

So Your Wife/Partner is Menopausal?!

So you think shaving daily is a problem? Your car is playing up and that idiot at work is driving you around the bend and so is the boss. And the wife? Well what is that all about? You are feeling worried, frightened, bewildered? You think your wife doesn't fancy you anymore, or it has vaguely occurred to you that she may even have someone else, after all she is behaving oddly, she seems cold, distant and can fly off of the handle in a split second and it is scaring you. You are not used to this, deep down you know this is not her and you know that something is wrong, but you just do not know what to say, how to ask, or even how to talk to her anymore. Familiar? Read on....

MENOPAUSE....Defined. Menopause means the last menstrual period. Periods stop because the low levels of oestrogen and progesterone do not stimulate the lining of the womb (called the endometrium) in the normal cycle. Hormone levels can fluctuate for several years before eventually becoming so low that the endometrium stays thin and does not bleed.

Perimenopause is the stage from the beginning of menopausal symptoms to the postmenopause.

Some women get really scared when their periods start to become erratic, irregular, light, heavy. Some women get scared and confused because they have been told they are menopausal and they certainly feel menopausal yet their periods have *not* changed and they are still regular, they become agitated or scared witless because they feel so wretched and ill, that they managed to convince themselves they are dying from an undiagnosed incurable disease. Remember here 'Climacteric' The term climacteric refers to the time in which the hormone levels are changing, up to the periods stopping; reducing and fluctuating hormone levels can cause early menopausal symptoms while still stimulating the endometrium (lining of the womb) to produce cyclical bleeding (menstruation).

Postmenopause is the time following the last period, and is usually defined as more than 12 months with no periods in someone with intact ovaries, or immediately following surgery if the ovaries have been removed.

You may see or hear the term 'Surgical Menopause' or 'Chemical Menopause' used. This simply means that menopause is occurring because of a specific intervention like the ovaries are failing due to specific treatment such as chemotherapy or radiotherapy, or when the ovaries are removed, often at the time of a hysterectomy. Sometimes the removal of just the uterus (womb) can spark off peri or pre menopausal symptoms, although this is not the case in every instance, but be aware that it can happen. (Knowledge is power and this has never been so true as when this age old saying is applied to the menopause)

I am going to start by explaining a little about Perimenopause as although it is not a term doctors use that often, it is a term that you will find used by a lot of women.

Perimenopause. The term peri is simply a prefix and simply means around, so perimenopause means 'Around the Time of Menopause'.

Perimenopause is the phase before menopause actually takes place, when ovarian hormone production is declining and fluctuating and this can cause many different symptoms. If you can keep in mind that hormones affect nearly every single cell in a woman's body, then this will go some distance in explaining why some women find this time in their lives confusing, distressing, scary and isolating.

Your wife partner has reached that certain time in her life, actually let's say *both* of your lives, since we females despite what it looks or feels like *do not* want to shut you out, or hurt or upset you in any way, in fact usually this is the very last thing we want to do.

Remember that Perimenopause or PREmenopause, is not an exact science, there are many variations.

Some doctors maintain that perimenopause can last for as long as 5 to 15 years, while others think that perimenopause is that period which is a 3 to 4 year time span just before menopause occurs. Either way, many women experience more symptoms during perimenopause than after menopause. Because this often happens at an age between 35 and 45, many women's symptoms are overlooked or ignored by their doctors and may incorrectly be put down to pre menstrual tension (PMT).

Oh yeah, we know all your male jokes about PMT and Menopause, so have a good laugh, but remember we invented them! Please do not feel that we have had a sense of humour by-pass, because we haven't, in fact us ladies spend a great deal of our time laughing at ourselves during this stage. If you could remember to laugh with us and not at us, chances are you will both end up laughing at something, instead of witnessing the parring knife come whistling past your left ear and impaling in the door frame!

Hormone Fluctuation: Remember you can have the hottest cam, perfect ignition timing, clean carburetor, and fresh fuel, but without good compression... that engine is not going to run and the mixture of fuel is either too much or too little and immediately this happens the engine misfires and cannot run correctly. This is more or less how a woman's body runs, only her fuel is hormones. Too many, will produce symptoms, too little will produce symptoms. These symptoms can range from being vague little niggles, to quite severe symptoms which can affect your partners quality of life dramatically. (And yours)

Now reverse up a little here.....This **does not** mean that the pair of you cannot get through this stage, it **does not** mean that life as you both knew it is over for good either.

What it does mean, is that you will just have to try and understand what is happening and learn to go with it, this is why it is a great idea to try and understand a little about what is actually happening inside her body and why it makes her behave the way she does.

One tip here and this is a HUGE **NEVER**. Please **NEVER** tell your wife/partner to pull herself together. Look at it like this, your best mate has had one too many and fallen over and broken his leg in three places, would you expect him to get up and walk? Don't think so. Then please do not think that a woman affected by all these symptoms can just pull herself together and carry on with life, because she cannot. Why? I hear you asking. Here I am going to drop in some symptoms of menopause, there is said to be around 35 of them, but talk to any woman and she may tell you it can often feel more like 535!

If I had a penny for every woman that has thought she was dying from an incurable disease at the start of perimenopause, I would be rich. Remember these feelings are very real, they are physical, they are **not** imagined.

- (1) Anxiety, feeling ill at ease
- (2) Hot flashes/flushes, night sweats and/or cold flashes, clammy feeling
- (3) Irregular heart beat
- (4) Irritability
- (5) Mood swings, sudden tears
- (6) Trouble sleeping through the night (with or without night sweats)
- (7) Irregular periods; shorter, lighter periods; heavier periods, flooding; phantom periods, shorter cycles, longer cycles
- (8) Loss of libido
- (9) Dry vagina
- (10) Crashing fatigue
- (11) Feelings of dread, apprehension, doom
- (12) Difficulty concentrating, disorientation, mental confusion
- (13) Disturbing memory lapses
- (14) Incontinence, especially upon sneezing, laughing; urge incontinence
- (15) Itchy, crawly skin
- (16) Aching, sore joints, muscles and tendons
- (17) Increased tension in muscles
- (18) Breast tenderness
- (19) Headache change: increase or decrease
- (20) Gastrointestinal distress, indigestion, flatulence, gas pain, nausea
- (21) Sudden bouts of bloat
- (22) Depression
- (23) Exacerbation of existing conditions
- (24) Increase in allergies
- (25) Weight gain
- (26) Hair loss or thinning, head, pubic, or whole body; increase in facial hair
- (27) Dizziness, light-headedness, episodes of loss of balance
- (28) Changes in body odour
- (29) Electric shock sensation under the skin and in the head
- (30) Tingling in the extremities
- (31) Gum problems, increased bleeding
- (32) Burning tongue, burning roof of mouth, bad taste in mouth, change in breath odor
- (33) Osteoporosis (after several years)
- (34) Changes in fingernails: softer, crack or break easier
- (35) Tinnitus: ringing in ears, bells, 'whooshing,' buzzing etc

Right let me point out that not all women will be experiencing all of these symptoms. Some women will experience some of them and some will experience some intermittently, while some may not experience any at all. But some unfortunate women may experience all of them and many of them at the same time. If this is happening to your wife/partner, try and think how experiencing some of these symptoms **yourself** would make you feel. How frightened **you** would be, and how wretched it would make **you** feel. Now, is it any wonder why that knife came whizzing past your left ear when you told her to pull herself together? When she was in the kitchen struggling to carry

out what was once a simple procedure, like peeling a flaming potato, she dropped the knife and burst into floods of tears and your input was, "don't be a drama queen, pull yourself together" (or words to that effect) Instead of you, going to her and giving her a cuddle and saying, look don't worry, it is this bloody menopause, we will get through this together. I love you and I will always love you no matter what. Now do you fancy a sit down and I'll bring you a drink and I will finish the potatoes. Or something along those lines depending what she was doing at the time. Or maybe you could just prepare the meal together, or do something that shows you have taken her feelings on board and you are trying to understand and that you love her and want to help her through, that you want to help *both* of you through. Just use your initiative.

Sex can become a major issue at this time, but it really need not be. It will take time and patience and understanding from both of you, but there is no reason why you should both not have a fulfilling relationship, long into much later life. Women can go off sex, remember they have gone off the act, *NOT YOU*. This is a real physical response to fluctuation of hormones, there are many ways and remedies available that can help ease this situation, it is a matter of looking up what is available and what may be suitable. Remember this is her body winding down from her productive years, it is *not* because she suddenly doesn't fancy you anymore. It is *not* because she has someone else either. There are many pills, potions, creams etc that can help with dryness etc. I will not go into them, but a chat with the doctor and looking up what is available is easy and can really help both of you. *Understanding* each other here is *key*. Do not reproach each other, neither of you is at fault here and it is something with patience and understanding that can be worked out.

You will note that I have placed Anxiety, feeling ill at ease right at the top of this list! This is because I as a menopausal woman, think that this one symptom alone, is the root cause of many of the myth and frightening times, that can cause so many misunderstandings in relationships and to the woman herself, who may even think she is dying.

This is *NO* joke, it is a terrifying and extremely real and distressing situation to be in. Understand this and you are way down the line to understanding how your wife/partner is thinking and feeling. Understand this and you will be able to ask her what is wrong, ask her outright what it is she is so scared of and then when she tells you, *both* act on it. Either read up on what is bothering her or you *both* go to the doctor, either way, getting reassurance for you *both* is crucial to your wife/partner's mental and physical well being and to *yours too!* Don't fob her off and *don't* tell her to pull herself together. This is *not* an imagined condition, it is a very real and very frightening condition and it is brought about by real physical changes in the body, caused by fluctuating hormones.

Feelings of anxiety and feelings ill at ease within her own body, coupled with feelings of impending doom, can bring about a general feeling of anxiety and this could if ignored develop into depression and or panic attacks. This can be avoided, with understanding from you. Try to get her to talk about this, try to get as much information as you can about what is bothering her, knowledge that she is not the only woman to suffer like this during menopause can go a long way to reassuring her and to allaying her fears. If she does suddenly think she is dying and starts to complain of dizziness, pins and needles, tingling, cold clammy etc, this is very, very scary. You must *never* assume this is just menopause, you must always err on the side of caution and seek urgent medical advice and treatment. Having said this, these symptoms are symptoms of a general anxiety disorder (GAD), once you *know* what it is you are both dealing with you can take steps to control these situations. Breathing is free and it is and remains the best way to control and restore the body to normal. Get your wife/partner to sit down and take slow deep breaths, inhale for 3 seconds, hold for 3 seconds and exhale for 4 secs. This quickly restores the body's blood gases to normal, where they had suddenly become out of sync giving rise to this panic attack. Remember this is *real* it is not imagined and you can help her through this if she is affected by them. In fact remember that these breathing exercises can help her through other symptoms like flushes and night sweats, especially where she experiences a sudden change in her heartbeat, which is a physiological response to a sudden fluctuation of hormones. Do something practical for her like rigging up a fan near her side of the bed, or go into Marks and buy her a few hand held portable battery operated fans (these are particularly good). One for the kitchen, one for the bed, one for the lounge and a couple for her handbags. If she is troubled by flushes/flushes and sweats, this is a brilliant way to cool down quickly and to regain control quickly.

Sudden changes in body temperature, coupled with an increased or irregular heartbeat, or palpitations etc are collectively called *vasomotor* symptoms. These flushes/flushes/sweats are *NOT* simply your wife/partner becoming hot, it is as though the body thermostat has been blasted up to full pelt and the heart beat has increased and the heat is coming from inside to out, yet there may be hardly any change to your wife/partners appearance to indicate such a sudden change in her equilibrium. Don't be fooled by this, understand what she says she is going through, it is really very unpleasant and she may suddenly become very agitated and want to flee from where she is, she just wants to get out, get away. The supermarket may suddenly seem menacing and the people around, will suddenly take on this booming, buzzing confusion and a small request like someone saying excuse me, or worse still someone just treating her as if she has suddenly become invisible and rudely standing in front of her, or pushing past her, is likely to bring on floods of tears and panic, right there in the middle of where ever you may be. Try and get her to a calm, cool place and get her to *deep breathe* her way through this, a small sip of water from her bottle carried in her bag will help, and so will the fan you bought her. Do this, stay with her and reassure her and this will pass in minutes and while you may feel like having a go at the person that was rude to her, please *don't* it will only make

things worse. By the way this situation is vasomotor yes, but it can also be termed as "Fight or Flight" and it is our body's mechanism and way of coping with a sudden change in situation, this again can occur suddenly and again is a direct response to a sudden change in her hormone production, taking place right there and then and totally *unseen* inside her body, in the middle of supermarket, or where ever she may be at the time it occurs. It has happened to me when we have been making love and it is horrible and I hate it, yet I can't stop it, but i *can* control it and by doing the things described above I can quickly bring it under control and my partner is very understanding and then normal operations can quickly be resumed.

Remember if your wife/partner hasn't yet been to see her doctor, try and encourage her to do so, offer to go with her, but if she really doesn't want you to go, then do not push her, let her go alone, or offer to go to the surgery with her, but remain in the waiting room. Your wife partner may be beginning the menopause transition, but she is not silly, she will appreciate your love and support, she will also appreciate you knowing when to back off. I know this is a hard ask, but with practice, you will learn to read the signs.

Because our brains can sometimes become *fogged* during the start of menopause, we are apt to forget things, or become weepy, so it is a very good idea that when making that appointment at the doctors to (1) request a longer appointment so she doesn't feel rushed and intimidated (2) *BEFORE* going to the doctor, write down all her worries, symptoms and concerns. then she can either read from this or if she becomes weepy just hand it to the doctor and let him/her read it while she gets on with having a cry. Her doctor will be well used to this and just hand her a box of tissues. Doing this will let her doctor know just what is going on, will reassure your wife that everything that is worrying her is now out and is now being dealt with. She will be able to talk about HRT with her doctor at some point. It will also be a good idea if you and your wife/partner can talk about what her options are. If HRT is for her or not, discuss both of your fears about HRT. (Unless you have been on another planet you will have heard bits and pieces about it) There are pros and cons with HRT, but remember there are pros and cons with natural remedies too. Both with HRT and natural remedies you may hit on one immediately that does the trick, but usually it is a matter of trial and error, with type and dosage. It may need changing or the dosage may need adjusting, it is really important to remember all of this as it knowledge is power and remembering this can stop a lot of unnecessary worrying if something does not work, or only works for a short while, or works but only a little bit. If this does happen, *don't worry* it can be sorted out.

Hope this helps you to understand this time and remember *understanding is key*.

Your lives may change here, but it does not mean that you will enjoy them any the less. You *will* get through this and with a little understanding you will both probably be all the stronger for it. All women go through this at some time in their lives, you can't ignore it, so better just trying to understand it.