



MANAGING Menopause

if you're dreading the "change of life," you're not alone — but it's time for menopause to get a much-needed makeover.

"Many women cultivate a new attitude after moving through menopause," says Chris Danz, nurse practitioner at Women's Care of Wisconsin. "I call it the 'Red Hat Phenomenon,'" she explains, referencing Jenny Johnson's 1961 poem that opens, "When I am an old woman I shall wear purple / With a red hat which doesn't go, and doesn't suit me."

"Women realize that they've lived some life and gained some wisdom, so they want to be heard," says Danz, "and that's empowering."

IDENTIFYING MENOPAUSE

"Menopause is part of a transition within the life of the ovaries," explains Danz. "The ovary begins to wind down between the ages of 35-65. The process of downward transition is much slower than puberty, which takes just a few years. Once a woman hasn't had a period for a year, she is menopausal."

For women with questions about menopause, Dr. Michael Kincheloe, OB-GYN at Aurora BayCare Medical Center, recommends the website www.menopause.org. "It was developed and is maintained by practitioners to provide well-researched, practical advice," he says.

THE ONLY THING CONSTANT IS... CHANGE

"Everybody experiences it differently. You can look to your mother as a possibility of how it might be — but it's not a given," Danz explains. "There are family trends, but again it's not a given."

"As they move through perimenopause, some women experience lowered overall libido," says Rebecca Menning, certified natural family planning instructor and owner of Wellspring Fertility Education. "Whereas others discover that the opposite is true."

"The changing ratio between estrogen and testosterone during perimenopause causes a number of physical changes," explains Kincheloe. "These include weight gain and redistribution, a decline in collagen, hair loss and dry eyes."

Women's bodies aren't the only things that change — society's perception of how to meet the needs of menopausal women has altered over the years.

Danz believes the medical community has finally reached a comfortable medium regarding hormone replacement therapy. "Millions of women have become graciously, wonderfully old without estrogen, while some benefit from hormone replacement therapy," she says. "It's an individualized plan, not a one-size-fits all treatment approach."

"When administered in the right patient for the right amount of time, hormone replacement therapy restores quality of life," agrees Kincheloe.


"Hot flashes can impact how women feel in social or professional contexts," says Kincheloe. "Women experiencing the effects of perimenopause to that

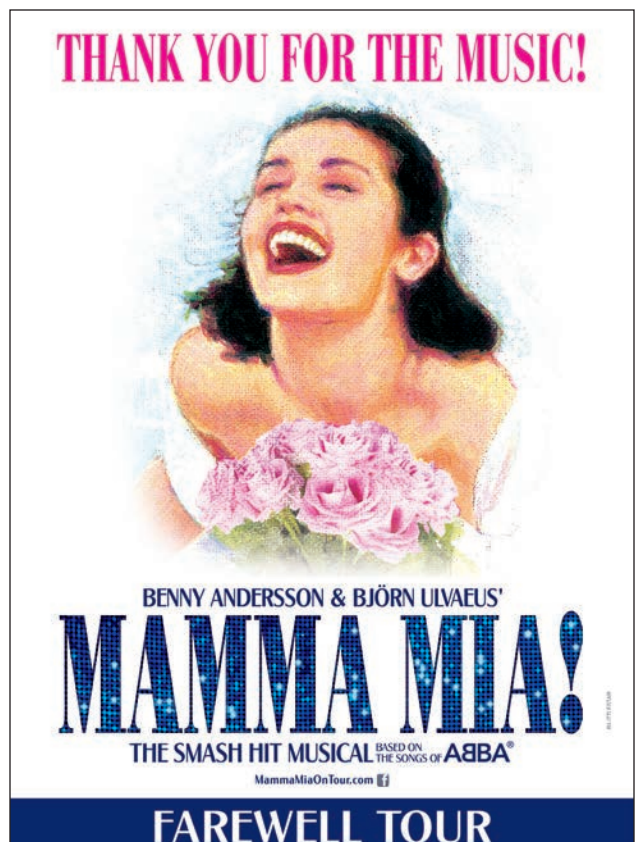
degree are good candidates for hormone replacement therapy."

SUPPORTING YOUR BODY — AND MIND

"For women who want to take a natural approach to support their bodies through these changes, try weight bearing and aerobic exercise to maintain healthy bones," says Menning. "A diet rich in nutrients, healthy fats and fiber can help balance hormones."

"If you're not already doing healthy things in your life, menopause is definitely a good time to start," adds Danz. "During the 5 years following menopause, the heart loses the protection it gets from estrogen and bones lose density more quickly. We do a lot of health counseling and we help women think about how healthy cooking can help them stay strong."

No matter what a woman is experiencing, she should take one of Kincheloe's recommendations to heart. "Women need to find 'selfish time' activities that work for them," he says. "Whether it's reading, yoga or 20 to 30 minutes in a relaxing bath, that time is crucial to supporting them as they experience the emotional and physical changes that hormonal imbalances produce." 





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