

Family support important during menopause

Menopause happens at different times for different women, but it generally occurs between the ages of 40 and 58. This is an active time in the life of a woman. These years may include working a full-time job, sending children to college and caring for aging parents. This busy schedule leaves little time for dealing with the dramatic changes brought on by menopause. However, understanding the causes and symptoms of menopause can help a woman and her loved ones cope with this natural event.

Menopause is brought on by changes in a woman's hormone

levels. Specifically, it occurs when her ovaries cease making estrogen and progesterone, two compounds that facilitate the female reproductive process. Menopause takes place in four distinct stages: Premenopause, Perimenopause, Menopause and Postmenopause.

Pre-menopause refers to the entire reproductive life of a woman. The end of this stage is signaled by noticeable irregularity in her menstrual cycle.

Perimenopause is the stage in which a woman experiences the most pronounced symptoms of menopause. These symptoms include:

Changes in hormone levels;
Irregular periods;



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Hot flashes;
Night sweats; and
Mood swings.

The third stage, menopause, refers to the point at which a wom-

an's menstrual cycle stops. Symptoms such as hot flashes and mood swings continue during this stage as estrogen and progesterone levels drop permanently. Once a woman has gone 12 months without menstrual periods she is in postmenopause, the final stage.

Menopause is a natural event in the life of a maturing woman. However, these changes can be more than just inconvenient. Family and friends should educate themselves about menopause in order to understand and support the women they love. Here are some things that they can do to help:

Respect the significance of the changes taking place;

Give her time and space to deal with these changes; and

Help her enjoy life and look for the positive.

While menopause can be a difficult and tumultuous time, it can also be empowering. Women experiencing menopause can look confidently into the future knowing that this phase of their lives can be as productive and enjoyable as any. If you or someone you love is coping with menopause, consult your physician for menopause education and treatment options.

Dr. Keith Ledford is a board certified obstetrician and gynecologist with more than 30

years of experience in obstetrics. During his career, he has delivered more than 3,000 babies and is skilled in a variety of gynecological surgeries. Joining the medical staff at Family Medical Center OB/Gyn Clinic in February 2003, Dr. Ledford's services include caring for prenatal patients and annual well women exams. He is skilled in the diagnosis and treatment of gynecological health problems; such as menstrual disorders or menopausal difficulties. He recently received training to perform the new, minimally invasive surgery for "fallen bladder syndrome." To learn more, schedule a consultation with Dr. Ledford by calling 264-7180.