



Awareness about Symptoms of Menopause among Women Aged 40 to 55 Years

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ABSTRACT

The aim of this study was to conduct a survey among women aged 40-55 years to find out their awareness about menopause and its symptoms. As every woman undergoes menopause after the age of 40, it is useful for them to have adequate knowledge regarding this topic. Hence a survey is conducted to test their knowledge and raise their awareness about this vital process. Menopause is a natural decline in reproductive hormones when a woman reaches her 40s or 50s. It has adverse effects like sleep pattern changes, mood swings, vaginal dryness etc. It marks the time in a woman's life when her menstruation stops, and she is no longer fertile. Awareness about the symptoms of menopause and its effects is of utmost importance to the women in their 40s to 50s.

Keywords: Menopause, hot flashes, perimenopause, pre-menopause, Hormone Replacement Therapy, mood swings, vaginal atrophy.

INTRODUCTION

Menopause is a normal physiologic process, defined as the permanent cessation of menses for 12 months or more due to termination of ovarian hormone production¹. The process of menopause does not occur overnight, but rather is a gradual process. This so called transition period is a different experience for each woman. There is no reliable lab test to predict when a woman will experience menopause. Menopause is a critical period in a woman's life that not only marks the end of reproductive ability but is also associated with multiple physical, vasomotor, psychological, and sexual complaints. The year immediately preceding and the decade afterward, however, are of much clinical significance². Age of onset of natural menopause also varies worldwide, with the international range being 44.6–52 years.³ In India, the mean age \pm standard deviation (SD) is 45.02 \pm 4.35 years.⁴

Perimenopause is the 3-5 year period before menopause when the oestrogen and progesterone hormone levels begin to drop. Women typically enter into perimenopause in their late 40's and could begin to experience irregular menstrual cycles and common menopause symptoms such as:

- Hot flashes
- Sleep disturbances-insomnia
- Night sweats
- Elevated heart rate
- Mood changes—irritability, depression, anxiety
- Vaginal dryness or discomfort during sexual intercourse

Post menopause starts after one year has passed since the last menstrual cycle. Other symptoms that may have started in perimenopause can continue through menopause and post menopause. A post-menopausal woman can still experience some common symptoms. The intensity of symptoms will vary depending upon which hormones changed, and how much those hormones have changed. According to Hill (1995) the number of postmenopausal women in the world will rise from 467 million in 1990 to 1.2 billion by 2030. Most of the increase in number will occur in developing countries⁵. Since India is a developing country, health care providers should offer screening tests, dietary and exercise recommendations to women coming under this category.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

A Questionnaire consisting of 22 questions related to menopause and its symptoms was prepared. It was manually handed over to some participants and was also conducted online. The Participants were woman aged 40 to 55 years of age. Sample size was one hundred and fifty. Women involved were from rural as well as urban areas. The main criteria was only the above specified age and gender (woman). The questions included were close-ended questions about their lifestyle, prevalence of symptoms such as hot flashes, mood swings, sleep disturbances, and about their prevalent discomforts and illness. The response rate was 100% and the data was categorised and analysed.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

General awareness

Awareness about how menopause is caused and when it occurs was very vague among women. 54% of them thought menopause occurs only when ovary stops



releasing an egg and 59% of them had a wrong knowledge that menopause is the period of time when menstruation stops for a particular time.

Stages of menopause in sample

The distribution of women in their perimenopausal stage was 66 (44%), menopause 63 (42%) and early menopause 21 (14%).

Awareness about symptoms

Higher awareness was seen about commonly experienced symptoms of menopause such as mood swings and hot flashes. Results for mood swings were 68% (102) and for hot flashes was 48% (72). Apart from these symptoms, an additional discomfort was felt by 75 women (50%) during summer months and while cooking. In another study conducted by Lu *et al.*, the most frequent symptom reported was “feeling tired or worn out (86%),” followed by “aching in muscles and joints (85%).” The prevalence of the classical menopausal symptoms – hot flushes, night sweats, and vaginal dryness – in the women aged 45–65 years was 36.8%, 20.8%, and 55.3%, respectively.⁶

Changes with respect to body and menstrual pattern

32% of women who had a regular menstrual pattern were now complaining of irregular bleeding. Out of which 22% claimed it to be painful menses causing severe cramps and body pain. Lighter menstrual bleeding had gradually changed to heavier bleeding for 20% of women.

Body changes were not as noticeable as that of changes related to menstrual pattern. Only 15% had seen a significant increase in their body weight. There was no sign of weight loss.

Gynaecologist intervention

The women who were in their menopause stage showed the common symptoms and they were aware of it because of their frequent visits to their gynaecologist and their encounter with menopause. Among the menopausal women, 90% had frequent appointments with their gynaecologists. But women under perimenopause, in the transition stage weren't aware of their condition because of their rare visits to gynaecologist. They haven't gone to a gynaecologist for about one to three years after the onset of symptoms.

Influence of background on awareness

Among perimenopausal women, 62 (94%) of women were unaware of their transition. Out of which 40% women were from rural areas. The perimenopausal women from rural areas were unaware of their stage of menopause and of the ways to keep them ready to face menopause and its effects due to their lack of resources in their community and improper medical care. This shows that background plays a major role in awareness.

Complications and ways to overcome (treatment)

Menopause leads to complications like osteoporosis and heart disease. Phytoestrogen is a general definition that has been applied to any plant metabolite that induces biological responses in vertebrates and can mimic or modulate the actions of endogenous oestrogen's usually binding to ER.⁷ Phytoestrogens prevent bone loss caused by oestrogen deficiency without exerting substantial adverse effects on the uterus and breast.⁸

Doctors usually advise these women to take calcium supplements as a precaution. Healthy postmenopausal women whose usual dietary calcium intake is low should be urged to increase their calcium intake to 800 mg per day, the current recommended dietary allowance, in order to limit bone loss.⁹ Vaginal atrophy is one of the common symptoms. It is due to lack of the reproductive hormone oestrogen which results in thinning of tissues, as well as decreased lubrication. Treatment with intravaginally applied oxytocin could be an alternative to local oestrogen treatment in women with postmenopausal vaginal atrophy.¹⁰

Women in rural areas (40%) weren't aware and aren't taking any of these above mentioned measures. Therefore, they are more susceptible to suffer from complications of menopause.

Preference for therapy

Among the women who were aware of their stage and their symptoms, only 4% had opted for hormone replacement therapy. There is evidence that oestrogen therapy (hormone therapy) decreases risk for coronary heart disease and hip fracture.¹¹ It can help to overcome the complications.

CONCLUSION

Most common reason for lack of awareness was their inability to relate their symptoms to menopause and their common notion that these symptoms experienced by them was due to some other illness in their body. Their unawareness may lead to complications after menopause. The perimenopause stage is one of the key stages of menopause and therefore, awareness among women in this stage is very important.

Women play a major role in the society. Their health is of utmost importance. Women in rural areas must be given higher preference and they need to be educated and briefed about menopause, its stages and symptoms through awareness campaigns and other means. Initiative has to be taken to provide them with good health care. Hormone therapies can also be made available for those who can't afford it at a lower cost. Educating the women, and planning ahead for this time of challenges and opportunities, every woman can make this period as one of the most rewarding and enriching time of her life. The real importance of menopause today lies in the increasing longevity of the 21st century woman. By making wise decisions about menopause and a healthy lifestyle, we



can make the most of the 20, 30, or more years we have ahead!

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