symptoms.
- **Menopause**- This is the point when it's been a year since a woman last had her last menstrual period. At this stage, the ovaries have stopped releasing eggs and making most of their estrogen.
- **Postmenopause**- These are the years after menopause. During this stage, menopausal symptoms such as hot flashes ease for most women. But health risks related to the loss of estrogen rise as the woman ages.



Signs and Symptoms of Menopause

It is important to remember that each woman's experience is different. Some women may experience few or no symptoms of menopause, while others experience multiple physical and psychological symptoms. The extent and severity of symptoms varies significantly among women. It is also important to remember that symptoms may come and go over an extended time period for some women. This, too, is highly individual. These symptoms of menopause are:

1. Irregular vaginal bleeding

Irregular vaginal bleeding may occur as a woman reaches menopause. Some women have minimal problems with abnormal bleeding during the prior time to menopause whereas others have unpredictable, excessive bleeding. Menstrual periods (menses) may occur more frequently (meaning the cycle shortens in duration), or they may get farther and farther apart (meaning the cycle lengthens in duration) before stopping. There is no "normal" pattern of bleeding during the perimenopause, and patterns vary from woman to woman. It is common for women in perimenopause to have a period after going for several months without one. There is also no set length of time it takes for a woman to complete the menopausal transition. A woman can have irregular periods for years prior to reaching menopause. It is important to remember that all

women who develop irregular menses should be evaluated by their doctor to confirm that the irregular menses are due to perimenopause and not as a sign of another medical condition.

2. Hot flashes and night sweats

Hot flashes are common among women undergoing menopause. A hot flash is a feeling of warmth that spreads over the body and is often most pronounced in the head and chest. A hot flash is sometimes associated with flushing and is sometimes followed by perspiration. Hot flashes usually last from 30 seconds to several minutes. Hot flashes are likely due to a combination of hormonal and biochemical fluctuations brought on by declining estrogen levels.

Other signs and symptoms of menopause

1. Vaginal symptoms

Vaginal symptoms occur as a result of the lining tissues of the vagina becoming thinner, drier, and less elastic as estrogen levels fall. Symptoms may include vaginal dryness, itching, or irritation and/or pain with sexual intercourse (dyspareunia). The vaginal changes also lead to an increased risk of vaginal infections.

2. Urinary symptoms

The lining of the urethra (the transport tube leading from the bladder to discharge urine outside the body) also undergoes changes similar to the tissues of the vagina, and becomes drier, thinner, and less elastic with declining estrogen levels. This can lead to an increased risk of urinary tract infection, feeling the need to urinate more frequently, or leakage of urine (urinary incontinence). The incontinence can result from a strong, sudden urge to urinate or may occur during straining when coughing, laughing, or lifting heavy objects.

3. Emotional and cognitive symptoms

Emotional and cognitive symptoms are so common that it is sometimes difficult in a given woman to know if they are due to menopause. The night sweats that may occur during perimenopause can also contribute to feelings of tiredness and fatigue, which can have an effect on mood and cognitive performance. Finally, many women may be experiencing other life changes during the time of perimenopause or after menopause, such as stressful life events, that may also cause emotional symptoms.

4. Other physical changes

Many women report some degree of weight gain along with menopause. The distribution of body fat may change, with body fat being deposited more in the waist and abdominal area than in the hips and thighs. Changes in skin texture, including wrinkles, may develop along with worsening of adult acne in those affected by this condition. Since the body continues to produce small levels of the male hormone testosterone, some women may experience some hair growth on the chin, upper lip, chest, or abdomen. Other common symptoms around the time of menopause include:

- Irregular or skipped periods
- Insomnia
- Mood swings
- Fatigue
- Depression
- Irritability
- Racing heart
- Headaches
- Joint and muscle aches and pains
- Changes in libido (sex drive)
- Vaginal dryness
- Bladder control problems

Not all women get all of these symptoms.

Exercises to stay in shape during menopause

After menopause, moderate exercise can help women manage hot flashes, become more fit and feel better, a new study suggests. It is found that a 20-week exercise program helped women boost their fitness levels, lose a little weight and give higher ratings to their physical and mental well-being. Women who are regularly active during menopause can significantly reduce their weight and BMI. Exercise is a great ally to help women through menopause and its various unpleasant effects (fatigue, weight gain, irritability, hot flashes), although it often falls by the wayside during this time of life. However, alternating strengthening exercises and regular cardiovascular exercise can help fight weight gain and reduce the frequency of hot flashes. Loss

of muscle mass is a common side-effect of menopause, and it can be difficult to build back up. Strength training exercises working core strength (the plank) and the thighs (wall sit) are the most effective exercises for strengthening and building muscle mass quickly.

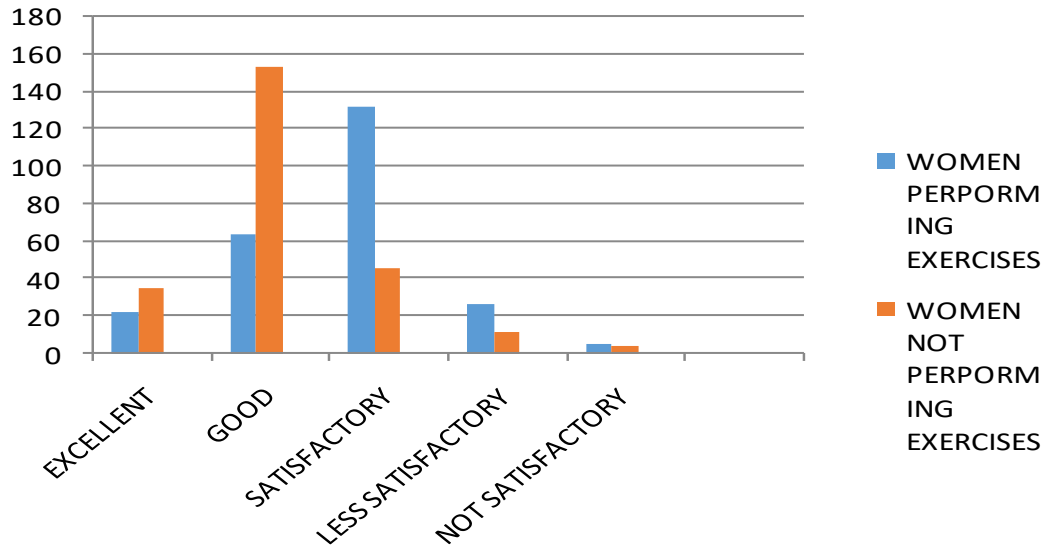
DATA ANALYSIS

TABLE SHOWING COMPARISON BETWEEN WOMEN PERFORMING EXERCISES& NON PERFORMERS

LEVEL OF SOCIAL ADJUSTMENT	WOMEN PERFORMING EXERCISES		WOMEN NOT PERFORMING EXERCISES		Z	P
	NO. OF WOMEN	%	NO. OF WOMEN	%		
EXCELLENT	22	8,8	35	14	-1.8293	NS
GOOD	64	25.6	153	61.2	-8.0307	< 0.05
SATISFACTORY	132	52.8	46	18.4	8.0324	< 0.05
LESS SATISFACTORY	27	10.8	12	4.8	2.5015	< 5.05
NOT SATISFACTORY	5	2	4	1.6	0.3364	NS
TOTAL	250	100	250	100		

From the above table it was observed that the social adjustment in women doing exercises (< 0.05) was better than those who did not perform exercise.

GRAPHICAL REPRESENTATION OF THE ABOVE TABLE



COMPARISON BETWEEN WOMEN PERFORMING EXERCISES & NON PERFORMERS

DISCUSSION

From the above findings it is observed that the level of social adjustment in women performing exercise is higher than women not performing exercises. It was also observed that the performing women were healthier, focused and had a positive attitude. They were cheerful and active throughout the day. It is clear that doing exercise helps participants to reach the state of a quiet mind and level of stress was very less. It was observed that their digestion, breathing and mental health had improved. Exercise, is thought to boost levels of certain brain chemicals, such as dopamine and serotonin -- which are important for mood, sleep and other functions. And those chemicals are sometimes lower during the hormonal fluctuations that come with menopause. It is found that women who exercised were better able to "regulate their body heat."

CONCLUSION & RECOMMENDATION

Women have diverse experiences of menopause based on various biological, psychological, social and cultural factors which shape their perception, values and attitudes to menopause. It is appropriate to ask about women's health seeking behaviour in relation to menopause and also to question the influence of culture, poor health including stress, and lower education literacy on their menopausal experience. This review has highlighted the lack of information on women's

menopausal experience and explored why there is value in understanding their menopausal transition as part of providing better culturally directed health care for women. The present study shows that exercise has positive physiological benefits. Women practicing this were found to be more sound and stable. It is recommended that exercise should be done to improve their physical fitness. More awareness should be spread among women. There should be awareness drives and campaigns in various parts of the cities and villages so that more women would be benefitted.

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