Midlife Issues for Women

Urinary incontinence

Urinary incontinence affects more women than men and more than 50 percent of women who have symptoms do not seek medical care, according to the American College of Obstetricians and Gynecologists. Many women leak small amounts of urine at times. These leaks can occur with physical activity or other stress, such as coughing. Some women feel the urge to urinate and cannot control it. Others leak urine only during pregnancy. When leaks become frequent or severe enough to be a problem, it is called urinary incontinence, or loss of bladder control.

Symptoms:

- Leaking urine often
- A strong urge to urinate whether or not the bladder is full
- Painful voiding
- Bed-wetting or leaking while sleeping

Prevention:

- Maintain a healthy weight; being overweight can put pressure on the pelvic organs.
- Strengthen the pelvic muscles through Kegel exercises.
- Quit smoking; it hinders blood supply and may cause coughing and an increased risk of stress incontinence.

How to Cope:

- Do Kegel exercises by tightening and holding the pelvic muscles until you can't hold anymore.
- Elevate your legs several times a day to lessen fluid buildup that can cause unwanted nighttime trips to the bathroom.
- Sometimes devices can be used to make the pelvic muscles stronger.
- Medications may help control muscle spasms, can help prevent leaks or strengthen the muscle of the urethra.

Menopause

Menopause is the time in a woman's life when her period stops. It is a normal change in a woman's body. A woman has reached menopause when she has not had a period for 12 months in a row (and there are no other causes, such as pregnancy or illness, for this change), according to the National Women's Health Information Center. Leading up to menopause, a woman's body slowly makes less and less of the hormones estrogen and progesterone. This change often happens between the ages of 45 and 55 years old.

Symptoms:

- Change in pattern of periods (shorter or longer, lighter or heavier, more or less time between periods)
- Headaches
- Trouble sleeping through the night
- Mood swings, feeling crabby or crying spells
- Memory issues trouble remembering, focusing or feeling confused
- Depression
- Hot flashes and night sweats (sometimes followed by a chill)
- Vaginal dryness
- Hair loss or thinning on your head, more hair growth on your face

Prevention: There is none.

How to Cope:

- Eating a healthy diet
- Exercise can combat insomnia, moodiness and low energy levels.
- Hormone therapy may be an option based on individual health risk and family history. Consult your doctor.
- Prescription vaginal suppositories or local creams help with vaginal dryness

Osteoporosis

Osteoporosis, a bone-thinning disease, affects 10 million Americans – eight million of whom are women, according to the National Institutes of Health. The disease is progressive disease and once diagnosed, treatment should begin. Talk with your doctor about bone health and when a bone density test is right for you.

Symptoms: Osteoporosis is often called the "silent disease" because bone loss occurs without symptoms. Some women may not know that they have osteoporosis until their bones become so weak that a sudden strain, bump or fall causes a hip to fracture or a vertebra to collapse.

Prevention:

- Do weight-bearing exercises such as walking, hiking, jogging, stair climbing, weight training, tennis, and dancing.
- Avoid smoking
- Avoid excessive alcohol.

How to Cope:

- Exercise regularly
- Maintain a balanced, nutritious diet
- Get enough calcium and vitamin D, which plays an important role in the absorption of calcium.
 Depending on how much calcium and vitamin D you get from food daily, you may need to take supplements.
- Consider medications
- Practice safety to prevent falls.