Men's Health

Strategies from Birth to Male **'Menopause'**

Foundation for Chiropractic Progress

Contents

Men's Health Strategies from Birth to Male **'Menopause'**

When it comes to a discussion about hormones, women have certainly taken center stage in mainstream media. The changes women go through during puberty, then decades of fluctuations every month for periods, childbirth and all the way to the profound changes during the cessation of menses (menopause) are well recognized. Men, however, also go through significant hormone changes during their stages of life that are different from those in women and haven't been as widely appreciated.

The anatomy and physiology of the male body is multifaceted and complex. From infancy into boyhood, puberty into parenting years and mid-life to the elder years, males engage in an ongoing continuum of changes in their bodies too. One of the most significant is the male version of menopause, formally referred to as 'andropause.' Doctors of chiropractic (DCs) have been supporting men's health for well over a century to help men of all ages naturally address the changes that happen in their bodies over a lifetime.

Birth

Beginning with birth, long-standing statistics from the *Journal of the American Osteopathic Association* imply that 80% of newborn babies (male or female) have suffered some sort of physical insult during birth that may not be easily recognized.[1] Those born breech, with the use of forceps or via cesarean section have an even higher risk. Boys tend to be heavier, longer and have a have a larger head circumference which may contribute to boys being more likely to require instrument-assisted deliveries or C-sections.[2] DCs can examine and adjust babies from cranium to pelvis to optimize neuromusculoskeletal dynamics to help facilitate a well-functioning, pain-free start in life.

Colicky babies are also a common occurrence. They aren't just babies that cry a lot. Studies have shown clinical evidence of vestibular dysregulation in the brains of infants with colic. Chiropractors address the issue by means of gentle treatment to support the joints and relax muscles of the neck. The suboccipital region (at the base of the skull and upper neck) has been cited as a particular area of focus.[3] Studies have also shown that 78% of infants with breastfeeding issues were able to exclusively breastfeed after two to five visits with a chiropractor in a two-week time period.[4]

Natural, gentle approaches to care for potential neuromusculoskeletal issues are important for the development and well-being of both male and female infants.

Childhood and Puberty

From toddlers to school-age, children are developing and increasingly engaged in a variety of activities that can affect the neuromusculoskeletal system. Learning to walk, growing pains, tumbles and falls, rough-housing during play, heavy backpacks, text neck from cell phones and school sports can all contribute to creating imbalance or inciting injury. These formative years of growth are also the peak time to watch for signs of scoliosis, though more prevalent in girls, scoliosis can also occur in many boys.[5]

Chiropractors evaluate the spine and extremities of active growing kids to catch alignment issues before they have a chance to become a problem. DCs can also detect early signs of scoliosis, as well as monitor the curve and counsel on interventions.

Boys typically hit puberty a couple of years after girls. Girls go through puberty between the ages of 8 to 14 and boys 10 to 16. By the end of high school or shortly after, the shortest boy in the class may very well have 'outgrown' the tallest girl. Testosterone levels will increase and as boys move through puberty they will go through a few distinct changes including: widening of the shoulders, an increase in muscle mass and strength, change in voice, growth of hair (legs, armpits, groin and chest) and sperm production begins.[6] The feet, arms and legs may grow in advance of the rest of the body and some boys may also have temporary breast enlargement which is normal.

From a biomechanical standpoint, it is important to note that height and weight distributions profoundly change, sometimes very rapidly. All of these changes can alter biomechanics and make boys feel clumsy as they are forced to get used to a new body dynamic and have to alter biomechanics and coordination.

A rapid growth rate can also lead to conditions of dysregulated growth such as Osgood-Schlatter disease which mainly affects males. It is a common cause of knee pain during the growth spurts of adolescents, particularly those that participate in sports.[7] DCs often manage cases of Osgood-Schlatter's to get kids back to the game as soon as possible.

When performing sports physicals, also known as preparticipation exams, DCs prioritize athlete safety and watch for other potential conditions that may be present such as scoliosis, Ehlers-Danlos Syndrome (a condition that can result in extreme flexibility of the ligaments which can lead to serious injury), issues with the heart, neuromusculoskeletal issues or diseases like Marfan Syndrome which can affect the connective tissues of the body that support bones, muscles, organs and other tissues. Those with Marfan Syndrome also need providers to watch their cardiovascular health closely. Such conditions found during a sports physical would warrant a prompt co-care referral to a specialist.

During the busy years of childhood, DCs are an important part of the health care team for neuromusculoskeletal injuries that may occur on the playground or during sports activities. Chiropractic care strives to maximize joint function throughout the spine and extremities and help children through the very real aches and pains that can occur with rapid spurts of growth and development.[8]

Mid-Life Differences Between **Menopause and Andropause**

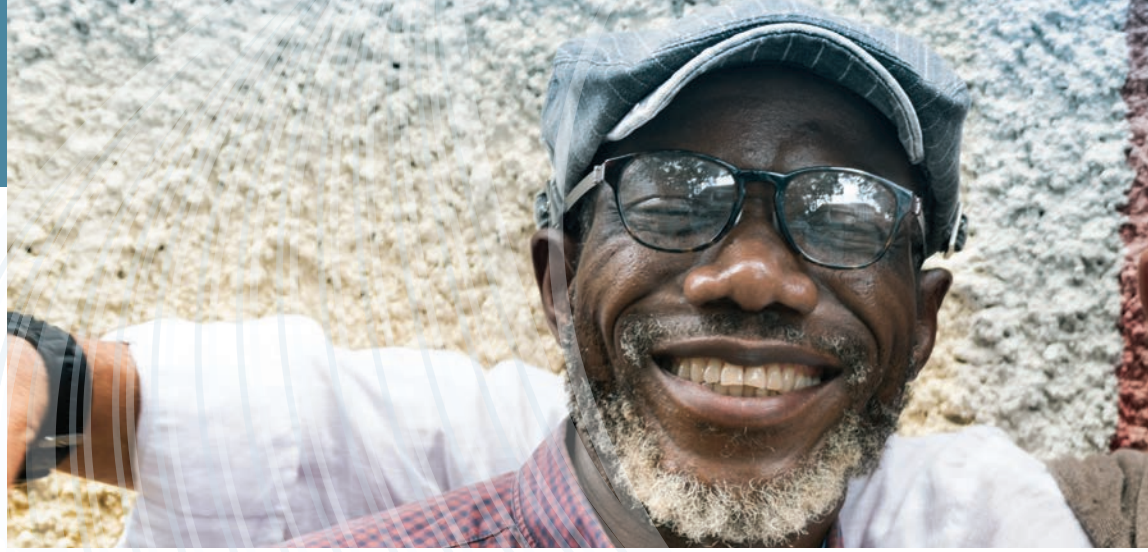
The term ‘menopause’ refers to the permanent stop of a woman’s monthly menstruation. Men obviously don’t have menses to actually go through ‘menopause’ so the term ‘male menopause’ as seen in the media is utilized very loosely in reference to the male experience. Though there are similarities with how males and females age (graying hair, loss of muscle, changes in skin elasticity), the actual process in men happens very differently compared to women. For females, the involved sex hormones plummet during a relatively short and intense period of time before and during menopause. In men, the production of testosterone and other related hormones naturally declines over decades starting at about age 40.

The male version of this midlife transition is formally called ‘andropause.’ Testosterone belongs to a class of hormones called ‘androgens’ which produce and maintain those male characteristics seen to develop during puberty. Andropause describes the slowly decreasing androgen levels that men experience. After age 40, it is estimated that men’s testosterone declines an average of about 1% per year.[9] Men may gradually detect a loss of muscle mass/strength, thinning and graying of the hair, less sexual desire or erectile differences from when they were younger.

It is important to note that the decline should be slow. Medical attention and testing for low testosterone stemming from other issues may be necessary if symptoms develop quickly. Symptoms may include: sudden loss of sexual desire, erectile dysfunction, breast discomfort or swelling (man boobs/gynecomastia), infertility, height loss, stress fractures, low mineral density, hot flashes or sweats, depression or anxiety.[10]

Bone density should always be a consideration for both sexes during the aging process. Though osteoporosis is more prevalent in women, the National Institutes of Health has determined that the number of fractures caused by fragile bones in men has increased in recent years, especially in men over 65.[11] Though women's osteoporosis gets more attention, the statistics for men are significant showing that one third of worldwide hip fractures (leading to loss of independence) occur in the male population.[12] Understanding the risk factors, possible vitamin deficiencies and taking steps to screen and manage the issue should be on every man's radar.

Paying attention to changes in strength and muscle mass is also important as hormones diminish. The heavy lifting that a man may have commonly performed in younger years can be the cause of injury in an older man that forgets about the changes in his body and tries to continue with loads that he once was able to handle. This can lead to sprain/strain injuries, intervertebral disc injury or falls that can have more profound ramifications.



The Profound Effects of the **Prostate**

Other changes may also be happening as men age. Changes in the prostate are extremely common. The prostate is a reproductive gland only found in males and sits just below the bladder and in front of the rectum.[13] Doctors perform a cursory test during full physical exams utilizing a digital (finger) procedure that intrudes the anal opening to palpate toward the front of the body to check for enlargement of the gland.

The primary function of the gland is the production of a fluid that combines with sperm from the testes and fluids from other glands to make up semen. The muscles of the prostate also work to forcefully press semen into the urethra and then expel it out during ejaculation.[14] In some men, enlargement of the gland can affect sexual function.

For many men, the prostate enlarges as they reach the fifth decade of life. Called Benign Prostatic Hyperplasia (BPH), the condition affects approximately 50% of men between the ages of 51-60, 70% between ages 60-69 and 80% of men over 70 years of age.[15] Though the precise cause of BPH is not completely understood, it is recognized as correlating with the aging process.

Because of the close proximity to the bladder, symptoms of an enlarged prostate include: frequent or urgent need to urinate, needing to get up and urinate more at night, difficulty initiating the urine stream, a stream that stop and starts, dribbling at the end of the stream or not being able to fully empty the bladder.[16] This may also predispose some men to urinary tract infections.

A more menacing issue for aging men is prostate cancer. About 80% of all men that reach age 80 have been found to have cancer cells in their prostate. Prostate cancer is most common among African American men, followed by Hispanic and Native American men which means these groups should pay extra attention to early monitoring for the condition.[17] Though Asian American men have the lowest rates of the disease and Caucasian men carry moderate risk, all men should be mindful about potential symptoms. The symptoms of prostate cancer can be very similar to BPH so monitoring the prostate through urine, bloodwork and other procedures, such as biopsies, is crucial for prevention and early detection.[18] Utilizing a test for Prostatic Specific Antigen (PSA) is a typical biomarker that doctors will look at as they evaluate prostate status and analyze the effectiveness of treatments.

Both BPH and prostate cancer have been linked to frequent pain or stiffness in the lower back, hips, pelvic or rectal area or upper thighs.[19] In cases when DCs observe recurring low back pain along with other symptoms, it would be common for them to refer you to a urological specialist for a consultation and exam for your prostate.

Chiropractic Care Supporting **Men's Health**

DCs work to support men of all ages as they transition into each spectrum of life. Whether engaging in sports, leisure activities, heavy lifting or long days at the office, chiropractic addresses the root causation of back pain and other neuromusculoskeletal issues to help men address posture, ergonomics, muscle balance, joint function, strength and healing from injuries. Chiropractic care optimizes the function of the joints and surrounding soft tissues from birth to the formative years and into adulthood to promote healthy development and joint preservation to help reduce the risk of degeneration in the spine and extremities. DCs also create individualized plans to work with patients on lifestyle factors such as diet, exercise, sleep issues and alleviating stress.

In mid-life, andropause and beyond DCs can help male patients evaluate symptoms, work with back pain that can be caused by prostate involvement, refer to needed specialists, provide care and recommend supplements to promote bone health, monitor potential issues with bone loss and provide individualized care plans to help support men in every stage of life to increase performance and enhance quality of life.

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