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Promoting women's health at midlife and beyond

Original Link: <http://www.menopause.org/for-women/menopauseflashes/make-your-menopause-a-positive-experience>

Make Your Menopause a Positive Experience
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The transition to menopause can be a time of reflection and inspiration. Although transitions of any kind can be inherently difficult, many women experience a newfound sense of freedom and anticipate personal growth.

"Menopause is a time of great change -- it is the adolescence of older age but better than adolescence of youth because menopausal women have confidence and experience."

"It is definitely a time of choice and should really be about finding out what you really want. It is a time to take charge and shape the remaining chapters of your life."

The attitude with which you embark upon this transition can have a tremendous impact on your experience of it, as well as on your choice of behaviors. Studies bear this out: negative beliefs held prior to menopause can be predictive of a more difficult time. For instance, the more catastrophic your thoughts about hot flashes, the more intense they will be. [Depression during menopause](#) is not uncommon.

More recently, it has also been shown that changing those negative thoughts and attitudes can result in a reduction of symptoms. Even in the face of difficult symptoms, women consistently say that changing their outlook helps. The following tips can help you transform your menopause experience.

Watch Your Thoughts

There is growing evidence that the *absence* of positive thoughts has a greater negative impact on our health and well-being than does the presence of negative ones. One way to cultivate positive thoughts and emotions is to keep an "appreciation journal." In my Mind Over Menopause program, I encourage patients to write down three things every night for which they are grateful.

They then hold these images in their minds for several minutes. Done regularly, women do



notice a difference.

"It changed how I felt psychologically. I learned to appreciate things more. Appreciating and enjoying a beautiful spring day because it's beautiful. I think the program opened my eyes as to how beautiful life can be."

"Life is what I make it for myself and no matter what the externals, at the end of the day by attitude and outlook I decide whether the glass is half full or half empty."

Laugh

Laughter brings us closer to people, moves us into more positive mind-sets, can stimulate our immune system, enhance our learning and memory, and help us cope better with the stressors in our lives. Laughter is a great menopause help.

Make Time for Yourself

Exercise, eat right, and incorporate relaxation techniques into your day. This practice moves you out of the stress response, which is harmful to our health. Eliciting a "relaxation response" increases muscle relaxation, quiets the mind, promotes positive emotions, learning, concentration, creativity, and can reduce such symptoms as hot flashes, insomnia, PMS, and pain. When women actually make themselves a priority (even 15 minutes a day), dramatic changes can occur.

"The fundamentally transformative thing is discovering that I'm worth that time. I take yoga class once a week. The whole thing has really snowballed into taking over my own post-child life for myself."

"It's very empowering to learn what your triggers are and to be able to change your lifestyle so that you feel good. And, it's not a sacrifice. You're really giving yourself a gift."

Stay Connected

Social support is key to health and can even help you live longer. It is one of the first pieces of advice women share.

"At this stage, women need other women -- friends with a rich life experience and wisdom to share."

"I measure my success in terms of the richness and closeness of my connections with good people."

Stay in the Moment

Try to be mindful (aware and present) of each and every moment of your life. This practice prevents you from worrying about the future (often fraught with anxiety) or dwelling on the past (often tinged with regret).

By combining positive thoughts, a healthy lifestyle, and relaxation techniques, many women are changing the menopause experience.

"I feel that I've acquired, and taken to heart, tools and techniques that fortify me when I feel my body is a stranger. I can quiet it with deep breathing and meditation. I have techniques to help me sleep better. I am kinder to myself. More empathetic to others. I have new thoughts and behaviors that help me change my mood before I feel at the mercy of the blues. I walk daily (after years of detesting exercise). I feel my energy rebuilt and my mood lifted with exercise. I have the new power to be positive."

"I am more aware than ever of my own ability, and responsibility, to change the course of my life, and to choose happiness, joy, and peace, rather than waiting for someone else, or fate, to deliver it."

"If this is in fact 'midlife,' I have another half ahead. And that's a lot of time to use the wisdom gained in the first half to make the second half richer and more joyful."

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