

The goal of this campaign is to start the conversation about menopause and increase awareness among women and men about the menopausal transition. Menopause is not a disease or disorder. It is common to all women and a large majority of women experience some bothersome menopausal symptoms. The more severe the symptoms, the more daily activities and quality of life are impacted due to sleep problems, poor concentration, mood swings and low energy/fatigue.

Menopause | **Week 1: Dispelling common myths about menopause**

Get the facts about menopause



Menopause is not just a personal health issue. It is also a workplace issue. Severe menopausal symptoms are also known to have a negative impact in the workplace, resulting in absences, decreased hours, layoffs, firings, job changes and an overall loss to the economy.

It's time to reduce the stigma associated with menopause. Let's begin by putting some of the most common myths and misconceptions to rest.

Common myths and misconceptions^{1,2}

Myth: Menopause is the same for every woman.

Almost every aspect of menopause, including when it starts, how long it lasts, types, frequency and severity of symptoms and what provides relief, is somewhat unique to each woman. Unfortunately, many women assume they will experience all of the worst symptoms of menopause.

Myth: Menopause only lasts a short time.

Many people believe menopause only lasts a few months or perhaps a year. The truth is that the course of menopausal symptoms is unpredictable and unique for each woman. Symptoms are likely to last much longer than a year. In fact, studies show that menopause symptoms last an average of about seven years with the most bothersome symptoms lasting about four years. Even four years is a significant amount of time – especially considering that other major life events, such as increased career demands, kids in college or caring for parents, may be occurring simultaneously.

Myth: Menopause causes weight gain.

On average, women gain about five pounds after menopause, but this change is most likely the result of a slowing metabolism due to aging rather than to menopause. Declining estrogen levels may make it more likely that any extra weight gained is deposited around the middle of the body. Eating a little less and exercising a little more can help avoid gaining weight. Including strength training to build muscle mass and boost metabolism also helps with weight loss and weight management. Achieving a healthy weight before menopause is ideal.

Myth: Menopause destroys your sex life.

Decreasing levels of the female hormone estrogen may lower sexual responsiveness and change genital tissues, but that doesn't mean women can no longer enjoy sex. It is possible to keep sex alive and satisfying. Open communication about sexual health and sexuality between women and their doctors or healthcare providers and with their partners is important.

Myth: Nothing can be done to manage the symptoms of menopause.

Women don't have to suffer with symptoms of menopause. There are several hormone and non-hormone prescription medications that can provide relief. Doing nothing isn't the answer. Women should visit with their doctors or healthcare providers to learn about

options and decide what's right for them. Lifestyle habits, such as relaxation techniques, regular exercise and healthy eating habits, can go a long way in promoting overall health and making it easier to cope with menopause.

Myth: Hormone therapy is never safe.

The origin of this myth is the Women's Health Initiative (WHI), a study released in 2002. The study results linked the use of combination (estrogen and progesterone) hormone therapy to increased risk of breast cancer and heart disease. The WHI study had many flaws, including studying women who had not recently gone through menopause and were older, as well as using a form of estrogen less typically used with modern regimens. The truth is that menopausal hormone therapy is very effective for some symptoms of menopause and a good choice for many women.

However, some women are discouraged from taking hormone therapy for menopause, including those who have or have had certain kinds of cancer, had a stroke or heart attack or have liver disease or a history of blood clots.

Myth: Once menopause starts, life is all downhill from there.

Women spend approximately 40% of their lives in postmenopause. The years beyond menopause can be among the best times of life. Many women find that not having to worry about contraception anymore and saying "goodbye" to heavy periods or premenstrual syndrome (PMS) offer a new sense of freedom and empowerment. Women are encouraged to think of menopause as a new beginning and take steps to learn as much as possible about this complex, interesting and important life stage.



Activity: What have you heard about menopause?

Are you wondering whether some of the statements you've heard about menopause are true or false? Write the statements in the space provided below and plan to ask your doctor or healthcare provider to clarify at your next office visit.

Is it true that...?

1.

2.

3.

4.

5.

References:

1. Mayo Clinic Press. Menopause facts vs. fiction: The truth behind the myths, August 14, 2023. www.mcpress.mayoclinic.org
2. NYU Langone Health News Hub. Five menopause myths you should stop believing now, February 7, 2023. www.nyulangone.org/news/

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