Managing Menopause

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You’ve probably read a lot about the health effects of menopause. They range from increased risk of heart disease to osteoporosis and painful intercourse. What you don’t hear a lot about is how menopause can change your physical appearance. This time in your life can bring about changes in appearance that, while not life-threatening, can affect your self-image, mood and overall sense of well-being. Here’s a look at how menopause can affect your appearance—and what you can do to prevent, delay or treat these changes.

Managing hair loss—and gain

Yes, hormone changes can wreck your hair. So do not be surprised if you find that you have less of it on your head and more of it on your face and body. Female pattern baldness is caused in part by heredity and in part to declining estrogen levels. As estrogen diminishes, the hormone androgen, sometimes called the male hormone, begins to make its presence known. For some women, that means thicker, coarser, darker hair on the face and body.

Hair loss can be treated with minoxidil, a drug that stimulates hair growth. Treatment is expensive, must be continued for life and is not effective for everyone. Hair transplantation is another option for some women, but it is also expensive. If you are concerned, you might simply ask your hairstylist to suggest a good style for thin hair or ask to simply give you advice on how to care for your hair to minimize loss.

Unwanted facial or body hair can be plucked, bleached or waxed. Electrolysis is the most permanent method of hair removal, but it requires repeated visits to a trained electrologist, which can become expensive. In some cases, drug treatment may be appropriate. A sudden increase in body hair can signal a medical problem, so if you notice such a change, see your doctor.

Helping skin age gracefully

As estrogen levels decline, skin becomes drier and less elastic. What can you do? Because your skin produces less protective melanin after menopause, it is important to use sunscreen, wear a hat and avoid the sun, especially between 10 a.m. and 2 p.m. Doing so will help you delay further aging of the skin.

Keeping your teeth healthy

The hormonal changes that accompany menopause can cause or aggravate various dental problems. These include gum diseases such as gingivitis and its more damaging
relative, periodontitis. In some women, especially those who have osteoporosis, the tooth-bearing bones become weak, a condition that can lead to tooth loss.

Symptoms of gum disease (also called periodontal disease) include gums that are red and swollen, gums that bleed easily or are badly receding and chronic bad breath. Good dental hygiene can prevent periodontal disease and minimize the damage caused by receding gums. See your dentist for regular checkups and cleanings, brush as instructed by your dentist and floss daily.

**Avoiding varicose veins**
Menopause can aggravate varicose veins that may have appeared during pregnancy. Keep varicose veins hidden by following these tips:

- exercise to improve blood flow
- avoid leg waxing, which can injure delicate blood vessels
- do not cross your legs while sitting
- avoid very hot showers, as they can dilate blood vessels
- maintain a healthy weight
- wear support hose if you stand a lot

Fortunately, most of the cosmetic changes that may arise after menopause is minor and can be prevented or treated. But if you are troubled by any of them, it does not hurt to remember that true beauty really does come from within!

For appointments, referrals or more information, please contact (706) 721-4959.