

# The Seasons of a Woman's Life

The stages of our lives change with the seasons. I often think of spring as representing menarche and puberty, summer as the child bearing years, fall as the season of peri-menopause, and winter the time of menopause. Women are cyclical beings deeply connected to the cycles of nature, the daily ebb and flow of the tides, the monthly cycle of the moon. The menstrual cycle mirrors the phases of the moon. The follicular phase, the time between menses and

ovulation, parallels opening to the full moon. This is a time of action, heightened libido and increased creativity. The luteal phase, the time between ovulation and the beginning of menses, is the time of the fading and new moon.

The darkness brings out our subconscious mind, increased emotions and unresolved issues. Let us reflect as the light grows dimmer.

Menarche is the beginning of menstruation, a time of physical and emotional changes for young women. Menarche is a rite of passage into womanhood, yet in our culture menstruation has been associated with being a "curse," a time of erratic emotions and shame. How were you prepared for menstruation? What messages did you receive from your family and culture? How can each of us honor the natural cycle of being a woman, respect our bodies and learn the importance of self-care?

As menses stabilizes, each woman moves into the child bearing years and becomes keenly aware of the pre-menstrual time period. Many women experience PMS and menstrual cramps. PMS is characterized by cyclical symptoms as diverse as cravings, bloating, breast swelling, depression, heightened emotions, mood lability, headaches, insomnia, back pain, acne, etc. What can you do to take care of yourself during this time?

Pre-menstrual syndrome can be stabilized by examining any underlying conditions, your unique physiology, emotional nature, life circumstance, lifestyle, family, social and spiritual support. Let's begin with the food we eat. A whole foods diet, vegetables, fruits, whole grains, essential fatty acids from fish, nuts and seeds is recommended, while minimizing refined carbohydrates, sugar, caffeine, alcohol and dairy. Regular exercise stabilizes mood and decreases stress. Other stress reducing activities include meditation, yoga, deep breathing and visualization. A variety of nutritional supplements have been shown to support women with PMS. The foundation is a multiple vitamin and mineral, plus Vitamin B6 to increase the synthesis of neurotransmitters. Vitamin D, magnesium and calcium affect menstrual migraines. Essential fatty acids, particularly evening primrose oil has been effective in decreasing PMS. Two botanicals that I think are valuable in treating PMS include Vitex

and Maca (Femenessence MacaHarmony). Both of these herbs affect the hypothalamic, pituitary ovarian axis, provide stability and balance. When significant anxiety is an issue, progesterone cream has a tranquil effect on the nervous system. I would suggest designing a program to meet your needs with a health care practitioner. Menstruation is a time to honor being a woman. We have the incredible opportunity each month to go within and reflect upon

our lives during this time of heightened sensitivity and intuition.

Postpartum depression affects many women. Women at risk include those with a history of depression, moderate to severe PMS, difficult labor and delivery and unstable relationships. Prevention includes good nutrition, avoiding low blood sugar by regular meals and eating protein, plus supplementing with omega-3-fatty acids high in DHA. Give yourself time to re-establish hormone balance after giving birth. Honor this time period, especially the first three months. Seek physical contact and support. If you felt best during pregnancy or respond well to progesterone, talk to your physician about taking progesterone after delivery. Take time to identify and work through any trauma related to giving birth. Allow yourself to be aware of issues, thoughts and feelings that arise. Remember that giving birth is a change that affects your life significantly.

Peri-menopause is a time of hormonal change. It is a time of irregular menses, heavy menses, emotional lability, sleep disturbances, hot flashes, night sweats, fibroids, etc. It is a time to re-evaluate where you are in your life. What each of us brings into this phase of life will directly affect how we move through this transition. There is a significant relationship between emotions, beliefs, stress and hormones. I approach peri-menopause from a wholistic perspective: whole foods diet plus soy, flax seeds, bioflavonoids and protein, regular exercise, nighttime ritual and activities to decrease stress. Supplements during peri-menopause include omega-3-fatty acids, vitamin D, calcium, black cohosh, Rhodiola, licorice, Dong quai, Maca. I recommend an individualized program to support your unique physiology and life circumstance.

Menopause is a time of hormonal shifts and ensuing balance. It is a time to pause from the world and reflect upon how you want to direct your creative energies, communicate your unique wisdom, pursue your spiritual life and evaluate your health risks. There is rapid bone loss during the first few years of menopause, thus a time to

Continued on Page 12



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