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## THE PHYSIOLOGICAL AND PSYCHOLOGICAL CHALLENGES OF MENOPAUSE: IMPACTS AND COPING STRATEGIES ON WOMEN'S HEALTH

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**Abstract:** The menopause is a natural phase in a woman's life, usually between the ages of 45 and 55, characterized by the cessation of menstruation and a decrease in female sex hormones. This transition can cause physiological challenges such as hot flushes, sleep disturbances and an increased risk of cardiovascular disease, as well as psychological impacts such as anxiety, depression and changes in identity. These symptoms significantly affect women's quality of life and emotional well-being. Appropriate treatment, including hormone therapy, alternative therapies such as herbal medicine and acupuncture, as well as psychological interventions such as cognitive-behavioral therapy, have been shown to be effective in relieving symptoms and promoting well-being. The combination of physical and emotional strategies can improve adaptation to the menopause. It is essential that health professionals adopt a holistic approach, taking into account women's individual needs. Social support and education about the menopause play a crucial role in helping women cope with the changes in a healthy and positive way, promoting a smoother transition and a better quality of life.

**Keywords:** Women's Health, Mental Health, Quality of Life, Menopausal Symptoms, Menopause.

## INTRODUCTION

The menopause is a natural phase in a woman's life, usually occurring between the ages of 45 and 55, marked by the cessation of menstruation and a decrease in the production of female sex hormones such as estrogen and progesterone. Although it is a physiological phenomenon, the transition to the menopause can create significant challenges for women's physical and mental health. The impact of this change occurs not only on a biological level, but also on a psychological one, affecting women's quality of life and emotional well-being (Mendonça *et al.*, 2024).

Physiologically, the menopause is accompanied by a series of symptoms, such as hot flushes, sleep disturbances, changes in weight and body fat distribution, as well as an increased risk of cardiovascular disease and osteoporosis (Cardoso *et al.*, 2023). These symptoms can be debilitating, leading to a decline in quality of life and an increased risk of chronic diseases. The scientific literature points out that the appropriate treatment of these symptoms, through hormonal and non-hormonal therapies, can significantly improve women's health during this phase (Fernandes *et al.*, 2021).

From a psychological point of view, the menopause is often associated with feelings of loss and changes in a woman's identity. The perception of aging and the fear of no longer being desirable or useful to society can generate anxiety and depression (Rapkevicz *et al.*, 2020). Studies suggest that menopause can be a period of psychological mourning for many women, due to the transition from a reproductive to a non-reproductive cycle, which can affect emotional state and self-image (Montezeli *et al.*, 2022). Stress management and appropriate coping strategies are essential to minimize these psychological effects.

Coping strategies play a crucial role in helping women deal with the challenges of the menopause. Practices such as physical exercise, healthy eating and psychological therapies, such as cognitive-behavioral therapy, have been shown to be effective in reducing depressive and anxiety symptoms, as well as promoting a healthy adaptation to aging (Santos *et al.*, 2024). In addition, social support and involvement in support groups are also considered protective factors for women's psychological well-being during this phase of life (De Melo *et al.*, 2022).

Finally, it is essential that health professionals adopt an integrated and holistic approach when addressing the challenges of the meno-

pause. Personalizing treatment, taking into account individual physiological and psychological needs, is essential to promote women's health and quality of life at this stage (Lage *et al.*, 2023). By considering the physical and emotional aspects in a balanced way, it is possible to provide more effective and targeted care, contributing to women's well-being during and after the menopause.

The aim of this study is to analyze the physiological and psychological challenges faced by women during the menopause, highlighting their impact on health physical and emotional. It seeks to understand how physiological symptoms, such as hot flushes and sleep disturbances, influence women's quality of life, as well as to investigate the psychological aspects associated with the transition to menopause, including anxiety, depression and changes in identity. In addition, the study aims to identify effective coping strategies, such as therapeutic interventions and social support, which can help women deal with the transformations of this phase of life, promoting healthy ageing and emotional well-being.

## METHODOLOGY

The methodology of this study was structured as a systematic literature review, with the aim of evaluating the physiological and psychological challenges faced by women during menopause, highlighting their impacts on physical and emotional health and the coping strategies adopted to improve quality of life. The research was carried out between August and September 2024 in the Virtual Health Library (VHL), Latin American and Caribbean Health Sciences Literature (LILACS), Medical Literature Analysis and Retrieval System Online (MEDLINE) and Scientific Electronic Library Online (SCIELO) databases. The Health Sciences Descriptors (DeCS) "Menopause"; "Women's Health"; "Quality of Life" and "Mental Health" were used, combi-

ned with related terms such as "Hot Flushes", "Depression", "Anxiety", "Sleep Disorders" and "Hormone Treatment", structuring the search with the Boolean operator "AND" to ensure the relevance of the results.

The inclusion criteria included complete articles, freely available in the databases, published between 2020 and 2024, in Portuguese, English or Spanish, which addressed the central theme of the physiological and psychological challenges of the menopause, with an emphasis on coping strategies and the impact on quality of life. The exclusion criteria included incomplete articles, paid articles, articles repeated in the databases, review articles, studies in other languages and those that did not deal directly with the subject of the study.

In the initial stage of the search, 1,300 articles were identified. After applying the inclusion and exclusion criteria, the sample was reduced to 90 articles. After thorough reading and eligibility assessment, 17 articles were selected for the final analysis. The data collected was organized and categorized according to each study's contribution to the topic, covering aspects such as menopause symptoms, physiological and psychological impacts, coping strategies, including pharmacological and non-pharmacological treatments, and innovations in therapeutic approaches to promote female well-being during this phase of life.

This methodology allowed for an in-depth analysis of the challenges faced by menopausal women, providing a comprehensive view of the coping strategies adopted to deal with the physiological and emotional impacts of this phase and how these approaches contribute to improving quality of life.

## RESULTS

The results of this study show that the menopause presents significant challenges for women's health, both in physiological and psychological terms. According to Backes *et al.* (2022), the most common symptoms include hot flushes, night sweats, changes in the menstrual cycle, sleep disturbances and vaginal dryness, which directly affect women's quality of life. Women who experience these symptoms often report negative impacts on daily activities, productivity at work and sexual health, as well as an increase in physical and emotional stress, especially during the early postmenopausal years. According to Oliveira *et al.* (2023), these difficulties are more intense in women who experience an early menopause or those with a history of intense menstrual symptoms.

From a psychological point of view, the menopause is often associated with an increased incidence of symptoms of anxiety, depression and irritability. This can be explained by the hormonal fluctuations that affect women's emotional balance. Studies such as Figueiredo *et al.* (2021) point out that hormonal variations during the menopause aggravate pre-existing emotional conditions and can lead to an increased risk of psychiatric disorders. In addition, the perceived loss of femininity and the fear of ageing are psychological factors highlighted by Porpeta *et al.* (2023), which contribute to the worsening of these emotional symptoms.

In terms of coping strategies, pharmacological treatments continue to be the most prevalent approach to relieving menopausal symptoms. Hormone replacement therapy (HRT) is widely used, with proven efficacy in reducing symptoms such as hot flushes and vaginal dryness (Da Silva *et al.*, 2024). However, HRT has limitations, such as the increased risk of breast cancer and cardiovascular disease, which makes the choice of treatment

a challenge. According to Alvarenga *et al.* (2021), alternative treatments such as herbal medicine, acupuncture and lifestyle changes have shown promising results in women who prefer not to use HRT.

In addition to pharmacological treatments, psychotherapeutic approaches have been shown to be effective in managing the emotional aspects of the menopause. Cognitive-behavioral therapy (CBT), for example, has been widely applied with positive results in reducing symptoms of anxiety and depression, as pointed out by Galhanas *et al.* (2024). Other relaxation techniques, such as mindfulness and meditation, have also been associated with benefits in controlling stress and increasing women's psychological well-being during this phase of life (Oliveira *et al.*, 2024). The combination of these physical and psychological therapies contributes to improving quality of life and can reduce the need for pharmacological interventions.

Finally, the studies analyzed suggest that health promotion and social support play essential roles in women's adaptation to menopause. According to Maraldi *et al.* (2024), education about the transition process and the normalization of menopausal symptoms can help reduce the stigma related to the menopause, encouraging women to seek treatment and adopt effective coping strategies. Building support networks, whether through family members or health professionals, is a fundamental strategy for women's emotional and psychological well-being, and is considered one of the most effective approaches to promoting a healthier and more positive transition during this phase of life.

## DISCUSSION

The menopause is a period of significant physiological transition in a woman's life, characterized by the definitive cessation of menstruation and a series of hormonal changes that directly impact physical and emotional health. Studies such as that by Ijage *et al.* (2023) point out that the typical symptoms of this phase include hot flashes, changes in sleep, and vaginal dryness, with a substantial impact on women's quality of life. The intensity and duration of these symptoms vary from woman to woman, with some experiencing more intense manifestations, while others are able to cope with the transition more calmly. These variations can be explained by genetic, socioeconomic and cultural factors, as shown by Cardoso *et al.* (2023), who suggest that the perception and experience of the menopause is also modulated by each woman's life history.

In addition, the psychological challenges associated with the menopause are often underestimated, but they play a crucial role in women's well-being. Hormonal fluctuation, especially the drop in estrogen levels, can trigger symptoms of anxiety, irritability and even depression (Backes *et al.*, 2022). According to Fernandes *et al.* (2021), the menopause can also be a period of symbolic mourning, related to the loss of reproductive capacity and the perception of ageing. These changes can be accompanied by feelings of insecurity and lower self-esteem, especially in cultures where youth and fertility are highly valued. This psychological approach is essential for understanding the complexity of the menopausal experience and for developing more effective therapeutic strategies.

Hormone replacement therapy (HRT) is one of the main strategies adopted to relieve the symptoms of the menopause, especially with regard to hot flashes and vaginal dryness. However, the use of HRT should be carefully evaluated because, as the studies by Santos *et al.* (2024) indicate, it is associated with risks,

such as an increased risk of breast cancer and cardiovascular disease, which limits its application for some women. Hormone treatment therefore requires a detailed analysis of the benefits and risks, taking into account the patient's health history and personal preferences. Personalization of treatment is a fundamental aspect, given that the response to treatment can vary widely between women.

With increased awareness of the risks associated with HRT, many women have been looking for non-hormonal therapeutic alternatives. According to Porpeta *et al.* (2023), treatments such as herbal medicine, acupuncture and lifestyle changes, such as physical exercise and a balanced diet, have shown promising results in mitigating menopause symptoms. Although there is still controversy about the effectiveness of these alternatives, there is evidence that they can offer symptomatic relief for women who prefer to avoid hormone therapy. In addition, the combination of pharmacological and non-pharmacological approaches can be effective in promoting the overall well-being of women during the menopause.

With regard to emotional support, cognitive-behavioral therapy (CBT) has been shown to be an effective strategy for dealing with the psychological aspects of the menopause, such as anxiety and depression. Studies such as that by Mendonça *et al.* (2024) indicate that CBT can help women identify and modify negative thought patterns related to the menopause, promoting a more positive and adaptive approach to this phase of life. In addition, the promotion of relaxation techniques, such as mindfulness and meditation, has been associated with a significant improvement in the mental health of menopausal women (De Melo *et al.*, 2022). Psychological support is therefore a key element in the management of the menopause, and is essential to help women overcome the emotional difficulties associated with this transition.

Finally, the importance of adequate social support and a support network is also widely recognized in the literature as a determining factor in women's adaptation to the menopause. Da Silva *et al.* (2024) point out that education about the menopausal process, combined with support from family, friends and health professionals, can reduce the stigma and anxiety associated with this phase. Women who have access to clear information and an emotional and psychological support system tend to cope better with physical and emotional changes, which reflects positively on their quality of life. Promoting a holistic approach, which considers the physical, emotional and social dimensions of the menopause, is therefore essential to ensure a healthy and positive transition for women at this stage of life.

## CONCLUSION

The menopause represents a significant transitional phase in women's lives, characterized by profound physiological and psychological changes that can impact quality of life. As studies have shown, the symptoms associated with menopause, such as hot flashes, changes in sleep, and emotional changes, are often challenging and can affect both women's physical and mental health. Although the process is inevitable, the impacts can vary greatly between women, influenced by genetic, social and cultural factors. It is therefore essential

that menopause management is individualized, taking into account the specific needs of each woman.

Therapeutic strategies, including hormone replacement therapy, non-hormonal alternatives and psychological interventions, play a crucial role in managing symptoms and improving women's quality of life during this phase. The research shows that, in addition to conventional medical treatments, complementary approaches such as herbal medicine, physical activity and cognitive-behavioral therapy have shown promising results in reducing symptoms and providing emotional support. Combining therapies may be a more effective approach, providing a comprehensive improvement in women's health and well-being.

It is therefore essential that health professionals are prepared to offer comprehensive support during the menopause, not only in the physical sphere, but also in the emotional sphere. Social support, ongoing education about the effects of the menopause and the creation of psychologically supportive environments can be decisive in helping women experience this phase in a calmer and healthier way. By investing in a holistic and personalized approach, it is possible to minimize the negative impacts of the menopause and promote a positive experience during this crucial transition in women's lives.

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