



MENOPAUSE, DIABETES AND HEART DISEASE IS THERE A CONNECTION?

By Tricia Talerico, D.C., M.S., Nutr.

Women approaching or currently in menopause may be at increased risk for developing heart disease, in part, due to volatile hormone fluctuations but also because heart disease risk increases with age. The underlying cause of this increased risk is connected to a decline in estrogen production. Estrogen is protective of the heart, it improves the flexibility of the blood vessels and arteries, which is better for blood flow. Decreased flexibility of blood vessels increases the risk of heart disease and stroke as we age. Estrogen also affects our lipid levels, so, the less estrogen our bodies are able to produce, the more likely we are to have elevated cholesterol, a leading marker for heart disease. While we cannot necessarily control when our periods will end, or the fact that we are all aging, there are many controllable lifestyle factors that we can manage in order to reduce our risk of heart disease.

1. Weight gain (especially abdominal weight gain). Estrogen helps to distribute weight equally in the body. It also helps with insulin sensitivity. So, without enough estrogen, we can easily gain weight in our mid-section, thus increasing our risk for heart disease. This doesn't mean we cannot occasionally have a "sweet treat", but the word "occasionally" means different things to different people.

2. Cigarette smoking. This is a leading risk factor for many health conditions, including cancer and heart disease.

3. Stress. Stress has been shown to increase the risk of heart disease and cardiovascular events like heart attacks or stroke. Experimenting with stress reducers like meditation, walking outside in nature, spending time with friends and getting enough sleep can be very effective.

It's also important to start eliminating risk factors earlier in life. If you have high cholesterol, there are several natural approaches to help correct this. Many people try to blame our genetics solely, but there are so many life style changes we can make. Losing weight, eating a more Mediterranean Diet, exercise and taking omega-3 fatty acids (fish oil) and/or Red Yeast Rice or plant sterols.

If you're wondering about diabetes and menopause, studies show that the prevalence of diabetes from pre-menopause to menopause almost doubles! This is, in part, due to lower estrogen levels, but that is not the only reason. Women over 50 may see and feel a weight shift to the midsection. Lower hormone levels may also slow down our metabolism, so we don't burn calories as effectively. Lower estrogen levels also lead to less insulin sensitivity or insulin resistance. So, what can we do?

1. Lower our intake of sugar, unhealthy fats and alcohol. Alcohol seems to be the biggest problem these days. Wine and

other sugary drinks should be less frequent and not part of everyday life.

2. Get regular exercise.

3. Increase our intake of omega-3 fatty acids (excellent for reducing diabetes risk).

Hormone replacement therapy (HRT) may be a way to reintroduce estrogen back into our bodies, but it is not for everyone. Bioidentical hormones, which are all natural, may be better. A thorough family history, lab and saliva testing should be done so that you can understand all of your options.

IMPROVE YOUR HEALTH... IMPROVE YOUR LIFE!



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