

Menopause / Godly older women

Tammy: I asked my friends: what were the times when your life really changed?

A: Oh, the day I got married.

B: When I became a mother- life was never the same again!

A: When I finished school and started work...

B: ... and when we came to live here

A: I think my body often told me I had reached a new stage- like when I started having periods...

B: And when I *stopped* having periods. That was a big change- and a good one in many ways.

A: Really?

Tammy: Welcome to Women of Hope. I'm Tammy...

Carol: ... and I'm Carol. Thank you for having us today. What did *you* think about when you heard that question - what were the times when *your* life really changed? Maybe it was something *unexpected*.

Today we're going to focus on *menopause*- a time of life that is expected, but full of change. Julie's with us again- do you remember she talked about our menstrual cycle a while back? Welcome, Nurse Julie!

Julie: Thank you Carol. Hi, it's good to be with you again.

Tammy: So Julie, can you explain what menopause is?

Julie: Menopause really means the time when our monthly periods stop permanently. But we often think of it as the time of life around our very last period. It has lots of names- the Time of Life, the Change. The average age of natural menopause is around 51 years but it can happen much earlier or much later than that.

Carol: I know some women are afraid of menopause and think of it as a sickness or curse. Can you explain what really happens?

Julie: Women are born with a limited number of egg cells in their ovaries. After puberty our ovaries usually release one egg per month. If we don't become pregnant, then a period follows about two weeks later. This is our normal menstrual cycle. When a woman's eggs are nearly all used up then her periods come less often and eventually stop. The ovaries also produce less of the female hormones *oestrogen* and *progesterone*, and that causes some changes. So menopause is a perfectly natural thing that happens for all women.

Tammy: Does it usually happen suddenly?

Julie: No, most women find their menstrual cycles become a bit different and less regular leading up to menopause. However, for about 1 in 10 women, their periods stop suddenly. If your periods become very painful, heavy or troublesome then see your healthcare worker. They can check for any serious problem, and help you get treatment.

But everyone experiences menopause differently. It partly depends on a woman's attitude towards menopause. If you're relaxed and accept it, it probably won't be as difficult.

Carol: I remember during menopause I had hot flushes during the day. I woke up many nights with my bed sheets soaked with sweat. Is this very common?

Julie: It *is* common; my friends at work often complain about these hot flushes or hot flashes.

Their face, neck and chest feel hot suddenly and the flush lasts a few minutes. They call them 'power surges' instead of hot flushes it sounds more positive!

Carol: I learned to wear clothes in layers so I could take something off. I didn't sleep so well. I was always throwing the blankets off! I needed to keep my bedroom cooler.

Julie: Some women find that hot flushes are triggered by spicy food, smoking, alcohol and caffeine drinks such as tea, coffee and cola. So try avoiding these things.

I said before that around the time of menopause a woman's body produces less oestrogen. That can make you pass urine more often or have leakage of urine. You might get more urinary infections, with stinging pain. Make sure you drink lots of water, and see your health worker quickly if you have severe pain...and think you might have an infection.

Women often feel uncomfortable and dry around the vagina during menopause. That's also because you have less oestrogen. You can get oils or gels that moisten the area and they're helpful, especially when you're going to have sex.

Carol: My doctor said your bones become thinner when your oestrogen level drops.

Julie: That's right. As we age we all gradually lose bone tissue; that makes our bones weaker, especially after menopause. Unfortunately for some women this can be very severe and cause *osteoporosis*. That means our bones break much more easily, especially if we fall. However, there are simple things we can do to help keep our bones strong.

Tammy: I know we need foods containing calcium. Dairy products like milk, cheese and yoghurt, have lots of calcium, and so do dark green leafy vegetables, soy beans, and tofu, especially if it's made with extra calcium.

Carol: We also need Vitamin D for strong bones, and we get vitamin D from sunlight. So spend a little time in sunlight each day when you can! And eat your soybeans!

Julie: *Exercise* also strengthens bones, especially weight-bearing exercise, like walking, so it's especially important as we get older. But smoking cigarettes makes your bones weaker, and it also can bring on early menopause and make hot flushes worse. Oestrogen also protects the heart and blood vessels. After menopause women no longer have that protection from heart attacks and strokes. But we're less likely to have these problems if we live a healthy lifestyle, before and after menopause. That means eating less fat... salt... and sugar. Stopping smoking also helps; and so does exercise, especially weight-bearing exercise. Men *and* women can look after their heart health.

Carol: So Julie, I suppose if any of those symptoms are severe or begin to affect your life badly, it would be a good idea to see your health care worker.

Julie: Definitely. And this is important. If it's been more than 12 months since you had a period, and then you have any bleeding from the vagina, you really must see your doctor or healthcare worker. This can be the first sign of a serious condition such as cancer of the womb. Most menopause symptoms are easily treated. It's a natural stage of life that all women go through. However, about 1 in 10 women have symptoms that are severe enough that they need medical help. Of course that means 9 out of 10 women can manage it themselves; I hope you're one of those 9!

Tammy: Here on Women of Hope we're talking with Nurse Julie about what to expect during menopause. Now Julie, what sort of treatments are there?

Julie: There's a medical treatment called HRT - hormone replacement therapy. It's not suitable for every woman...or available for everyone. Your doctor will discuss all this with you and give you good advice. Some research shows that regular exercise can be just as good for menopause symptoms as hormone tablets. It might surprise you to know that lifting weights is one of the best things you can do. Strong women stay younger and fitter at any age.

(Source- not to be read: The North American Menopause Society states "Exercise may cause the same magnitude of change as that induced by estrogen therapy." ([The Effects of Physical Activity on Menopausal Symptoms and Metabolic Changes around Menopause](#))

Carol: My big secret was Vitamin B6. I began taking 250 mgs a day and it helped a lot.

Julie: Yes, the B vitamins help your general health and your mood. They don't actually change your hormones.

Tammy: What about natural treatments?

Julie: Eating soy beans regularly seems to produce a mild natural effect like oestrogen. There are lots of herbal remedies and some women have found these to be helpful. However, these traditional treatments can also be harmful to some women and they can have dangerous interactions with other medicines. So if you want to try a herbal treatment, it's important to discuss it with your healthcare worker first. They should *continue* to work *with* you to manage *your* symptoms. There's no *one* treatment...every woman is different.

Tammy: I've often heard people say that menopause makes you very grumpy. Is that true?

Carol: Do you remember Tammy, I had mood swings during menopause? I felt badly for my family. I would go from being very emotional to being silly then easily angry all of a sudden. My husband and I explained it to our two teenagers so they didn't think it was their fault. My husband was my hero. He always assured me that this would pass and that it would be better once I was through menopause. And it was!

Julie: Not all women suffer, but some do feel low, moody or anxious around this time of life. They can find it harder to concentrate. Women often feel less interested in sex because of the symptoms we've mentioned. These changes can really affect your life and relationships. It's a good idea to talk things through with your husband if it's affecting your marriage. It's a time when you both need to consider each other's needs.

Tammy: Of course, menopause often happens at the same time as women are facing other big changes. These can be difficult and painful times; perhaps your children are leaving home, you're caring for elderly relatives, a family member may be dying, or you or your husband might be retiring. So it can be a tough time.

Julie: If you feel down, you're not alone...other women can feel this way too. It's a great idea to talk to someone about how you feel. Friends and relatives are a great support but it might help to see a doctor or healthcare worker. Sometimes tablets for low mood can be very helpful through this time of change.

Carol: We often talk on Women of Hope about the benefits of a healthy lifestyle. It can certainly make menopause easier. Julie suggested the same things we often talk about. What we eat matters: it's good to eat a variety of food, low in fat and salt but high in calcium, to strengthen the heart and bones at this stage of life. Regular weight-bearing exercise matters: it stimulates hormones: it helps us sleep, strengthens our bones and makes us less anxious. Smoking makes

the symptoms worse as well as all its other bad effects. So there are simple things we can do to help ourselves.

Tammy: When my friend went through menopause she said she suddenly felt she was getting old. Her joints ached, and her hair and skin seemed dull. She really felt depressed.

Carol: I suppose it *is* a sign of getting older. But is that so bad? Are women only valuable and attractive if they have smooth skin, shiny hair and can have babies? I don't think so- and neither does my husband! And neither does God. Older women can be wise because they have a lot of experience, and they can be attractive in a different way. Maybe after menopause people come to value us as whole people, not just for our babies, our work, or our looks.

Julie: I agree Carol, and it makes a big difference how you think about menopause. If *you* think it's the end of your sexual relationship with your husband, or that you don't have anything to contribute, of course you'll feel depressed. If *you* think you're only valuable if you're young and fertile, you're bound to feel worthless. But you can also see it as a new beginning. Many women feel more free. They no longer have to deal with a menstrual cycle. They don't have to worry about getting pregnant. For some women their marriages improve as they have more time to spend together, and as they help each other through the challenges of this time. And once the menopause is all finished, most women feel strong and healthy, and start a really good new stage of life. You can take up new interests. Menopause can be the start of 10, 20 or 30 years of creative, productive time in your work or family life.

Carol: It certainly can!

We've been chatting about menopause, and how we deal with getting older. How do *you* feel about getting older?

Tammy: It's interesting how different cultures see older people. In the west, we often value youth, beauty and energy. I know people who are really scared of losing their looks, or losing the jobs that give them status...importance. Young people sometimes think that older people can't keep up with the times, especially with all the new technology. But in many traditional cultures, older people have a lot of power and respect. The old people carry the memories of the community, and know the skills that they need to live. They have seen a lot of life and they can make wise decisions for the community.

Carol: I think it was like that at the time of the Lord Jesus Christ and his followers, about 2000 years ago. The message of Jesus spread quickly and the new believers in Jesus needed to learn how to live as Christians. They came from different backgrounds and saw things in different ways.

Tammy: We've often talked about Paul, one of the first leaders of the Christians. He travelled about, risking his life to bring the good news about Jesus. One of the places Paul visited was the large island of Crete, in the Mediterranean Sea. He had a friend with him, Titus. Titus had been a pagan, not a Jew. They preached that God would welcome anyone, whether they were Jews or pagans, when they put their trust in the Lord Jesus Christ. Many people welcomed this message, but most of them really didn't understand very much about God, because they used to worship idols. The people of Crete were famous for all the wrong reasons- they were known as lazy, immoral, dishonest gluttons and drunkards (Titus 1:12). So they had a lot to learn. Titus had been taught well, so Paul left him there in Crete to help the new believers in Jesus.

Sometime later Paul wrote a letter to Titus. It's in the Bible, God's holy word. He reminded Titus that elders or leaders in these groups must be respected by all, not arrogant or quick tempered, not drinkers or greedy for money. They needed to understand the message and hold to it firmly,

encouraging others (Titus 1:5-9). Paul told Titus to teach the older men, the younger men, and the older women.

Julie: I wonder why Paul didn't tell Titus to teach the young women? Perhaps he was a single man and it wouldn't have been proper for him to mix with the young women (laugh).

Tammy: That could be the reason. But the young women needed to learn. Let me read you some of Paul's letter (Titus 2: 1-5, TEV).

'Instruct the older men to be sober, sensible and self-controlled: to be strong in their faith, love and endurance. In just the same way, instruct the older women to behave as women should who lead a holy life. They must not slander others or be addicted to wine.'

Carol: So the standard was the same for men and for women- they all needed to live holy lives, be self-controlled, respected by all, and set a good example. That reminds me that God loves women as much as men, and we women need to be following God's ways just as much as men do. We each need to trust God and obey him each day.

Tammy: That's right. Now listen to what Paul wrote next about these older women. 'They must teach what is good, in order to train the younger women to love their husbands and children, to be self-controlled and pure and to be good housewives who respect their husbands, so that no-one will speak evil of the message that comes from God.'

Carol: Isn't that interesting! Paul trusted Titus to teach the truth, and he trusted these older women to pass the truth on to the younger women. Apparently these Cretan girls were not used to being self-controlled...pure...or working hard for their husbands and children. Remember, they were famous for being lazy, greedy and immoral!

Tammy: Yes, this was a big responsibility for the older women. Titus reminded them to set a good example, not just tell others what to do. They had to live holy lives, to mind their own business and not be gossiping behind others' backs, or getting drunk. And all this was so that the message of God's love through Jesus could be passed on to others. That's important for us as followers of Jesus, whether we're young or old. The way we act should make others *want* to know about Jesus, not run away from him.

Julie: You know, I'm so grateful that older women taught me to follow Jesus, and showed me how to be a good wife and mother and worker. Now I'm getting older, I ask God to help me to pass it on to my daughters, and other young women.

Carol: I wonder who teaches *you*? And who *you* teach in turn? Perhaps we Women of Hope can help you to follow Jesus and understand God's word. If you have questions, we'll try to answer them, and we love to hear from you about your life.

Tammy: Thank you for spending time with us today. We'll look forward to meeting again.

Julie: Goodbye, and God bless you.

© Copyright Trans World Radio 2013