**I wanted a smoking hot body.**

It’s finally happening! I’m recognizing its evilness as I go about my everyday things. Hating to admit it. Trying to deny it and hating it even more. Menopause! It’s wonderful having a menstrual cycle going berserk, sleep sometimes non-existent, brain fog and enough generated heat to set the Estes Valley Fire District into a 5-alarm alert. I’m just loving life. Out of the entire package; it’s the hot flashes that I hate the most.

Starting with today’s MSN, Good Housekeeping website article, “Six surprising things you didn’t know about Menopause” Janes, B, 9/10/19. Oh, the joy!

Symptoms can last for 7.4 years! Roughly, three years prior to your last period and 4.5 years after.

Sex can still be enjoyed. Yeay!

I could still get pregnant. Oh dear.

It affects your fat productions and distribution, appetite, thyroid, energy levels, sleep, mood, inflammation and so much more.

Increases risk of depression.

And still it’s the hot flashes that bother me the most. The rest of these symptoms I’m controlling really well with hormone supplements and exercise.

My brain begins to think of possible benefits to these ridiculous hot flashes. If the world was perfect, shouldn’t we be able to burn more calories naturally while we are flashing? Wouldn’t that have been just one tiny positive in the pool of negatives we experience when we go through menopause? Heck, in the pool of negatives we experience all our lives!

Let’s talk about hot flashes a little more in depth. What is a hot flash? It is a momentary sensation of heat that may be accompanied by a red, flushed face and sweating. It is caused by the change in the body’s thermostat, brought on by the part of the brain that regulates this body temperature.

Since hormones regulate many of the brain functions, we can only correlate the reduced estrogen levels directly triggering a hot flash. Hot flashes occur when the blood vessels near the skin’s surface dilate to cool. This produces the red, flushed look to the face. Perspiration occurs to cool down the body and often times increased heart rates will accompany a hot flash.

Since a hot flash is basically a reaction within the cells of the skin it is not a calorie-burning event such as the heat generated during an exercise session. The calorie burning that you receive in these instances are brought on by the exercise session itself, not the reaction your body is having while it tries to cool itself.

Hot flashes affect every woman differently and they aren’t random. There is no way of telling how it will affect you. There are some things that you can do to help in the intensity and possibly the duration of hot flash attacks.

These are some triggers that have been associated with hot flashes: stress, caffeine, alcohol, spicy foods, tight clothing, heat and smoking. Some things you can do to keep hot flashes to a minimum include exercising regularly, practicing relaxation techniques, staying cool, wearing loose fitting clothing, using deep breathing (slow, deep abdominal breathing at the onset of an attack) techniques and there is some suggestion that massage, acupuncture and yoga can be helpful.

Exercise can help in many ways. Not only is there evidence that regular exercise will reduce the severity of hot flashes, exercise also helps protect the menopausal woman from these other physiological changes that can occur. After menopause women have an increased risk towards bone loss, heart disease, increased cholesterol levels, increased blood pressure levels, increased risk of stroke and weight gain.

Lastly, other kinds of therapy that are often used to minimize hot flashes include: a variety of prescription treatments (hormone supplementation, birth control pills, blood pressure medications, antidepressants), vitamin and mineral supplementation (vitamin B, E, ibuprofen) and herbal remedies (dong quai, ginseng, black cohosh).

So, as the cartoon Maxine has brilliantly said; “My greatest fear is that menopause doesn’t exist, and this is the real me!” and “When I asked for a smoking hot body, menopause was not what I had in mind!”

It takes humor to get through some of this stage of our aging process but know that the symptoms are real and there are ways cope easier.