

What You Need To Know About Menopause

Thursday, January 28, 2021



Menopause is a natural part of the aging process for most women. It is defined as the time in a woman's life when her period has stopped for 12 consecutive months. This means that she has reached the end of her reproductive years.

In the US, the age at which menopause begins can range from 40 years to 58 years, with an average start at 51 years. Read on to learn about menopause and ways you can help manage your symptoms.

About premature menopause

Some women enter menopause early, before age 40. This is referred to as *premature menopause*. There are some known causes of premature menopause; however, the cause may not always be determined. Some reasons or risk factors for premature menopause include:

- Having a family history of early menopause.
- Smoking.
- Having the uterus or both ovaries removed surgically.
- Having certain autoimmune diseases such as thyroid disease or rheumatoid arthritis.

About perimenopause, menopause, and postmenopause

Perimenopause is a period of 8 to 10 years before your last menstrual cycle. On average, perimenopause may last 3 to 4 years, but in some women, it may last only for a few months. During this transition period, your ovaries will produce less estrogen over time. You will continue to have menstrual cycles, but they may be irregular and there is still a chance you could get pregnant. You are diagnosed with menopause if you do not menstruate for 12 months in a row.

Menopause is confirmed when you have not had a period for 12 consecutive months.

Postmenopause are the years after menopause. During this time, some of your menopause symptoms may start to ease. But your risk for certain conditions such as heart disease and osteoporosis, may increase. Be sure to speak with your healthcare provider about ways you can reduce your risk for certain conditions.

Menopause signs and symptoms

As a woman approaches menopause, her ovaries make different amounts of hormones called estrogen and progesterone. She may experience changes in her menstrual cycle (irregular periods) and may also start to have a variety of other menopausal symptoms. These may include:

- Hot flashes which cause a sudden feeling of heat in the face, neck, chest, back and arms. An episode can generally last between a few seconds to ten minutes. A woman may sweat during a hot flash and have cold chills after the hot flash.
- Trouble sleeping, such as having a hard time falling and staying asleep. Hot flashes during the night can cause women to sweat heavily (night sweats).
- Vaginal problems, such as vaginal dryness, which can cause itching, burning and discomfort. It may lead to painful intercourse and cuts and tears in the vagina.
- Mood changes or irritability.

Menopausal symptoms may be different for each woman. For example, hot flashes for some women might be severe enough to interfere with their lives, while for others they may be mild. Some women don't experience any hot flashes at all.

There are also longer-term health concerns that can emerge after menopause due to a decrease in estrogen. For example, following menopause, bone density loss might occur and may lead to osteoporosis, causing an increased risk of fractures. The risk of heart disease may also go up. Don't forget to talk to your healthcare provider about the long-term health effects of menopause and how they might affect you.

Diagnosis

Most women are diagnosed with menopause after 12 consecutive months of no menstrual cycle. If you are having symptoms and think they may be related to menopause, consider having a conversation with your healthcare provider. It is likely that he or she will take a detailed medical and family history and may recommend a blood test to check your hormone levels.

Managing menopause

Each woman experiences menopause differently and uniquely, so it's important to work with your healthcare provider to develop a management plan that is tailored to your needs. The plan can include making lifestyle

changes or taking medication, if appropriate. Here are some things you can talk about with your healthcare provider to help manage some of the symptoms associated with menopause and maintain your overall long-term health:

- For individual symptoms after menopause such as hot flashes or vaginal dryness, speak with your healthcare provider about lifestyle recommendations, prescription, and/or nonprescription options to consider.
- If you haven't already, establish good sleep habits, limit caffeine, alcohol, and large meals before bed, and turn off your digital devices before getting ready for bed.
- Exercise or walk regularly to help promote good bone health and improve sleep. Talk with your healthcare provider before starting a new physical activity.
- Eat a healthy, balanced diet that includes plenty of vegetables, fruits, and whole-grain foods along with adequate intake of calcium and vitamin D.
- Make—and keep—regular wellness check-ups with your healthcare providers, including your healthcare provider, dentist, and eye doctor.

Be sure to communicate with your healthcare providers about these and other things you can do to promote better health as you enter the next phase of your life.

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Originally published, Thursday, January 28, 2021