MANAGING PMS AND MENOPAUSE WITH EXERCISE AND LIFESTYLE CHANGES

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What are PMS and Menopause?

PMS, or Premenstrual Syndrome, is pain that occurs in women a few days before the onset of their menstrual cycle due to hormonal changes. Menopause usually begins for women in their 40s or 50s, and marks the end of a women's natural fertility and menstrual cycles.

Frequently Asked Questions:

Q: What type of pain/symptoms are tied to PMS and menopause?
A: PMS symptoms can include breast tenderness, bloating, cramps, headaches, and/or muscle tenderness. Women can experience some or all of these, at different severity levels. Onset of menopause can be marked by irregular periods; vaginal dryness; hot flashes; night sweats; sleep problems; mood changes; weight gain; slowed metabolism; thinning hair; dry skin; and loss of breast fullness.

Q: Why are my PMS symptoms worse than other women?
A: Not all women experience PMS symptoms, roughly 3 out of 4 women have had symptoms at least once in their life. Physicians do not know why some women suffer from PMS and others do not. It has been documented that those with family members who experience PMS symptoms are more likely to experience symptoms also.
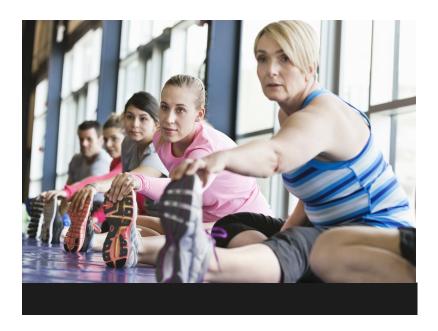
Q: What causes the onset of menopause?
A: The onset of menopause can be triggered by multiple things such as the natural decline in reproductive hormones, a hysterectomy, chemotherapy and radiation. Early onset of menopause, or before the age of 40, can be caused by primary ovarian insufficiency, or the inability to produce reproductive hormones due to genetic factors or autoimmune diseases.

Q: If I have PMS symptoms, will menopause begin earlier?
A: There has been no studies showing a correlation between severity of PMS symptoms and the onset of Menopause. Studies have shown those that experience more severe PMS symptoms tend to experience more menopause symptoms, including but not limited to worse moods swings and hot flashes. This is suspected to be the case because women who have PMS symptoms tend to be more sensitive to fluctuating hormone levels which cause menopausal symptoms.

Complications of PMS & Menopause

PMS

Increased tension or anxiety, depression, insomnia, appetite changes, social withdrawal, and/or poor concentration.

Menopause

Weight gain, decreased sexual function, and increased risk of developing the following: cardiovascular disease, osteoporosis, and urinary incontinence.

What Can Exercise Do For PMS and Menopause?

The American College of Obstetricians and Gynecologists states that regular aerobic exercise can lessen PMS symptoms, as well as help regulate fatigue and depression associated with PMS. They suggest increasing your heart rate by brisk walking, running, cycling, and/or swimming. Since one common side-effect of menopause is weight gain, regular exercise is recommended for weight maintenance. Strive for 150 minutes/week of moderate aerobic exercise. Regular exercise also increases muscle mass; boosts the metabolism; and helps combat the onset of osteoporosis and cardiovascular disease. Regular exercise can be used to help in managing stress, which is known to greatly exacerbate both PMS and Menopause symptoms.

What Can Lifestyle Changes do to Manage Symptoms?

There are many recommended lifestyle changes and remedies to manage PMS and menopause symptoms. For PMS, to help relieve or prevent bloating, it is suggested to avoid high-sodium diets and to eat smaller more frequent meals. Try avoiding caffeine a few days before your cycle, for it is known to cause increased anxiety and irritability. Ensure your diet is adequate in calcium, magnesium, and Vitamin B6 for these help maintain hormone levels that are known to fluctuate and cause increased PMS symptoms. For menopause, adequate levels of B vitamins are key in combating the fatigue and stress effects. Warm drinks can exacerbate hot flashes, so avoiding these can lessen hot flash symptoms. Experts also suggest practices such as yoga, meditation, and massage to help relieve stress.