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Women of South Africa are some of the most powerful people on Earth.
Change what you believe is possible for yourself.

– Oprah

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Note from the **doctor**

Menopause is the end of the fertile cycle of a woman. This has an effect physically and emotionally on a woman. This newsletter will discuss these factors in more detail-what I'd like to add is how important support for the woman is. It requires patience and sensitivity. It is a good idea for both husband and wife to have counselling together so both can understand what is happening and how best to manage the change of life.

Cervical cancer is 100% preventable. No woman should die from it. By having a pap smear every year early changes can be detected and treated before cancer develops.

Please take this seriously-have a regular pap smear and prevent cervical cancer!

South Africa commemorates Women's Month in August as a tribute to the thousands of women who marched to the Union Buildings on 9 August 1956 in protest against the extension of Pass Laws to women.

This historic march was a turning point in the role of women in the struggle for freedom and society at large. Since that eventful day, women from all walks of life became equal partners in the struggle for a non-racial and non-sexist South Africa.

In light of National Women's month, we pay particular attention to Menopause and cervical cancer.

CERVICAL CANCER

What is the cervix?

The cervix, also called the neck of the womb, is the lower, narrow part of the uterus (womb). The uterus, a hollow, pear-shaped organ, is located in the pelvis between the bladder and the rectum. The cervix has a canal which is part of the passage connecting the vagina to the uterine cavity and the fallopian tubes.

What causes cancer of the cervix?

The development of cervical cancer precursors and later cancer is linked to infection of the cervix with high-risk types of the human papillomavirus (HPV) which is a sexually transmitted disease.

The most common means of acquiring HPV Infection is through sexual intercourse. Human papillomavirus is also transmitted vertically that is, from mother to child as the child passes through the birth canal and becomes infected from cells in the vagina and cervix that harbour HPV.

Smoking increases the risk to develop cancer cells in the cervix. Conditions that lower immunity like Aids or certain medicines for transplant patients also increase the risk for cervical cancer.

Can cancer of the cervix be prevented?

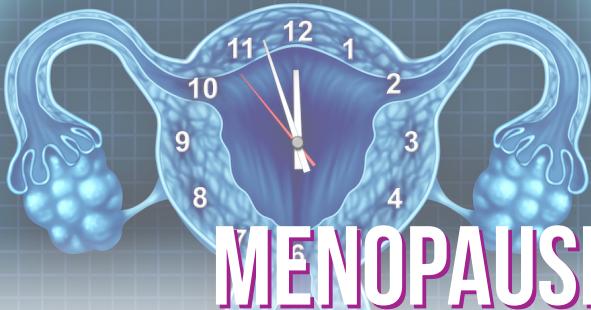
Yes, cancer of the cervix can be prevented with regular gynecological check-ups including a pap smear especially if they are or have been sexually active or if they are 18 years or older.

Those who are at increased risk of developing cancer of the cervix should be especially careful to follow their doctor's advice about check-ups. Women who have had a hysterectomy (surgical removal of the uterus, including the cervix) should ask their doctor's advice about having gynecological examinations and pap smears of the vaginal vault.

The HPV vaccine

A vaccine against HPV has been developed to prevent the spread of HPV, especially among women. The HPV vaccine, known as Gargasil is recommended for girls and boys ages 11 or 12, although it can be given as early as age 9. It's ideal for girls and boys to receive the vaccine before they have sexual contact and are exposed to HPV. Research has shown that receiving the vaccine at a young age isn't linked to an earlier start of sexual activity.

Speak to your doctor for more information about this vaccine.



MENOPAUSE

Menopause occurs when your ovaries stop producing estrogen, the hormone that controls the reproductive cycle. Anything that damages your ovaries or stops estrogen can cause premature menopause. This includes chemotherapy treatment for cancer or surgery to remove the ovaries.

During menopause menstruation ceases permanently and you're no longer able to conceive. It can be a time of great physical and emotional change that can overwhelm you if you don't know what to expect.

When does menopause begin?

There is no predicting when menopause will occur. Generally speaking, menopause can occur when a woman is between the ages of 45 and 55, but for a few women it can start as early as 35- or as late as 60.

Usually, there'll be a sign that the menopause is approaching. Periods can gradually become further apart, they may be scantier and not last as long. Alternatively, some women experience heavier bleeding with shorter gaps between. Occasionally, menstruation just stops altogether with no warning.

Symptoms of menopause:

The decline in the release of estrogen and progesterone can begin a few years before menstruation stops, leading to the below symptoms:

1. Hot flushes - most women experience these in varying degrees of severity. On average, hot flushes occur four or five times a day and usually last from a few seconds to a few minutes.

2. Night sweats

3. Irregular, scant or heavy periods - this is a common sign of the approaching menopause, but it's worth remembering that irregular or heavy bleeding can be caused by conditions other than menopause, so it's a good idea to get it checked out.

4. Dry or itchy skin - as we age, our skin becomes thinner and without estrogen our skin finds it difficult to retain moisture.

5. Aches and pains - These can range from joint and muscular pains to backaches or headaches.

6. Insomnia - this is caused by low levels of estrogen, but can be exacerbated by night sweats as these disturb your sleep pattern.

7. Bladder problems - these include an increased susceptibility to cystitis or other bladder infections and stress incontinence. Some women also experience reduced bladder capacity.

8. Loss of vaginal elasticity - intercourse can become uncomfortable or painful owing to the thinning of the vaginal walls, causing dryness and loss of elasticity.

THE SEVEN DWARVES OF MENOPAUSE



Itchy, Bitchy, Sweaty, Sleepy, Bloated, Forgetful, & Psycho



Emotional Symptoms:

Some women go through menopause with no emotional changes but for others there may be psychological issues to come to terms with.

Mood swings - these can range from tearfulness and irritability to depression. Depression may be more likely in the years immediately before menopause.

Emotional symptoms can include:

Panic attacks - Increased levels of anxiety can lead to panic attack symptoms including palpitations, shortness of breath or dizziness.

Poor memory and concentration - since estrogen plays a part in the healthy functioning of nerve cells in the brain, there could be some slight drop-off in concentration when there's less of it.

Treatment and recovery

Hormone replacement therapy (HRT) can help your body to adjust to lower levels of estrogen and progesterone, helping to alleviate common symptoms. Before deciding whether HRT is for you, talk to your GP about the risks of taking it or not. Make sure he or she is aware of any existing medical problems, such as high blood pressure, liver disease, endometrial cancer or a previous deep vein thrombosis (DVT).

HRT can take several different forms including tablets, implants, creams, pessaries and patches. The type will be tailored to your individual needs. The treatment comes in different combinations of estrogen and progesterone and in different strengths.



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