

A pause for thought about health

The word “climacteric” literally means a critical or crucial time – a year when there are significant changes in health or fortune.

Most often the word is used to describe that time in life when there is a decrease in the ability to reproduce – in women leading to the menopause.

For some women, managing the menopause is quite a challenge. Unpleasant symptoms include breast tenderness, hot flushes, night sweats, mood swings and depression. No surprise then that hormone replacement therapy (HRT) which can control these symptoms became so popular – popular that is, until 2002 when results from the Women’s Health Initiative (WHI) study suggested that there could be serious side effects from HRT.

However, now researchers have had another look at the results of the WHI study, the news is not all that bad. In fact the news is pretty good.

According to Professor Amos Pines, Chair of the International Menopause Society (IMS), women in the early stages of menopause should not worry about taking HRT medicines. And IMS President Dr David Sturdee said that common “misconceptions” surrounding HRT have resulted in many women having difficulty with menopause symptoms. Women should take HRT he said “for as long as they need to be on it”.

A summary of the scientific evidence and common perceptions relating to the menopause can be found on the IMS website www.imsociety.org.

Of course men’s bodies gradually undergo change as well. By the time we get to our 40s and 50s our bodies may begin to show signs of wear and tear. Regular ‘check-ups’ and ‘maintenance’ procedures, which women are so used to having carried out, will be able to prevent serious illness or at least allow for early diagnosis and effective treatment. So it should be for men.

Even if no health problems are apparent, from the age of 50 onwards men should attend their GP for a check up at least every two years – and if men have the occasion to visit the doctor, say for the treatment of an injury, or perhaps travel vaccinations, they should take the opportunity to have blood pressure and blood sugar levels checked. Conditions such as high blood pressure and diabetes can occur with few symptoms and little or no warning.

During their lifetime, women may have a few more specific health problems than men; however, for those conditions which are likely to affect both men and women, men are often at greater risk.

Probably because of lifestyle issues, such as diet, lack of exercise, smoking and drinking habits and the tendency to be overweight, men are more likely to suffer from heart disease and certain cancers.

There are of course some special health issues for men and these are covered in the *Men’s Health* fact card available from pharmacies around Australia providing the Pharmaceutical Society’s Self Care health information.

There are other relevant topics in the Self Care fact card range as well. They include *Weight and Health*, *Exercise and the Heart*, *Sleeping Problems*, *Heartburn and Indigestion* and *Gout*. Each card offers information about signs and symptoms, self help procedures and when to seek further advice.

The week beginning June 9 is International Men’s Health Week – perhaps a time to pause and reflect on men’s health issues - by both men and women.

Meanwhile, you can get those fact cards all year round from a Self Care Pharmacy. Phone 1300 369 772 or check out the Pharmaceutical Society’s website at www.psa.org.au