

Postmenopausal Women's Health

The average life expectancy of Hong Kong women is 82 years old. Therefore, women spend a much longer phrase of their lifetime (about 1/3) in menopause/postmenopause. It is estimated that approximately **1,105,110** women have reached menopause/postmenopause in Hong Kong, i.e. about 1/6 of total population. After menopause, ovulation no longer takes place and only small amounts of estrogen are produced. Consequently, women experience various physical and psychological changes during menopause/postmenopause. Estrogen deficiency may further lead to serious long-term effects such as increasing the risk of osteoporosis (bone loss) and cardiovascular disease. The mood and quality of life of postmenopausal women may also be adversely affected.

Postmenopausal Women's Health Survey by Faculty of Medicine, the University of HK (HKU)

Department of Medicine, Faculty of Medicine, HKU has recently conducted a women's health survey, with the aim to know more about the health status of Hong Kong postmenopausal women, especially in the areas of osteoporosis, cardiovascular diseases and psychological health. A total of 503 perimenopausal or postmenopausal women were successfully interviewed by population-based telephone survey.

Amongst the interviewees, about 30% lacked exercise and were over-weight. Besides, 31% had hypertension (high risk factor for cardiovascular disease), 16% had osteoporosis, 11% had various gynaecological diseases and diabetes mellitus and 7% had cardiovascular disease.

Survey Findings:

(i) Osteoporosis

Osteoporosis is one of the most common postmenopausal women diseases. This is due to the decline of female hormone/estrogen after menopause which accelerates bone loss and leads to low bone density. It is estimated that about 1/3 of HK postmenopausal women have osteoporosis.

The survey conducted by Department of Medicine, Faculty of Medicine, HKU showed that about 8% of postmenopausal women had kyphosis, 29% were shorter when compared with aged 25, 96% were not willing to take preventive drugs for osteoporosis as they thought it was not necessary. 83% had not discussed or assessed by doctor on the risk of osteoporosis. This reflected that osteoporosis in Hong Kong was seriously under-diagnosed.

(ii) Cardiovascular Disease

Cardiovascular disease is a major health risk of postmenopausal women. Reduced estrogen (*a female hormone that can help to prevent blockage of blood vessels and lower level of cholesterol in blood*) and metabolism after menopause can lead to obesity and therefore increased risk of cardiovascular disease.

The survey also showed that postmenopausal women had misconceptions on the symptoms of cardiovascular disease. Many of them wrongly thought that headache (15%), dizziness (19%), insomnia (10%), dazzle (9%), numbness (19%) and fatigue (10%) were symptoms of cardiovascular disease.

(iii) Psychological Health

Postmenopausal women experience a number of physical and psychological changes which may negatively affect their mood, e.g. sudden depression, worry and feeling not peaceful etc.

According to the survey findings, about 1/3 of postmenopausal women could not accomplish what they

plan/want to do, 57% cannot concentrate on work or daily activities due to mood disturbance. In addition, 43% did not feel energetic and 68% did not feel positive or were unhappy. The social life of 34% postmenopausal women was also adversely affected by mood disturbance.

The above figures reflected that a majority of postmenopausal women were suffered from mood disturbance/disorder. As menopause/postmenopausal might also affect the sex life of couple, it was important for their spouse and family members to pay extra care and support to help them overcome the sudden physical and psychological changes brought by menopause/postmenopause.

Conclusions and Recommendations

Menopause/postmenopause is a natural stage of a woman's life, therefore, women should face it with positive attitude.

The following are some health tips to prevent osteoporosis and cardiovascular disease:

1. Healthy diet
 - balanced diet
 - more vegetables and high-calcium diet
 - avoid intake of high cholesterol food
2. Maintain a “healthy” weight
3. Quit smoking, drinking alcohol and avoid excessive intake of caffeine
4. Do weight-bearing exercises 3-4 times/week, e.g. walking & jogging for at least 30 minutes
5. Regular health check
6. Discuss with doctor on your risk of osteoporosis and cardiovascular disease, take drugs for prevention or treatment if necessary.

In addition, understanding and care from family members are the biggest support to postmenopausal women!