

The Power of Menopause

By Allison Koch, CNM

How much do you know about the life transition we call Menopause? Menopause is what is known as a retrospective diagnosis. That means that women are defined as “in menopause” or “menopausal” when they have had no period for a full year. Women may go 10 or 11 months without a period, then have a period. We call that “peri-menopausal.” Once women have achieved Menopause, they are considered Post-Menopausal.

In the USA, the average age of menopause is 51. Despite women's shorter lifespan throughout history, age 51 has remained the average age of menopause for the past 300 years. Most women will experience some symptoms that make them aware that their bodies are changing, but few women that I have seen in my practice are aware that there are nearly 100 symptoms that may coincide with the menopausal transition.

The hormones involved in the changes of menopause are likely to be estrogens and progesterone, but also could be DHEA, testosterone, or an imbalance in another body system brought on by changing hormones.

Hormones are natural chemicals present in our bodies that interact with each other or with our cells and organs. Hormones exist primarily to regulate processes and keep our body in homeostasis, a state of natural balance. Menopause is a process, frequently taking 10 years or more, designed to change our bodies and prepare us for a lifetime beyond the fertile years!

In perimenopause, most women experience some of the same hormonal symptoms that heralded menarche. Anxiety,



emotionality, irregular periods are all normal in young girls approaching puberty. Worsening PMS is often the first symptom noted as we enter the perimenopausal period. Although our youth-oriented culture doesn't generally approach the Elder “rites of passage” with as much anticipation as other milestones, there is still cause for celebration (raise a glass of red wine!)

Beginning in September, the main focus of my practice at Women's Birth & Wellness Center will be perimenopause and menopausal care. I am here to guide and support you through the menopausal transition. I want to optimize your experience, your health and your adjustment to the power of a new way of life. Together we will explore the process and your options for managing challenges.

Additionally, September 25 and October 2, I will be hosting

The Power of Menopause Workshop

Women's Birth & Wellness Center
The Living Room
Suite 304, 930 MLK Jr., Blvd, Chapel Hill

Part 1: Monday, September 25, 6-9pm

Part 2: Monday, October 2, 6-9pm

Cost: \$75

A light supper will be served.

a two-part workshop titled, “The Power of Menopause.” Menopause is one of the Women's Mysteries, along with menarche, pregnancy and birth. Come celebrate your unique and magical transition (as the midwives do) and learn more about what to expect during this exciting time.

I am overjoyed to be expanding our wellness and women's primary care offerings with a focus on the wonder years (“I wonder where I put my keys...”)

The great anthropologist Margaret Mead said: “There is no greater creative force in the world than a menopausal woman with zest!” We wholeheartedly agree!

Allison joined Women's Birth & Wellness Center in January of 2008. Her entire career has been devoted to empowering and advocating for women. She has been politically active for midwifery and birth reform and strives to preserve the midwifery model of care. She especially enjoys working with healing herbs, homeopathy and energetic therapies.

EXTINCTION

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killer whale offspring cannot find places to prey on seals and sea lions because they never learned the location from their mother who died from exposure to the oil during and after the oil spill. Imagine, extinction in this case is because of the lack of communication among a population of transient killer whales, not because of insufficient food. The seals and sea lions are there. The transient adult killer whales just don't know where they are. Is there a parallel story among people and cultures? Of course there is.

Seth Kantner is the other Alaskan author I referred to earlier. His two books are entitled “Shopping for Porcupine: A Life in Arctic Alaska” and “Swallowed by the Great Land: and Other Dispatches from Alaska's Frontier”. The author was born and raised along the banks of the Kobuk River in northwestern Alaska. His life began with his mother, father and older brother in a sod house built into the side of a hill many miles from the

nearest village. From a very early age, he learned to track, hunt and trap animals. He learned everything he could about which body parts to eat and what he could do with the bones and skins. A keen observer of Nature, he came to an early understanding of how the land related to the animals and on what aspects of Nature he could always depend. It was not uncommon for him to go out into minus forty degree weather for days without the comforts and safety of modern-day clothing. He learned a lot from his father, but even more from elder indigenous people who had lived in other remote areas of Alaska. From time to time they would stop at his sod home to find shelter during a snow storm. Now over 45 years of age, the author spends a lot of time photographing and writing about a time that no longer exists even in the most remote parts of Alaska. Things began to change when three things happened. Snow machines made dog teams obsolete, so you could get farther into the wilderness, but have to depend on fossil fuels rather than animal power to get you there. High-powered weapons made hunting too easy, so you could kill more animals than you really needed. Modern-day

clothing, transportation and electronics take the risk out of trophy hunting which puts subsistence living at a disadvantage because the overall population of animals is reduced.

We talk a lot these days about living a sustainable lifestyle, but really have no clue as to what that really means. There is no physical risk involved when we trade paper money to buy food or acquire goods. Seth Kantner had to endure subzero temperatures and the risk of being attacked by a pack of wolves in order to feed his family. Instead, as we avoid risks to get what we want, a little of our spirit dies and we are not even aware of it just like adult transient killer whales are not aware of a place to find food. Have we lost our ability to experience and communicate about what is really important in life, and by doing so, insure our demise?

Joe Jacob, a Chatham resident for more than 30 years and a marine biologist, is president of The Haw River Canoe & Kayak Co., www.hawrivercanoe.com, 336.260.6465. He worked for The Nature Conservancy for 20 years and served as Director of Science for TNC's Southeast Region.



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