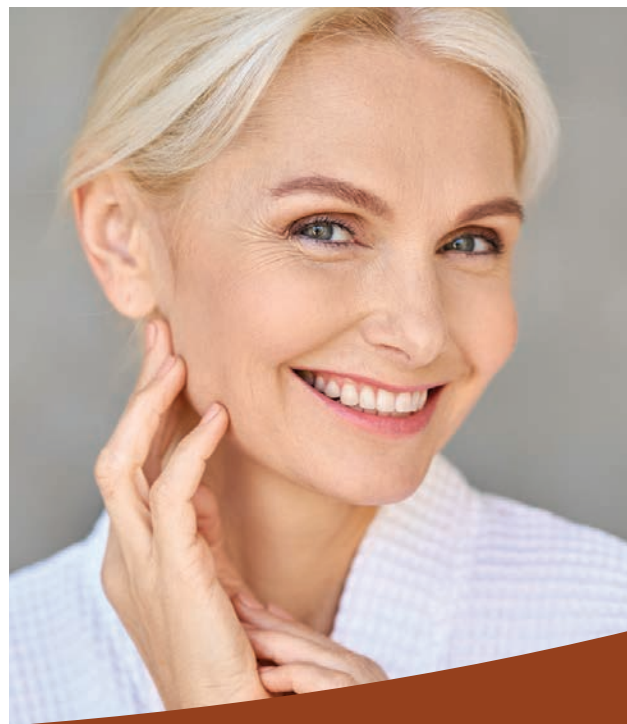




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A legacy of love and loyalty: the life and career of Chris Barnett

By JOANNA POOLE
reporter@theeagledemocrat.com

Chris Barnett’s story is one of heartfelt connections, enduring dedication, and a love for community that resonates across generations. Raised in the small town of Wilmar, Barnett’s roots run deep. A graduate of Wilmar High School and a lifelong member of the Wilmar Methodist Church, her life has been intertwined with the people and places of her hometown. When the church recently closed due to low attendance, it marked the end of an era for Barnett, who cherished her lifelong involvement there.

Barnett’s journey into the world of work began at Creed’s, the dairy diner owned by her grandparents.

“Working there, I just kind of cut my teeth on learning how to talk to people,” Barnett said. “I made 75 cents an hour. It was a lot of fun, and it taught me a lot of people skills.”

From a young age, Barnett knew she wanted to be a hairdresser and was inspired by her neighbor, Ms. Lela Wiley.

“She had a beauty salon in her home, and I would go down and visit with her,”

Barnett said. Wiley not only welcomed her into the salon but also took Barnett to beauty shows after she graduated from beauty school in Crossett.

“She influenced me a lot,” Barnett shared.

After beauty school, Barnett’s career took off at Jimmie Ann’s salon, where an experienced stylist became her mentor.

“When I went to work there, one of the older girls took me under her wing,” Barnett said with a smile. “I don’t know why she did, but she was a great hairdresser. She was a good mentor.”

Two years later, Barnett returned to Wilmar to work at The Duchess, a cozy salon set in an old house with three other stylists.


In 1977, after marrying her husband Buddy, Barnett opened her own salon in their Wilmar home, where she styled hair for 13 years and not only created hairstyles but also lasting friendships.

When the Barnetts moved to Greenhill, Barnett worked at The Hair Pen in Monticello before eventually purchasing the salon and renaming it Chris’s Hair Care.




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For decades, she ran the salon with passion and purpose, but when knee pain made continuing difficult, she made the bittersweet decision to retire.

"I knew I couldn't keep doing this," Barnett said, reflecting on the physical demands of the job.

Concerned about her clients, she meticulously planned her retirement to ensure they wouldn't be left without a hairdresser during her recovery.

"I hired Sonia Potter four or five years ago," Barnett explained. "We sat down and talked about me having knee surgery. I asked her if she would want to buy the salon, and she said, 'Oh yeah.'"

Barnett's confidence in Sonia ensured a seamless transition for her loyal customers.

After 53 years as a hairdresser, Barnett retired, leaving behind a legacy of friendship, dedication, and community.

"I enjoyed all the years," she said thoughtfully, though her voice broke as she spoke of clients she had lost over the years.

"It was sad when I would lose them in death," Barnett said emotionally, referring to past clients. "I've buried many."

Barnett often fixed their hair for their final farewells.

"That's the last thing you can do for

them," she shared, her words filled with emotion.

Some people look forward to retirement, but as Barnett wiped away tears, I could see that retirement was not a decision she made lightly. She was wise when thinking about her life after retirement.

"I planned it for years," Barnett said. "I had my 401K account. I tried to make it to where I wouldn't be a burden. I wanted to have plenty if I needed it."

She then went deeper into detail as she shared the advice she would give those who were just starting out.

"They need to be setting up something for their future," Barnett said. "They need a Roth IRA or an IRA. They need to go to a financial advisor because nobody is going to take care of you when you retire. It's a must."

But Barnett didn't have only financial advice.

"Another thing is buying too many supplies and not using them," Barnett said. "Also, not coming to work. That happens so often when girls think they don't need to go because they don't have any appointments. You could have walk-ins. A lot of business can be built from walk-ins."

For Barnett, retirement brings new joys, like reconnecting with former cli-

ents and spending time with family. However, her legacy lives on through the generations of customers whose lives she touched.

"I have cut almost all the kids' hair in Monticello at some time or other," Barnett said with a smile.

But sometimes, it's harder to convince those that are closest to us. Barnett confirmed that when she told me the comical story about her youngest grandson.

"Connor, who's three, doesn't want a haircut," Barnett said with a laugh. "We finally talked him into sitting on my lap, and I gave him a scissor cut. He needs it

again, but this morning, he told me he wasn't ready. We've done everything."

At Barnett's retirement party, held at the now-closed Methodist church, the depth of her impact was evident. Friends and loved ones filled the room, sharing laughter, stories, and gratitude for the woman who had been a part of their lives for decades.

Chris Barnett's story is more than a career retrospective; it's a testament to the power of passion, connection, and community. Her love for her work and the people she served shines through every memory and every story.

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Bruised but not broken: The inspiring journey of Sharonda Forte

By JOANNA POOLE
reporter@theeagledemocrat.com

Life can be full of ups and downs in both personal and professional life. It's important to hold onto good things when you find them, especially when those things affect your daily life. Finding people who enrich life is hard in today's world. The same goes for authenticity. Words are cheap, but actions are priceless. The same can be said for people who truly care about you.

It's the little things that people do that truly make a difference. It's easy to ask someone how they're doing in passing conversations, but do we truly mean it when we ask? Are we prepared for the honest answers that may follow what could be a loaded question? Most people don't and aren't. They are simply being polite and contributing to the small talk. However, in the small town of Monticello, there is one person who I would say is

sincerely asking.

Sharonda Forte was born in Kansas but grew up in Michigan. When she was a pre-teen, her parents moved the family to Arkansas because they wanted to give their children a quieter place to live. However, the transition wasn't exactly picturesque.

"It was truly a culture shock," Forte said.

Selma was their home for a time, but they eventually moved to Monticello. Forte attended and graduated from the Monticello School District as an honor student. While in high school, she ran track and was a member of the band.

If you have a conversation with Forte, you notice a few obvious things about her. For starters, she loves her family very much. She has two daughters. The oldest, Jadece lives in Little Rock and works at the VA hospital, and the youngest, Darbee lives here in Monticello and is in nursing school.

"Family means everything to me," Forte said. "I don't really have much outside of my immediate family and church family. I'm very introverted and somewhat shy in certain environments, so I just stick close to my family."

In November of 2023, Forte's world seemed to come to a halt when her mother, Ola Simmons, passed away. As anyone can imagine, the time since then hasn't been easy. But Forte's father has been a huge asset to her life.

"My dad is my best friend," Forte said. "We spend every day together."

Her father, Lorenza Simmons isn't just that. Together, Forte's parents founded Trinity Full Gospel Church, where Forte attends and for a long time, he was also her pastor. Simmons is now retired, but he still oversees everything that happens.

Forte has always been a very involved parent. When her daughters were in school, Forte spent much of her time attending athletic events and other school activities. After high school, there were college basketball games to go to.

"When my daughter graduated from college, I was wondering what I was going to do," Forte explained. "I just decided to throw myself in volunteer work."

And throw she did! Forte spends a lot of

time helping out different organizations. One of the ways she stays busy is by holding a seat on the board of the NAACP.

"It takes up a lot of time," Forte said with a laugh. "But I love it."

She then went on to explain what led her to start volunteering with the NAACP.

"I guess I've always silently fought for equality as much as I possibly could," Forte explained. "I wanted to be very careful not to offend or cross any lines. As a Christian, you struggle because you don't want to say or do things that are not going to be indicative of you being a Christian. But then there are times that you need to stand up and say, 'Right is right and wrong is wrong.'"

During our conversation, I found it very easy to talk about all things, but we seemed to veer toward our common faith in God. Forte is strongly rooted in her faith, something to which I can strongly relate. Although she has been through hard times, she continues to lean on Jesus and His promises. She depends on Him daily to get her through hard times. I asked her to share a little of her testimony.

"For me, church is all I have ever known," Forte responded. "Like all young adults, I tried other things in life, but I



Joanna Poole/Advance Monticellonian

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never waived from being a “church goer.” I knew when I was young that church was always going to be a part of my life. There came a point in my life where I tried everything else, and I had better try Jesus. I decided that that was it for me. Life without God is too hard.”

Forte then went on to tell me about a personal experience in her life.

“I was a single mom, not making much money,” Forte explained. “One day as a young adult sitting at home, I remember just being blunt and having a conversation with God, and I said, ‘God, you know, I don’t understand, I’m tithing, I’m going to church, I sing on the praise team, I’m at church every time the doors open, but it just seems like stuff keeps happening,’ and God spoke to me as boldly as I spoke to Him. He said, ‘I have to allow you to go through this so that you can continue to depend on me and continue to know that I am the source of all that you need.’ So I said, ‘Okay God, I got it! I’m nothing without you. Even if I fall and make a mistake, You’re right there with me.’”

Forte said that when she goes through dark times, she knows that God is right there with her, and He is walking along beside her.

“God spoke to me and said, ‘It’s in the darkness that I am protecting you. I don’t want you to see all that is going on around you. It’s not going to be dark always, and when you get through the darkness, you will be better for trusting Me.’”

Forte says she not only tries to find the purpose in the pain but also in the joy. She always looks for peace and what God is trying to show her.

“You have to silence the noise around you in order to hear what God is trying to tell you,” Forte explained. “When I say I am protecting my peace, I am silencing the noise that is going on around me so I can be prepared for the next chapter in my life.”

Another important detail about Forte is that she loves to mentor children.

“I love volunteering at the schools,” Forte said. “I work in the hospitality room and do whatever I need to do to help.”

Despite Forte’s success with giving her time, she has learned that it isn’t always about giving.

“I give and I give, and it’s really hard for me to take,” Forte commented. “It’s hard for me to be in the limelight because I help because it’s the right thing to do. I’m learning how to reap my harvest and that’s been a new thing for me.

Not long after our conversation started, I could hear true confidence in her words. She spoke with wisdom and understanding, and I could tell that she is currently at a great place in her life.

But Forte didn’t just wake up and turn into the person she is today. She spoke about being thankful for the way she grew up.

“Growing up, I had always been the pastor’s kid,” Forte explained. “And then I was a pastor’s wife. I didn’t know anything outside of that. My mom raised us heavily in church. We had stern discipline. But then my dad asked me and my sister if we regretted it, and we both answered no. With wisdom comes discipline. Figuring out who I was at age 40 was tough. But I think now, at 52, I’m starting to understand the sacrifices that were made for me and the sacrifices that I’m making now for my children.”

One thing that is very important to Forte is peace. She said before she lost her mother, she was always the one who lived in a “go-with-the-flow” kind of mindset. But after her loss, she started seeing things in a different way.

“Losing my mother sort of flipped a switch for me,” Forte commented. “Now I’m learning how to understand that not everything that’s going on around me is for me. I have to pick and choose where I place my energy.

Her two daughters are two of the places where she chooses to invest her energy. When Forte talked about her children, I could hear a huge sense of pride. She continued to share about how her mindset has changed.

“Honestly, I realized in the last five years of my life that everything that I thought was important, everything that I thought was my goals, I understand that they were my purpose,” Forte explained, talking about her daughters. “Developing them and helping them navigate through life was very, very important to me. People told me that I needed to let them figure it out. They will eventually, but as long as I have breath in me, I’ll be a very hands-on mom.”

One achievement that Forte fondly remembers is being recognized as a distinguished alumna by UAM for her heavy involvement in Monticello, which includes founding The Lady Warriors AAU Organization, being youth director at Trinity Full Gospel Ministries Church, and serving as a volunteer on a number of boards and organizations, including the Drew County Single Parent Scholarship, SEARK Business Solutions, ARISE, Inc., the Drew County Boys and Girls Club, and KOL.

Forte also commented on how she’s not the same person that she was a few years ago. She talked about working in a male-dominated field and how easy it is to lose your identity in that kind of environment.

“I’m trying to find my voice professionally,” noted Forte. “It’s so very important to set boundaries, especially when you work in a male-dominated environment. Those boundaries have to be clearly communicated to others. Otherwise, you can get lost.”

See **FORTE** Page 8

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FORTE

Continued from Page 5

During our conversation, we again started talking about her education and the road that led her to where she is today professionally.

Originally, her goal was to move back to Michigan. She had no desire to stay in Arkansas. She visited many out-of-state universities, but when she started looking around, she realized that Arkansas was the place she was meant to be. She stayed local and attended and graduated from The University of Arkansas Monticello.

"I don't regret it," Forte noted.

As many first-time freshmen do, Forte began college thinking she knew exactly what she wanted to do. While she started as an education major, she soon saw that it wasn't for her and switched her major to business. Her desire was to be in some type of management role.

"I always knew that I wanted to help lead people," Forte said. "But I just didn't know exactly what my role would be."

Forte is no stranger to working. She got her first job working in fast food when she was only 14. Following that, she moved to retail and then on to what is known today as CenterPoint. But after an incident with a disgruntled customer, she knew she needed a change. She seems

like a very determined individual, so even though she didn't go into detail about the incident, I knew it must have been very upsetting for her to make the decision to change.

That's when she applied for a job at Union Bank. Forte started working at Union Bank in 1993, and November of 2024 marked 31 years. Her current title at Union Bank is Vice President of Internal Audit, but she started as a Note Teller and has worked her way through the ranks at the bank. She explained a little about her journey.

"This kind of just clicked for me," Forte said. "I wanted to do more. I wanted to learn more. Every time projects came up, I wanted to take care of them. That kind of created this position called a Senior Loan Administrator. They saw that I was pushing, and they thought I would be the one to take things and develop them. I then got deeper into real estate. I was working under a good guy who just kind of mentored me. Then, another opportunity became available, and they asked me if I'd like to do that. It was in Compliance. I said yes, but they knew I didn't want to lose real estate, so they told me I could do both. Then, Internal Audit became open, and they asked me if I wanted to try it. I thought it might be too much, but I decided to try it"

Forte then went on to explain how she

fell in love with that position. But after several years, she was thrown a little bit of a curve ball.

"My boss came to me and told me that they really needed me to get back downstairs and get reinvolved with the hands-on, day-to-day items," Forte said. "Turnover was bad, and we just didn't have the staff that we used to have. I was crushed because I loved audit. It looked to me like a step-down. But God reminded me that he put me here for people and not for me."

Forte is still in her current role of compliance and CRA, but she also manages the note department and loan administration. However, she says that she feels her role goes beyond management.

"I feel like one of my strengths as a manager is taking it a step further," Forte said. "You don't just work for Union Bank. You are an extension of me, and my heart connects with your heart. The only way that happens is if I really listen to you and know who you are."

Forte went on to say that she knows when someone in her department is having a bad day or when their children aren't feeling well or other similar issues.

"God has truly blessed me with a spirit of discernment," Forte stated. "He has revealed to me those that need to know that they're doing a good job. I want everyone who is connected to me to win. I want to give them everything they need to be suc-

cessful."

Forte likes to take the extra step when it comes to those who work for her. She wants to know about the small, overlooked details in their lives. She wants to form meaningful relationships.

"Happy people produce great work," Forte said.

Overall, Forte has been through a lot. But she says that her experiences are a part of her testimony. There's one phrase that she continues to say through everything.

"I've been bruised, but I'm not broken," Forte said with a smile. "God can still use me. Even in my lowest of points, He still uses me. I am giving Him all of the glory, honor, and praise. WITH Him, I still went through some things, and I can't imagine life without Him."

"I'm not done," Forte said with a smile. "There is more that I want to accomplish, but I take my time and let God open doors for me."

Sharonda Forte exudes authenticity in her daily life. She is a true witness for Jesus. She wants to tell others about Him and what He has done in her life.

She is thriving in a male-dominated profession, and she wants to make the work environment better for each person who works with her. She is a strong pillar in her faith, family, and community.

Claudia Hartness: A Lifelong dedication to education and service in Monticello

By JEFF McDONALD
editor@monticellonews.net

Claudia Hartness has been a steadfast presence in Monticello for many years. From her early days as a student at Arkansas A&M University to her distinguished 55-year career as an educator at the University of Arkansas at Monticello (UAM), Hartness has devoted herself to both the growth of her community and the minds of its young people. Her passion for teaching, civic engagement, and public service has shaped Monticello in countless ways, from her decades of service on the City Council to her influence in the classroom. Known for her unwavering commitment to improving her city and fostering the next generation of leaders, Hartness is a living testament to the power of dedication, service, and community.

Claudia Hartness' life in Monticello began when her family moved here from Prescott when she was six years old. The


family moved because Hartness' father took a job with the Soil Conservation Service. She has made Monticello her home ever since.

After graduating from Arkansas A&M University, now the University of Arkansas at Monticello, Hartness began her teaching career. She spent six months teaching in Huntsville, followed by six months in Selma. She then spent one year teaching at Monticello High School. In 1969, Hartness would begin her teaching career at UAM, which to this point has spanned an amazing 55 years.


"I love what I do," Hartness said when asked what has kept her teaching at UAM for all these years. "Every Fall, I still get excited for the first day of classes. I enjoy being around young people, and I enjoy the subjects that I teach. It's a wonderful job and a wonderful place to be."

In 1978, Hartness was appointed to the City Council after Alderman Jerry Wilson passed away mid-term. 47 years later,


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Hartness was recently reelected to another term on the City Council.

"Monticello is my home, it is a part of me and my family," Hartness said when asked what keeps her serving on the Council. "I just like politics, sometimes. It is a very fascinating position in some ways."

Hartness noted that while serving on the City Council she has had the ability to see many city projects progress throughout the years.

"Take the lake for example," Hartness said. "I remember when we started working on the lake under Mayor James Jordan. I will never forget all the people running around trying to get right of ways and all those kinds of things, and finally, after a lot of work, we got the lake. Under Mayor Paige Chase, we had to drain the lake. I've been able to watch that full progression. I find that interesting."

Another project of note for Hartness is the by-pass which is currently under construction. Hartness notes that many years of hard work from the City Council, Monticello Economic Development, and many others have gotten Monticello to this point, and soon the city will see the by-pass open.

"Monticello is a strong city. We have, I think, very resilient people," Hartness added. "We have had ups and downs. I remember whenever Burlington closed, oh my, we were all wringing our hands. Somehow we managed to pull together and go forward."

Hartness reflected on a time when she was asked a question about the duties of the council.

"Years ago, I was invited to a third-grade class to discuss the council," Hartness shared. "This little girl came to me and said, 'What is it that you do?'. I thought, 'That is a really good question.'"

Hartness stated that the function of the City Council is to take care of the city's fire department, street department, water department, and sanitation department, and try to manage the city's finances as well.

"The city offers services to the citizens, and most of the time, things run smoothly, but there are times when they don't," Hartness said. "During those times you just have to ride it out."

In all, Hartness stated that she continues to serve the City of Monticello because she loves the city and she finds it, "very interesting".

Whenever Hartness was asked if there were any projects or academic achievements that she was particularly proud of, she listed a few that stood out.

"The City Council and the Mayor work together as a whole. I think it is a composite effort," Hartness said. "One mayor will start a project, but it may be another mayor that sees it finished. I am especially proud of our youth facilities. I'm proud of the new industry that is coming to our area (Weyerhaeuser). I'm proud to see the

by-pass will be completed. I'm proud that the City of Monticello is no longer under sanctions from the Arkansas Department of Environmental Quality (ADEQ). Our water is a priority and we are no longer under any sanctions."

Hartness noted that when working with other people, and dealing with the public, the ability to effectively communicate is a necessity.

"Working with people is a puzzle, and the more you can communicate with them, and have some kind of understanding, you can move forward," Hartness said. "There have been times when there have been difficulties because of a lack of communication, or rather I have had difficulty. It was my fault, not theirs. I've tried to be much more flexible and much more patient, and try to find common ground."

"We are so proud that Ms. Claudia Hartness is being recognized for her many years of service to both UAM and the local community," Dr. Peggy Doss, Chancellor of UAM, said when asked to speak on Hartness' impact at UAM and Monticello as a whole. "At the university, Claudia is a beloved instructor and has impacted countless students over the years. She truly has the 'heart of a teacher' and inspires students to love English and literature as much as she does. Her commitment to education, community initiatives, and her church has made a lasting impact, and we appreciate the powerful example she sets as a servant leader and a role model for civic engagement. She truly embodies the values that we hold dear at UAM."

"Councilwoman Hartness possesses a level of institutional knowledge of city government that is unsurpassed. In every serious discussion I've had with her concerning city issues, her responses always reference ethics, equality, and transparency. Doing what is right is always her priority," Mayor Jason Akers said regarding Hartness' service on the City Council.

With all of her years of service to UAM and the Monticello City Council, one might think Hartness would be looking forward to slowing down and retiring, but you would be wrong.

"I'm going to continue doing exactly what I'm doing now. I enjoy teaching and being on the City Council. I'm just happy to be in this position."

It was a true privilege to sit down and talk with Ms. Hartness. She was one of my favorite instructors at UAM, and seeing that she still has the same passion for teaching that she had twenty years ago is inspiring. Seeing her dedication to the City of Monticello shows someone who has a servant's heart. As one of the countless students Hartness impacted, as referenced by Dr. Doss, it is great to see a whole new generation getting to have those same experiences. Thank you Claudia Hartness for your years of dedicated service, and to many more in the future.





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What young women should know about breast cancer

A prevailing myth concerning breast cancer is that it only affects older women. Various medical organizations and institutions recommend women begin receiving mammograms starting at age 40, which may compel women younger than 40 to think that they are immune to breast cancer. Yale Medicine notes breast cancer in younger individuals is rare, but the organization reports it is the most common cancer among women between the ages of 15 and 39. In addition, a body of evidence points to a growing rate of breast cancer diagnoses in younger women.

The Cleveland Clinic says breast cancer in young women and people assigned female at birth is known as early-onset breast cancer. Even adolescents and young adults can get breast cancer. Although young people can get any form of breast cancer, invasive ductal carcinoma and triple-negative breast cancer are the most common forms of the disease among young women.

Diagnoses of breast cancer have steadily risen in women under age 50 over the last 20 years, says the Washington University School of Medicine in St. Louis. Researchers believe the surge is largely driven by increases in the number of women diagnosed with estrogen-receptor positive tu-

mors, which are cancerous tumors fueled by estrogen. The researchers also found higher rates of breast cancer among Black women, particularly those between the ages of 20 and 29. Black women in this age group were found to have a 53 percent increased risk of breast cancer.

The Breast Cancer Research Foundation says that breast cancers in women under age 40 are more likely to have features that contribute to poorer outcomes and prognoses. Larger tumor size, advanced tumor stage, negative hormone receptor status, and an over-expression of the HER2 protein are some such features. The BCRF also reports younger women are more likely to experience a recurrence at five and 10 years after therapy compared to older women.

It is essential for younger women to be in tune with their bodies and learn to recognize any signs that may be indicative of breast cancer. Since annual screenings are not often part of preventative health plans for women younger than 40, adolescents and young adults need to alert their doctors if they suspect anything is wrong. Unfortunately, by the time a tumor in the breast can be felt, it likely has been present for some time already. Symptoms of breast cancer may include:



- Inverted nipple
- Breast lump or a lump in armpit
- Breast pain
- Changes in the skin of the breast
- Nipple discharge with or without pain
- Swollen lymph nodes

Any of these signs should be discussed with a primary care physician or a gynecologist.

Younger patients also are more likely to

have a genetic connection to breast cancer. Individuals with one or more family members who were diagnosed with breast cancer are at higher risk and may want to consider screening at earlier ages.

Breast cancer is not a disease that only affects women 40 and older. Younger people can get breast cancer, and it's often a surprise and sometimes more aggressive.

Learn the basics of cervical cancer

Each year, hundreds of thousands of women and people assigned female at birth are diagnosed with cervical cancer. The World Health Organization reports that cervical cancer is the fourth most common cancer in women across the globe, with around 660,000 new cases reported in 2022. Learning more about cervical cancer may help to reduce these numbers.

What is cervical cancer?

Cervical cancer begins on the surface of the cervix, which is the part of the female reproductive system where the vagina meets the uterus.

The Cleveland Clinic says human papillomavirus infection is to blame for almost all cases of cervical cancer. HPV is a virus that spreads through sexual contact.

Symptoms of cervical cancer

Cervical cancer may not cause any initial symptoms. As the cancer spreads, the Mayo Clinic says that it can cause certain issues. These include vaginal bleeding after intercourse, between periods or after menopause. Pelvic pain or pain during in-

tercourse also may occur. Some women experience menstrual bleeding that is heavier and lasts longer than usual.

Types of cervical cancer

Cervical cancers are named after the type of cell where the cancer started. The National Cancer Institute says the two main types of cervical cancer are squamous cell carcinoma and adenocarcinoma. Ninety percent of all cervical cancers are squamous cell carcinomas. These cancers develop from cells in the ectocervix. Adenocarcinomas develop in the glandular cells of the endocervix and are less common.

Risk factors for cervical cancer

Some risk factors for cervical cancer are within a person's control. The Cleveland Clinic warns of these risks.

- Lack of screening: Those who haven't had regular Pap tests are more likely to get cervical cancer, as the tests can detect pre-cancerous cells.
- Sexual history: Having many sexual partners may put one at elevated risk for



HPV infection. Lowering risk for HPV infection lowers cervical cancer risk.

- Smoking: Smokers have a higher risk of cervical cancer.
- HIV infection: People with HIV have a higher-than-average risk of developing cervical cancer.

HPV tests as well as Pap tests are critical in catching the disease. In addition, a vaccination to prevent HPV infection may reduce overall risk of cervical cancer and

other HPV-related cancers. Most medical organizations suggest routine Pap tests begin at age 21 and advise repeating them every few years. Women are urged to speak with their doctors about the testing and other preventative measures that are best for their situations.

Learn more about cervical cancer at www.cancer.gov/types/cervical.

Understand the menopause transition



occurs after the last period has occurred. It is a finite date. The menopausal transition before that takes place is actually called perimenopause. It is a period of time that most often begins between ages 45 and 55. The National Institute on Aging says perimenopause traditionally lasts seven years, but it can go on for as long as 14 years. The duration may depend on lifestyle factors, race and ethnicity.

During perimenopause, production of estrogen and progesterone made in the ovaries varies greatly. That can mean menstruation can be heavy at times or light. It may occur once a month or even multiple times per month. The menopausal transition affects each woman differently. It is a good idea for women to use a menstruation tracker and remain aware of symptoms to discuss with the gynecologist.

What is postmenopause?

Postmenopause is the time after menopause has happened. Women will remain in postmenopause for the rest of their lives. While many symptoms ease up in postmenopause, there still may be mild symptoms attributed to the low levels of reproductive hormones.

What are common symptoms of the menopause transition?

As one transitions from childbearing years into postmenopause, certain symptoms can occur.

- Irregular periods
- Hot flashes/night sweats
- Vaginal dryness
- Urinary urgency
- Difficulty sleeping
- Emotional changes
- Dry skin, eyes or mouth
- Worsening premenstrual syndrome

symptoms

- Breast tenderness
- Headaches
- Racing heart
- Joint and muscle aches
- Weight gain
- Trouble concentrating
- Changes in libido

Women are urged to discuss their symptoms and concerns about menopause with a health care professional. Various treatments can alleviate symptoms and make the transition more comfortable.

The human body is capable of various amazing feats, but many will attest that the ability of women to nurture and grow what will become another person is the body's most impressive characteristic.

Healthline states a woman can get pregnant and bear children from puberty, when they start getting their menstrual periods, to menopause. The average woman's reproductive years are between ages 12 and 51. While puberty and pregnancy are topics widely discussed in a woman's life, the same may not be said for menopause.

What is menopause?

The World Health Organization characterizes menopause as the end of a woman's reproductive years. After true menopause, a woman cannot become pregnant naturally. Menopause is marked by the end of a

monthly menstrual cycle often referred to as a "period." Natural menopause is deemed to have occurred after 12 consecutive months without menstruation. Menopause can occur for other reasons, such as if the reproductive organs are damaged due to illness or removed for the treatment of a certain condition. This is called induced menopause.

What happens during menopause?

During menopause, the ovaries stop producing reproductive hormones and stop releasing eggs for fertilization, says the Cleveland Clinic.

What is perimenopause?

Some people incorrectly describe the years leading up to the last menstrual period as menopause. However, menopause only



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