



Menopause: What is Menopause?

What is menopause?

Menopause is defined as the time when a woman has her last menstrual period and is a normal and healthy part of a woman's life. The entire transition period is known as perimenopause and begins several years before your last period. A full year without a period is needed before you can technically say you have been through menopause. Postmenopause follows menopause and lasts the rest of your life. Some women experience menopause early as a result of surgery or a natural occurrence; this is known as early or premature menopause.

Who does menopause affect?

Menopause affects all women at some point in their lives. The average age for menopause is 51, although perimenopause can begin around age 40. The length of time of perimenopause varies woman to woman—for some women, it only lasts two or three years; for others, it can last 10 to 12 years.

Menopause can also affect partners, families, and friends. As your body changes, other things can change as well. Those closest to you may be impacted by these modifications in a number of ways. For example, if your sexual desire changes, your partner may be affected by this. Possible changes to your mood could impact your partner, family, and friends. Despite the risk for impacting their lives, you may find that those closest to you are the most supportive during this time in your life.

What are the signs and symptoms of menopause?

There are many different symptoms of menopause, due to the various impacts the reduction of estrogen will have on the body. There are also a number of ways to reduce the effects of these changes. Symptoms, and how to lessen the effects, include:

- Changes in your period - Your periods may be irregular in terms of how much you are bleeding, the duration, and the frequency.
- Hot flashes - These are very common because they are related to the amount of estrogen in the body. A hot flash is a sudden feeling of heat in the body. Most hot flashes last between 30 seconds and 10 minutes.
 - *Regular exercise can help alleviate hot flashes.*
 - *Some women use hormone therapy to help with hot flashes.*
- Problems with the vagina and bladder - Decreased levels of estrogen can make the vagina drier and thinner, possibly making sexual intercourse uncomfortable. You may find it hard to hold urine long enough to go to the bathroom, or you may leak urine during exercise, sneezing, coughing, or laughing.
 - *Kegel exercises help strengthen the vaginal muscles, improving vaginal health and bladder control.*





- Sleep problems - You may start having trouble getting a good night's sleep. This could be caused by insomnia, night sweats, or other reasons.
- Certain medications may help with sleep problems. Talk to your health care provider to see if this would work for you.
- Mood changes - You might find yourself moodier, irritable, or depressed around the time of menopause.
- Certain medications may help with sleep problems. Talk to your health care provider to see if this would work for you.
- Changes in your body - You may experience changes in your body, such as a larger waistline, a gain in muscle or fat, thinning skin, stiff or achy joints and muscles, or memory problems. These changes could be the result of menopause or simply from growing older.
- Regular exercise and a well-balanced diet can help reduce the risk for these changes.
- Osteoporosis - A thinning of bones that makes them less dense, which is a common occurrence during menopause.
- Regular exercise, especially weight-bearing exercises, can help reduce the risk of osteoporosis.

Some women use hormone therapy to help with the symptoms of menopause, although hormone therapy carries a high risk for serious side effects, including breast cancer and heart disease. It is important for women to talk to their health care provider to determine the best treatment for them. Your provider can also offer other recommendations for lessening the symptoms of menopause.

