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going through it herself.

Northrup said women between the ages of 25 and 64 are about to reach a historic pinnacle. By 2008 they will be the largest and richest demographic group, and that will mark the first time ever the largest demographic has also been the richest.

"What's more, much of that wealth will not be inherited from husbands and relatives as in the past, but earned by women themselves," she said, drawing a big cheer from the crowd.

Her point was that this presents an enormous opportunity and that menopause equips women to deal with the situation powerfully.

"I don't bash men; I'm not about that. I'm about empowering women. Period."

Northrup said she and all doctors were trained to believe that menopause is a time when something (estrogen) is missing, so something must be done (hormone replacement) to fix it. In fact, she said, that's based more on perception than reality. Many women continue to make enough hormones naturally to avoid menopausal symptoms.

"There is no such thing as a scientific truth that is separate from the culture in which it is discovered," she said. In fact, she said, the female brain chemistry changes for the better after menopause, giving women a powerful high they could only experience during one phase of their monthly cycle pre-menopause.

"It's really, really true that your

brain changes," she said. She urged her audience to use that power for their own betterment. She rejects the teaching that the brain is nothing more than a computer, pointing out that certain areas light up on brain scans during meditation.

"It's kind of like taking apart a radio to figure out where the Beethoven is coming from. It doesn't work."

Seize the power

Northrup urged her audience to seize the power and use it to improve their lives. Rather than turning to hormones or tranquilizers, she said they should take control of their quality of life, including everything from diet and exercise to making sure they have nur-

ture relationships and are in control of their own finances.

"This is the time of life when you really say grow or die; your body is saying grow or die," she said. "The body is the outward manifestation of the mind. . . . Every aspect of your life affects how your brain thinks and how you feel. . . . You really have to be very selective about what you let into your body and into your mind."

Illness, she said, is not inevitable with age.

"At mid-life diseases skyrocket, not because it's supposed to but because your body is growing fatigued with your bad habits," she said, noting that heart disease and osteoporosis can both be seen in children. "We've made enormous progress with breast cancer,

but it's really heart disease we need to start paying attention to."

A few other bits of Northrup's wisdom of menopause:

On food: "Be grateful, eat it with love and it changes the way it is metabolized, honest to God." She suggests protein for breakfast and a brief break to move around in late afternoon instead of a snack when energy starts to fade. As for sweet, fatty stuff, "These foods are really very satisfying. I don't want you to give them up. But I don't want you to have them for breakfast every day."

Drugs: "We've had a lot of cheap solutions."

Femininity: It expresses the idea there are things worth living for, while masculinity expresses the idea there are things worth

dying for. "We need both."

Inequality: "You really notice this at mid-life, where the average guy of 55 is dating girls who are 30 but if you're 55, you're not dating guys who are 30."

Money: The average age of widowhood is 66. Women at mid-life should have a will, durable power of attorney, life insurance and know where their investments are. "You need to get a grip on your money."

Staying young: "The culture, I'm fairly sure you've noticed, is fairly youth-obsessed. . . . The only thing we do is become inappropriate, right?"

Osteoporosis: She recommends weight training. "Your bones aren't meant to dissolve just because you turn 51."

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