

Menopause: The last big hormone shift

New Spirit Journal is pleased to bring you *All's Well*, our new health column by Moira Fitzpatrick, PhD, ND. Moira is a clinical psychologist, hypnotherapist and naturopathic physician who graduated from Bastyr University and did a residency in Women's Health and Integrative medicine with Tori Hudson through the National College of Natural Medicine in Portland Oregon.

Dr. Fitzpatrick has been practicing psychology for over 20 years and was the founder of Hanbleceya, a therapeutic community for the seriously mentally ill in La Mesa California. She is also the founder of Emerald Center for Integrative Medicine and practices both naturopathic medicine and psychology in the Northgate area of Seattle.

If you would like a particular subject addressed or have a question you would like answered in the column, please send it to krysta@newspiritjournal.com.

What is menopause? It is essentially a day in time that marks 12 months since your last menses. Prior to this day, a woman is peri-menopausal and following this day, she is considered postmenopausal. The process of menopause is a transition from the generally stable reproductive years into changing hormone levels, a time often filled with rough waters as our bodies discover a new balance. Perhaps we can think of menopause as a rite of passage into embracing and revisiting our lives as we honor the wisdom of our experiences and the sacredness of life.

Peri-menopause is the beginning of the change, affecting women between 42 and 49 of age. The predominant challenges include irregular menses and hot flashes, often accompanied by irritability, mood changes, and feeling overwhelmed. During the 24 months prior to menopause, the ovaries are making erratic amounts of estrogen. Waning estrogen affects neurotransmitters that influence both mood and memory.

The beginning of peri-menopause is an excellent time to see your health care practitioner for a complete physical, to revisit your lifestyle and prepare emotionally, physically, and spiritually for the upcoming transition.

The average age for a woman to experience menopause is between 50 and 52. The predominant symptoms of the middle and later menopausal phases include hot flashes, night sweats, insomnia, and vaginal dryness. There are many other individual symptoms of menopause that may include headaches, anxiety, depression, incontinence, frequent urina-



All's Well
Health for Body, Mind, Spirit

by Moira Fitzpatrick, PhD, ND

tion, urinary tract infections, decreased sexual response, hair loss, palpitations, joint pains, weight gain. This ever widening picture of potential challenges is a reminder to take time to care of ourselves physically, emotionally, and spiritually.

Natural medicine offers us many options for easing our way into and through this menopausal transition. A place to begin is to identify and treat the symptoms that are most problematic in terms of interfering with your life. This is also a time to evaluate your risk for osteoporosis, cardiovascular disease, breast cancer, diabetes, and Alzheimer's disease.

How can I deal with hot flashes and night sweats?

I often begin with herbs. My favorite herb is Maca-Go (Lepidium Peruvianum Chacon). Maca-Go is an adaptogen, which works by balancing the hypothalamic-pituitary-ovarian and adrenal axis. This herb has been shown to decrease hot flashes, night sweats, depression and irritability, plus increase the body's capacity to cope with stress. The most studied of the herbs for menopausal symptoms is Black Cohosh, which provides benefit for many women. There are many herbs that target individual symptoms of menopause and these can be explored with your health care practitioner.

What are Bio-Identical Hormones and are they safe?

Bio-identical hormones are molecularly the same as the hormones found in our bodies. Bio-identical hormones may be synthetic or compounded. Synthetic hormones are produced by pharmaceutical companies with limited dosing options. A compounded bio-identical hormone is synthesized in the laboratory from precursors found in soybeans or Mexican wild yam. Doses can be individualized to meet the

specific needs of the woman. A compounded formula may include estradiol, estriol, progesterone, testosterone, DHEA, or a combination of hormones. These hormones come in many forms, pills, creams, suppositories, and sublingual drops.

The current thinking around the safety of hormones is the lowest dose for the shortest time for menopausal symptoms. The time of greatest benefit from bio-identical hormones may be for women within the first five years of menopause.

Prior to prescribing hormones, it is essential that your practitioner review with you both the benefits and risks of hormones taking into account your unique symptoms and history. The choice to take hormones is yours. You have the choice to take herbs, supplements, bio-identical hormones as well as make the changes you desire in your life.

What can you do to balance your body and your life?

Midlife brings us face to face with a slower metabolism. As you turn your attention to diet, you may consider a decrease in portions, decrease carbohydrates, increase your intake of a variety of colorful vegetables and fruit, add protein to each meal for sustained energy. We need omega-3 fatty acids typically found in cold water fish or in nuts and seeds. Don't miss meals as the body will react by storing fat for survival. Drink lots of water and cut back on alcohol to one drink per day.

Since many of us are emotional eaters, this is the time to add a stress reduction program such as reminding ourselves to breathe, practice meditation, do yoga, walk, write, take time to reflect. As women we need support so stay socially connected to a community of friends. Physical activity at this time of life is crucial to keep weight off and retain bone mass. I recommend that women work up to walking for one hour six days a week or whatever form of exercise is enjoyable and fits into your lifestyle.

Foundational supplemental support during menopause includes a good multiple vitamin/mineral, 1500 mg of calcium, plus vitamin D. I typically supplement vitamin D, 2000 IU's in the winter and 1000 IU's in the summer. Vitamin D prevents fractures and may contribute to the prevention of various cancers, seasonal affective disorder, and other inflammatory conditions.

This journey is your time to take care of yourself. It is a time of reflection. It is a time to take your place in a circle of women, to share your stories and wisdom. Discover this season and gift of menopause.

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Nicotiana: Quit fighting yourself and quit smoking

By Jenny Vires

Getting kicked off the soccer team at age 14 due to bad knees can be devastating to an adolescent athlete. I was really hurt and angry and as an act of revenge towards my coach I decided to have my first smoke at the local ice arena. I remember actually saying out loud, "I'll show him." Boy, did I really show him with a pack a day and 15 years later. My logical reason for smoking was an act of revenge, but really it was to put the hurt and disappointment I felt into an act of self deprecation. The reason we all started smoking in the first place may have manifested in different ways, but whether great or small the end result is ultimately enslavement to an addiction.

Addictions come in many packages and act as a temporary guise to divert our attention away from emotional hurt and healing that needs to take place within us. Cigarette smoking may be the most common and accepted form of addiction, but addiction to food, shopping, drugs, alcohol, sex, anger, or even exercise are all forms of suppressing our emotions. We have

to ask ourselves how this activity is controlling our lives.

If you are trying to quit something that is controlling you, the first place you must address within yourself is how you think about the addiction. Do you think about quitting daily, once a week, every now and then? Do you wake up and feel your lungs aching and your body pleading with you to stop? Are you polluting your body with negative energy due to feelings of guilt and self abuse that you can't quit? Do you have specific times of day or social situations where you just have to fulfill that craving to get you through? What emotions are you running from?

All of these questions are just the tip of the iceberg when it comes to why we have an addiction and why we cannot seem to quit. Fortunately, I freed myself from an addiction that enslaved my body, mind, and soul New Year's Day 2003. It took me seven years and so many tries I couldn't count if I wanted to. So technically it took me almost half of the 15 years I smoked to actually kick the habit. I am happy to say I have broken my shackles of enslavement to this deadly, sabotag-

ing, life sucking, aging addiction! Yay for me!

If you have tried to quit smoking, have wanted to quit but don't know how, or feel disappointed in yourself because you just can't seem to have enough will power it is time to take a new approach to quitting.

With each relapse I would punish myself with horribly negative thoughts about how I should be ashamed and guilt-ridden for backsliding yet again. I would beat myself up mentally for my weakness to the chemical I loved so: nicotine. It is the most addictive substance in the world and in concentrated form nicotine is actually a deadly substance in the air.

In order to create change in our lives, we have to come to a place of peace with who we are right now in this very moment. True change can only be lasting change if it is backed by love. The only true and righteous acts in the history of this world have come from places where love resides. It is in this place of love and compassion where the strength to create positive change exists. A positive attitude is the only way to feed positive change. I realized my negative attitude was only

feeding the addiction, the emotions I wanted to bury. Instead of loving and understanding the feelings I buried them one puff at a time.

I realized in my self discovering that I wasn't fighting myself, I was fighting something that controlled my body, mind, and soul. In this fruition I created the entity I was fighting and she rules all of us who are enslaved by some addiction. She feeds off of the power and keeps us in her control. Her name is Nicotiana and she is the Goddess of Addiction. She becomes enraged within when she doesn't get what she wants. You see, it is not you who wants the cigarette, the fix, the food; it is her feeding off of our wounds, our weakness.

The next time I quit smoking I waged battle against her. It was the last time I quit smoking. I was enslaved and had to free myself from her chemical grip. I no longer had to beat myself up for failing. I had to get angry at someone other than myself and I had to be proud of myself each moment that I didn't smoke. Each one of her cravings I fended off was a battle won in the war for my life. I could hear her screaming in the other realm with

frustration and I became stronger knowing I was emancipating myself from her grips.

So the next time you attempt the psychologically difficult task of freeing your mind, soul, and body from whatever addiction Nicotiana has you shackled, remember you are waging war against an entity sometimes greater than yourself. You might have to ask for help. You might have to gather all of the reserves within yourself to fight for your life, to fight for your freedom to live your life, and to start loving your body. Nicotiana will have her work cut out for her!

Your body will thank you, your pocketbook will thank you, and especially those who love you will thank you. May you find the courage, love, and strength to live from your soul!

Jenny Vires is a shamanic practitioner specializing in spiritual readings and space clearings/blessings. She aligns with your soul's highest purpose to bring about deep healing. To schedule an appointment in person or over the phone please visit www.jennyvires.com or call 206-434-9870.