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News Classifieds Directory

Sunday, July 23, 2006 | Home > News > Journal Features > Health & Fitness

Journal Features

[Monthly Features](#)
[Arts & Entertainment](#)
[Business Watch](#)
[Community Calendars](#)
[Community News](#)
[Customer Profile](#)
[Distribution Sites](#)
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Health & Fitness

Can women avoid menopause? One author thinks so

By Cathy Herholdt 07/04/2006

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[Top of Page](#)

I admit it-I'm scared of menopause. With my 40th birthday just around the corner, I've begun dreading what I've watched my now 50 and over friends go through. I'm bracing myself for the unbearable hot flashes, lack of sleep, depression and mood swings, not to mention the complete loss of sex drive many women experience.

When Beth Rosenshein's book *Preventing Menopause* came across my desk, I was intrigued, but mostly skeptical. I figured she was either trying to sell an herbal remedy, or peddling a New Age program that promised to alter your "perception" of menopause. But I was surprised to discover that Rosenshein, who has a background in electrical and bio-medical engineering, has done her research, and presents some ideas that even doctors, including endocrinologist Elena Christofides, M.D., who wrote the forward to the book, say deserve more attention and further discussion.

"We've taken menopause for granted as a medical profession," said Dr. Christofides. "We need to understand it better in order to know how to best treat it."

Rosenshein takes it one step further, stating that menopause could be prevented altogether, with the right balance of bio-identical hormones. The problem, she said, is that those hormones are not available to women in the form of commercial products, and probably won't be unless more research is done and pharmaceutical companies start making the products that would make her vision a reality.

"I don't want any woman to have to go through what I've gone through," said Rosenshein, 46, who describes in her introduction to the book being catapulted quite suddenly into menopause a few years ago. "I don't want to see my children grow up and walk in those shoes."

Using the term "ovarian failure," Rosenshein explained that menopause is more than the end of a woman's reproductive life; it is complete failure of the ovaries, she said. And the ovaries, she points out, with the complex set of hormones they produce, affect all aspects of a woman's body and health.

"I don't think any organ failure is normal," she said. "It's involuntary and it's untreated."

Rosenshein likens menopause to the failure of the thyroid to produce its vital hormone. This is treated with medication that mimics the function of the thyroid, she explained. But menopause, she says, is not treated the same. Instead, the most common forms of hormone replacement therapy (HRT) are nowhere near the identical levels the ovaries produce.

While current forms of HRT offer relief from some symptoms, improve sleep and increase stamina, "right now there are not enough products on the market to restore a woman's sexual response," Rosenshein said. In her book, she lists the effects of ovarian failure on the systems in the body, including the nervous system, metabolism, bones, GI tract, brain and more. "Every organ system in the body uses ovarian hormones to function," she writes. "It follows then that ovarian failure negatively affects

every organ in the body."

A hundred years ago, she notes, most people lost all of their teeth by the time they reached their mid-40s. Today, improved dental care and strides in the dental industry make it possible to keep our teeth into old age. The same, she said, is possible for the ovaries. The ovaries eventually fail because women are living longer, she said.

Rosenshein makes a point to separate the reproductive function of the ovaries from their endocrine function. She also points out that men go through a similar process somewhere around their 70s, and this is often treated aggressively. "We were meant to grow old together," she said.

Ovaries fail because they run out of eggs, and extending egg production is how women can ultimately avoid menopause, Rosenshein said. This too could be achieved with the use of hormones.

Dr. Christofides said the ethics of this need to be discussed further, but added, "It is important to have ovarian health throughout our lives, and this area has been neglected. Beth's book shines light on a valuable topic," she said.

But, some might ask, isn't menopause a normal, natural process?

"It's a normal process for humans in the modern era," said Dr. Christofides. "But there is no model for menopause in the animal world."

She agrees with the author that more commercial products are needed to attempt to mimic the function of the ovaries exactly. "It's a very difficult process. It's not as easy as a prescription for Premarin or Prempro," she said. But, she said, attempting to mimic ovarian function is a reasonable thing to do. She recommends working with an endocrinologist toward this goal.

Dr. Christofides cautions that it must be determined to be safe based on the patient's personal and family history, and doses must be evaluated based on what is trying to be achieved. It's not appropriate, for example, to seek the same hormone levels as a 30-year-old. "Unfortunately, the rest of the body ages and you have to take that into consideration," she said.

Rosenshein says her main goals in writing the book are to educate the public and push for more research in the area of prolonging ovarian health. More versatile forms of testosterone, estrogen and progesterone are needed, she said.

"I'm not about telling people what to do. I'm about educating people that right now we don't have that option," she said.

The response has been good so far, Rosenshein said. She's received numerous emails from women who work in fields such as law, where they need a clear mind to perform their jobs and are frustrated with the inability to concentrate caused by menopause. She's also received positive feedback from doctors who understand the limitations of current HRT and want more options.

She hopes to see more research trials being conducted. "Right now there are no attempts to try and mimic ovarian function," she said.

Her recommendation for women who are interested in prolonging the life of their ovaries is to educate themselves about the issue and become activists for more research.

"Don't be scared, be informed," she said. For more information or to order Rosenshein's book *Preventing Menopause*, visit her Web site at www.preventingmenopause.com.

Return to [Top of Page](#)

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