

## Menopause and Andropause

Menopause is a natural step in the process of aging for women. However, it can be a confusing and stressful transition, especially if you aren't sure what you're going through. Most every woman knows that she will go through menopause, or lose her periods, but menopause is so much more than just a loss of the menstrual cycle.

Menopause is the result of a drop in estrogen, one of the main female hormones. Generally, it begins naturally between the ages of 40 and 60, but it can be brought about when the ovaries are removed or stop functioning for some reason. The most common symptoms of menopause are hot flashes, night sweats, and mood swings. However, each woman will experience menopause in her own way. Estrogen is very important to the maintenance of the female reproductive organs, but also affects the surrounding organs. When the estrogen level drops in a woman's body, all of these organs will shrink and weaken. This weakening may cause involuntary urinary leakage, infection, and/or painful urination. Another serious effect that the loss of estrogen has on a woman's body is the thinning of bones which can lead to osteoporosis. Estrogen is also important to the heart and a reduction in estrogen levels can increase the risk of heart disease.

All this can be very overwhelming, but there are treatments that can ease the effects of menopause. The most common, and controversial, treatment for menopause is hormone replacement therapy. The benefits of using hormone replacement are reduced hot flashes, the slowing of bone loss, and reduced mood swings. However, there are some risks such as increased risks for heart disease, breast cancer, and blood clots. If hormone replacement therapy is something you are interested in, be sure to talk to your doctor. Another emerging treatment for menopause is natural treatment. This includes soy and bioidentical hormone therapy. Soy contains phytoestrogens, which are hormones similar to estrogen produced by plants. Bioidentical hormone therapy works along the same lines using plant hormones; however, with this treatment, the hormones are hand-mixed by a specialist for each individual woman.

Menopause is a very well known phenomena; however, its male counterpart, andropause, is not as well known. Andropause is the drop in testosterone levels in males. Andropause occurs gradually starting when a man is in his 30's. Symptoms of andropause include change in mood, energy level, sex drive, and physical agility. Andropause can also increase the risk of heart disease, weakening of bones, and certain types of cancers. Just as a low supply of estrogen impacts the female body, low levels of testosterone affect the male body.

There is treatment available for men who are suffering from the effects of andropause. Testosterone replacement therapy can improve mood and sex drive, and also potentially decrease the risk of heart disease. As with menopause, hormone replacement therapy is not for all men and a doctor should be consulted if it is being considered.