

Transitions through the many stages of life are not nature's mistakes, disease states or deficiencies requiring healthy women to be treated with dangerous drug treatments or maiming surgery.

The Amazing Ovaries

By Sherrill Sellman

A woman's ovaries are truly amazing!

They are not only organs that embody the mystery of life and the cycle of reproduction but they also hold secrets of a woman's transformation and renewal. Many myths and misunderstandings have veiled the true function and purpose of the ovaries.

The ovaries are small, oblong, pearl-coloured organs that lie just below the fallopian tubes at either side of the uterus. They are a woman's primary sex organs. The ovaries produce the two key female hormones progesterone and oestrogen that are essential in ensuring her reproductive capacities. Ovaries also produce eggs. A developing female fetus contains all of the immature eggs, known as follicles, that will mature and be released during a woman's entire fertile life. The ovaries of the female fetus contains about seven million follicles! By the time puberty arrives the number of follicles has

been reduced to about 400,000 and only about 400 of them actually develop during a woman's life.

Myths About Ovaries

Medical science has contributed to the maligning of the menopausal ovaries by decreeing them as useless, failing and defunct. It is commonly assumed that at menopause, the end of the reproductive stage of life, the ovaries will shrivel up and cease to function. However, nothing could be farther from truth. This misunderstanding also serves as a metaphor for the way our culture has viewed the postmenopausal woman herself - as nonproductive, dried up and useless. Fortunately, the true nature of the postmenopausal woman and her ovaries is, at last, being revealed!

According to Dr. Susan Love, "Making eggs isn't the ovaries only function any more than reproduction is a woman's whole function. The ovary is more than

just an egg sac. It's an endocrine organ - an organ that produces hormones. And it produces hormones before, during and after menopause. With menopause the ovary goes through a shift from a follicle rich producer of estrogen and progesterone into a producer of estrogen and androgen. In the postmenopausal woman the ovary responds with increased production of testosterone as well as continued lower levels of the oestrogens, oestrone and oestradiol and the oestrogen precursor, androstenedione."

So, contrary to popular belief, the menopausal ovaries do not shrivel up nor do they cease functioning. Ovaries produce hormones, including oestrogens, throughout the life cycle.

It is an erroneous belief that the ovaries cease producing estrogen at menopause. Since the menopausal woman is no longer in her reproductive cycle, it is not necessary for the body to produce the high levels of oestrogen required to mature an

egg. Therefore, as women age, the ovaries grow smaller, as nature intended. However, the part of the ovary that shrinks is known as the theca, the outermost covering where the eggs grow and develop. The innermost part of the ovary, known as the inner stroma, actually becomes active for the first time in a woman's life. With exquisite timing, one functioning starts up as the other winds down.

Dr. John Lee, author and critic of HRT explains that, "Oestrogen levels decline at menopause but not to zero. Oestradiol falls generally to about 15 percent of premenopausal levels and oestrone falls only to 40-50 percent of premenopausal levels. Adrenostenedione, a hormone made in the ovary long after menopause, is converted in body fat into oestrone which is partially converted in the gut and liver into oestradiol. Did Mother Nature intend that women should become oestrogen deficient after menopause? I think not. Oestrogen deficiency at menopause is a myth created by drug companies to justify selling supplemental oestrogen."

Nature designed the postmenopausal women to produce adequate levels of oestrogen for that stage of life. Thus, lower levels of oestrogen at menopause is part of a natural adjustment. It does not mean a pathology of "oestrogen deficiency".

Conventional medicine has also held the theory that oestrogen production begins to decline during the perimenopausal years. This is not true. Dr. Jerilynn Prior, a Canadian endocrinologist, reviewed all pertinent references from 1990 to the present and found no evidence that oestrogen levels fall before menopause. All evidence indicates that over-all oestrogen production remains at normal premenopausal levels.

Dr. Lee also comments that, "It has also been assumed that premenopausal hot flashes are caused by oestrogen deficiency. If oestrogen levels are normal, what causes the hot flashes? It is fluctuating oestrogen hormones against a background of progesterone deficiency." He warns that prescribing HRT to the perimenopausal women is totally inappropriate and potentially dangerous.

After menopause the ovaries continue to function working in conjunction with other body sites such as the adrenal glands, skin, muscle, brain, pineal gland, hair follicles and body fat to produce hormones. Celso Ramon Garcia, M.D., Director of Surgery at the University of Pennsylvania Hospital, has found that the hormones produced by the postmenopausal ovaries promote bone health and skin suppleness, support sexual functioning, pro-

tect against heart disease and contribute to a woman's health and wellbeing. The ovaries have as much to do with the maintenance of a woman's own life as they do with her role of bringing other lives into the world. The menopausal ovary is neither failing nor useless. It is simply the beginning of a shift from its reproductive to its maintenance function. Dr. Love explains that, "The hormonal dance doesn't end; the band just strikes up a different tune."

Ovarian Energy

Ovaries are not only vital physical structures of a woman's physiology but also are expressions of her emotional and spiritual essence. The ovarian wisdom represents a woman's deepest creativity; the unique creative expression which waits to be born within her. All of the creations that come from deep within - whether they are babies, books, or works of art - have a life of their own. An important aspect of a woman's journey is to allow her creative expressions to be birthed and nurtured unfettered.

Dr. Christian Northrup in her book *Women's Bodies, Women's Wisdom* wisely explains that, "our ability to yield to our creativity, to acknowledge that we cannot control it with our intellects, is the key to understanding ovarian power. We must allow this power to come through us."

When a woman's fears or insecurities prevent her from heeding her innermost creative wisdom, ovarian problems can arise. Ovarian dysfunction results from a woman's perception that people and circumstances outside of herself prevent her from being creative. When a woman uses her emotional weaponry to indulge in being highly critical or seeking revenge, it is often her ovaries that are at risk.

Ovarian cysts are one manifestation of this energy distortion. The ovaries are always changing, forming and reabsorbing the small physiological cysts of undeveloped follicles. As long as the creative energy is allowed to be freely flow, the ovaries remain normal. When the creative energy is blocked in some way, abnormally large cysts may occur and persist reflecting this creative stagnation. Energy blockages that create ovarian cysts may also result from stress. Whenever a woman is not listening and responding to her inner needs, she become susceptible to manifesting an 'outer' message.

Ovarian cancer is also a message from a woman's innermost depths. According to Dr. Northrup, "Cancer in a woman's ovarian is also related to an extreme need for male authority or approval, as she gives

her own emotional needs last priority. A woman at risk of ovarian cancer may feel that she doesn't have enough power, financial or otherwise, to move or to change even as abusive situation. "

It is imperative to treat such health problems not only on the physical level but also to explore and resolve the underlying emotional and spiritual conflicts.

Reclaiming Ovarian Energy

Without a full appreciation and understanding of the ovaries' important ongoing role in a woman's hormonal nature, she can be easily convinced by well-meaning but ill-informed doctors to have them removed. It is common for a women, undergoing a hysterectomy, to be advised that she should also have her perfectly health ovaries removed. She is told either that they are not necessary if she is a postmenopausal woman or that such prophylactic surgery will protect her from the risk of ovarian cancer. She is never told that the removal of her ovaries, according to the medical definition, is called castration that will permanently reduce, if not totally extinguish, her sexual energy. Without her ovaries, a woman is an increased risk of osteoporosis and heart disease, as well as a host of other menopausal symptoms. The unnecessary removal of ovaries, unless cancerous or otherwise seriously diseased, is a great travesty perpetrated upon uninformed women.

Throughout most of medical history, the physiology of a woman has been poorly understood. Even in this modern age, an understanding of the ovary's function is distorted by erroneous and outdated theories. What is disturbing is the fact that the medical profession knowingly profits by continuing to endorse such lies, myths and misinformation.

Transitions through the many stages of life are not nature's mistakes, disease states or deficiencies requiring healthy women to be treated with dangerous drug treatments or maiming surgery. A woman's ovaries must be appreciated as dynamic organs that are part of her body's wisdom throughout life, not as something useless or potentially harmful. Only by reclaiming the knowledge, respect and wisdom of the female body can each woman truly walk her healing journey.

Sherrill Sellman, the author of the best selling book "Hormone Heresy: What Women MUST Know About Their Hormones". To access more of Sherrill's research and articles about women's health visit <http://www.whatwomenmustknow.com> or email golight@earthlink.net.