

*CLUW News Health Tip*

**PERIMENOPAUSE**

Perimenopause is the four to five year period leading up to menopause. It is a normal part of a woman's life. The most common sign that it is occurring is a change in the menstrual cycle and it usually begins in your forties. Menstrual cycles become much more irregular. There may be heavier bleeding and a shorter time between periods. Eventually, menstrual cycles stop completely. Menopause is your last monthly period and is a signal that your ovaries are no longer actively functioning.

During perimenopause, contact your doctor if you experience heavy bleeding, long intervals of spotting, or go more than two months without a period. It is possible you have an abnormality of the uterine lining which can be easily treated.

Women can become pregnant during perimenopause. To avoid an unwanted pregnancy, be sure to use some type of contraception. Some doctors recommend that contraception be used for a year or two after menopause to make certain that an unintended pregnancy does not occur. Women are also at risk of getting a sexually transmitted disease during perimenopause and any time after menopause. Safe sex is just as important as during earlier years.

During perimenopause, you may experience occasional hot flashes and night sweats. Breast tenderness or fullness may occur at unpredictable times. See your doctor if you feel any lumps in your breasts or experience fluid coming from your nipple. Even if there are no unusual symptoms, your doctor should do a clinical breast exam once a year and schedule a mammogram.

Some women have decreased sexual desire during the perimenopause. You may notice some vaginal dryness. This is due to the body's decreased level of the hormone estrogen, which is secreted by the ovaries. Lubricants are available for this common condition. Menopausal women may wish to discuss the possible use of hormone replacement therapy or use of a vaginal estrogen cream with their health care professional.

Most women do not find the perimenopause to be difficult as it is a normal transition in a woman's life. This is a good time to plan to start or maintain a healthy

lifestyle which includes regular exercise, good nutrition, and cessation of smoking. See your doctor at least once a year for a check up and screening tests that detect health problems early, before they cause symptoms or serious problems. Some of these screenings are blood tests for diabetes and for cholesterol levels, and blood pressure screening for hypertension.

No two women are exactly the same and perimenopause begins at different times for different women. Most of us reach menopause between the ages of 45 and 55.