

INTRODUCTION

Definition :

The words menopause, climacteric* and postmenopause are often used interchangeably (Utian, 1980). The menopause is strictly the last menstrual period & occurs during the climacteric. (The First International Congress on Menopause, 1976) . The climacteric is that phase in the aging process of women marking the transition from the reproductive stage of life to the nonreproductive stage . The climacteric is the counterpart of puberty, lasting from 1 to 5 years during which the genital organs involute in response to cessation of gonadal activity . The climacteric may start 2 or 3 years before the menopause & continue for 2-5 years after it .

The period preceding the menopause we call "Premenopause " not only from theoretical but also from practical considerations, the years following the menopause belong to the "Postmenopause " . (Jaszmann, 1975) . We often use also the term "Perimenopausal " mostly for clinical purposes, for the few years prior to & the last

years following the menopause . (Figure 1) .

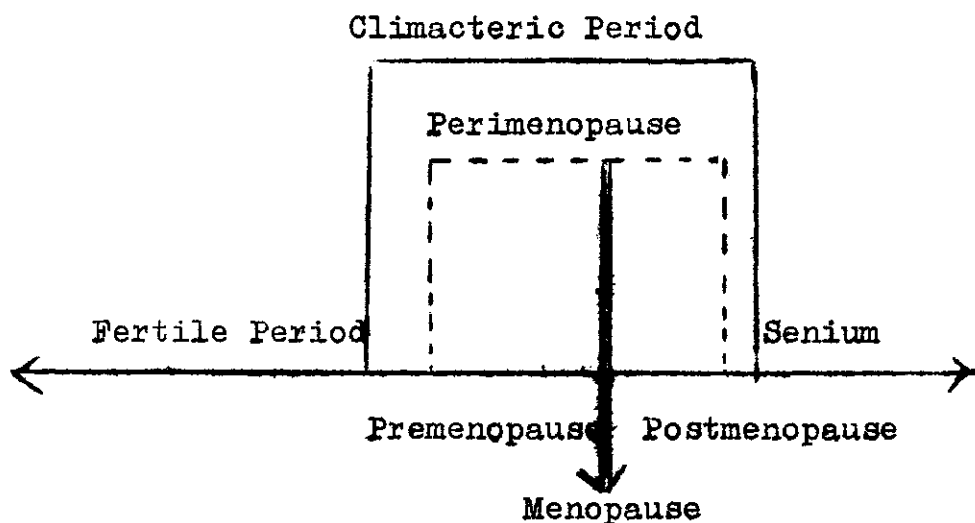


Figure 1 : The climacteric period, (Jaszmann, 1975)

Age :

The average age of the menopause was thought to be about 45 years, but it appears to have become slightly later in the last half century, so the normal menopause now occurs about the age of 50 in the United Kingdom . & U.S.A. (Frommer, 1964) . The average age of menopause was found different among different nationalities being 44.4 years for U.A.R. women ; 43 years for Jordanian women 48 years for Iraqi women & also 48 years for Kuwaiti

and Bedwin women (Odeh, 1967) .

There does not appear to be any consistent relationship between age at menarche and age at menopause (Jeffcoate, 1975; Judd , 1980) . Marriage, childbearing, height , weight & prolonged use of oral contraceptives do not appear to influence the age at menopause .

Moreover, age of menopause does not appear to depend on socioeconomic conditions, race, marital status, income, geography, parity or skinfold thickness . (MacMahon, et al., 1966) . Smoking, however, is associated with early menopause (Jiek, et al., 1977) . The mechanism is unexplained, but it is theorized that the metabolism of steroid hormones may be influenced by certain liver-metabolizing enzymes which are induced by the content of cigarette smoke. Another theory involves the direct actions of nicotine on the neuroendocrine system .