

I was in a hardware store standing in line behind a well groomed lady, she was in her mid fifties, quiet demeanor and appeared pleasant enough, smiling at other patrons, exchanging pleasantries with the store staff when from out of nowhere she grows two heads each with its own set of smoking horns. Totally unprovoked she exploded into a verbal tirade against the guy in front of her who, dumbfounded, looking like a deer at night caught in a car's headlights, stood there jaw agape. It was so random and off the wall that I looked around to see if someone had a hidden camera somewhere playing a joke. I didn't think she would turn on me but not taking any chances I backed off a few paces, actually 20 feet, and took up a defensive position behind a pillar and watched the scenario unfold. She was crimson red, screaming like a banshee, erratically gesturing with her hands and steadily advancing towards this very surprised customer who gingerly placed all of his purchases on the counter and with hands raised in a surrender position, backed out of the store totally speechless. Within minutes, if not seconds, the demon reverted to a diva and she returned to her previous pleasant self and commented to the teenage boy behind the check-out counter that "he was strange wasn't he?". The young clerk, still shell shocked, mouth open and with a bit of drool working its way down the side of his chin just nodded the affirmative.

What we all witnessed was one of the symptoms of a menopausal woman's mood swing. Mood swing is a fluffy way of describing an explosion of emotions and for what seems to be no apparent reason, at least not apparent to those witnessing the swing. It is a symptom of menopause which is the proverbial "change of life" a change where a female's hormones are shifting, her body is transforming and she can no longer fulfill her destiny of bearing children. This change is not abrupt and generally takes place over a number of years when approaching the 50 year mark and it is signaled when a woman does not have a menstrual period for twelve months.

The physical toll and the mental stress of these changes have a dire impact on their psyche and needless to say it tests the boundaries of their patience and people skills. We have all been on the receiving end of these see-saw swings whether we know it or not and if the woman is not into full menopause when this is happening then they are likely at the perimenopause state which is the developmental transformation that leads up to menopause. This process can start as early as the late 30's and can last anywhere from 2 to 8 years.

While it is difficult to accept the flip-flop moods, the outbursts and the temper, men who think that it is only a hormone change that is making them a bit gnarly should recognized all of the changes that are

taking place inside the body of menopausal women and the associated stress that goes with it. The irritability and hot flashes are the most recognized and most talked about symptoms but there is insomnia that kicks in, weight gain, joint pain, night sweats, fatigue, dry eyes, bowel upset, urinary tract infections. vaginal dryness and short-term memory problems. You would think guys could use the short term memory loss to our advantage in an argument but it doesn't work that way. You will lose anyway and if you don't lose it doesn't mean to say that you won. Female logic 101 !

While this state does not last a lifetime, 8 to 10 years is a long time and un-mitigated or un-checked, it will surely take its toll on a marriage and family, as well as other people she is closely associated with. It is important for a menopausal woman to have a healthy life style by eating well and getting plenty of exercise. The exercise will not only keep the weight in check but will keep the heart and bones strong and will lift a person's mood. The diet should be low in saturated fat and include high fiber grains and breads as well as fish, fruits and vegetables. Menopausal or not, after age 50 lots of calcium should be included in your food intake, at least 1,200 mg daily plus 400 IU of vitamin D is recommended to assist the body use up the calcium. Soy (isoflavones) is said to help and the herb "black cohosh" is supposed to prevent or relieve symptoms but one should speak to their doctor prior to taking it as it is not known whether is safe to take for any longer than 6 months.



In addition to standard exercise, there is paced respiration which is better known as meditative breathing exercises. It has shown to assist in fighting the hot flashes and, used in combination with a routine of yoga movements it will help reduce stress. For severe cases there are some prescription medicines such as HTR or hormone replacement therapy, antidepressants and clonidine which is used to treat high blood pressure. Consulting with a doctor is totally recommended.

The male version of menopause is called andropause and while I have not had time to research any facts on the symptoms, I suspect as in life, it is the opposite of the female version. Judging from my own observations, we with andropause are calmer, more tolerant, focused and accommodating and we don't get too excited about exercise as when we were younger and needed it. As for diet, a few staple vegetables like potato chips and onion dip on hand while watching the game always appears to look after any mood swings. I am not sure that all would agree and without fully investigating the medical accuracy of my version I might not be right on the money, but then I'm just Reading Between the Lines.