

## Menopause — it's not just hormones



Is it me or my hormones? *Understanding midlife change*. 2nd ed. Margaret Smith, Patricia Michalka. Sydney: Finch Publishing, 2006 (278 pp, \$24.95). ISBN 187645174 2.

**WE'VE ALL SEEN THEM** in our practices: anxious women, bewildered or even frightened by the signs of the menopause transition. Perhaps they're carrying the burden of family folklore; perhaps they've somehow managed to insulate themselves — even through pregnancy and childbirth — from a proper understanding of their own bodies; perhaps they're shocked by these intimations of mortality.

Hot flushes, night sweats and mood swings may have taken them by surprise. The loss of sexual desire or the experience of discomfort during intercourse may be evoking confused responses, ranging from self-doubt (“Am I still an attractive woman?”), to worry about the state of the relationship with their partner.

For some women, patient listening and an assessment of their physical state (including, in appropriate cases, hormone therapy) may provide all the reassurance they need. For others, though, something more comprehensive is called for.

For women who need detailed information — physical, emotional, sexual, social and even spiritual — about the menopause transition, this book is a godsend. Margaret Smith, a gynaecologist specialising in the menopause, and Patricia Michalka, a psychotherapist, have distilled their combined wisdom into a book that addresses one of the most fundamental questions raised by menopausal women: “Is it me or my hormones?”

In a genuinely holistic approach, the authors explore the many symptoms and issues that sometimes confuse menopausal women to the point of despair. The case-study approach is handled warmly and with compassion: worried women will find it easy to identify with the stories in this book.

We all know that the “one size fits all” approach flies in the face of common sense and our experience of the uniqueness of each patient's situation. *Is it me or my hormones?* emphasises the need to take an individual approach, and to recognise that symptoms are rarely a sign of only one thing.

**Sheila O'Neill**

Women's Health Physician  
Cammeray, NSW