

# HORMONES AND MENOPAUSE

## WHAT YOU NEED TO KNOW

The endocrine system is a network of glands and organs that produce, store, and secrete hormones. Sometimes called “the change,” menopause is the time, around age 50, when a woman’s ovaries produce fewer hormones and she stops having a monthly period. Menopause takes place gradually over four or five years. Symptoms can occur more abruptly, such as if you have your ovaries removed. There are challenges in menopause, but by staying strong and active, you’ll find that some of the best years of your life are still ahead.



### MENOPAUSE FACTS

Menopause is a natural biological part of aging process for all women. Menopause can happen between 45 to 55 years of age in most women. It is the time that marks the end of your menstrual cycles as your ovaries no longer produce eggs and produce less amount of female hormones, called estrogen and progesterone, which help regulate your monthly periods.

#### 3 STAGES OF TRANSITION TO MENOPAUSE

- 1. PERIMENOPAUSE:** Begins several years before a woman’s last period. When the hormone levels begin to change, women may experience irregular, shorter/longer, heavier or lighter menstrual cycles than usual, and spacing between periods might change. Women may also experience hot flashes and other changes during this phase. For many women, perimenopause can begin as early as at 40, but on average, it starts around age 47.
- 2. MENOPAUSE:** You will know you have reached menopause only after it has been a full year since your last period. This means you have not had any bleeding, including spotting, for 12 months in a row. Typically occurs around the age 51.
- 3. POSTMENOPAUSE:** After menopause, women enter post-menopause. Hormone levels remain low and women are no longer able to get pregnant or have monthly cycles. Postmenopausal women are more vulnerable to heart disease and osteoporosis or thin bones.

**EARLY MENOPAUSE** could be a result of a surgical procedure such as removal of both ovaries (oophorectomy), chemotherapy or radiation therapy for cancer. Early menopause could also result from autoimmune or genetic abnormalities.

### COMMON SYMPTOMS

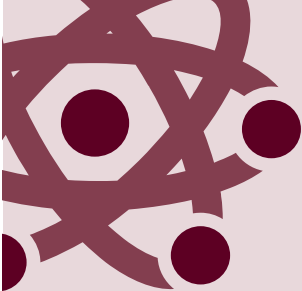
Some women sail through menopause with only a few symptoms, while others experience them all. These may occur during any or all stages of menopause, from perimenopause to postmenopause:

- Irregular periods
- Hot flashes and night sweats
- Mood changes
- Sleep problems
- Vaginal and bladder problems
- Fatigue
- Heart palpitations
- Dry skin
- Joint aches
- Body changes (weight gain)
- Hair thinning
- Forgetfulness
- Changes in sexual desire



Visit [endocrine.org/menopausemap](https://endocrine.org/menopausemap) for more information.

Editor: Spyridoula Maraka, MD



Hormone depletion matters because estrogen and progesterone also affect your reproductive tract, urinary tract, heart and blood vessels, bones, breasts, skin, hair, mucus membranes, pelvic muscles, and brain.



## DID YOU KNOW?

Perimenopausal women have one of the highest rates of unplanned pregnancies of any age group, even though pregnancies are rare. Birth control pills should be continued during the perimenopausal phase, if you want to avoid pregnancy. The risk of sexually transmitted diseases remains the same even after menopause. Women need to continue safe sex practices after attaining menopause.



**6,000**

An estimated 6,000 women in the US reach menopause every day.

**1.2  
BILLION**

It is estimated that 1.2 billion women worldwide will be menopausal or post menopausal by the year 2030.



With an increasing life expectancy, women will spend up to 40% of their lives postmenopausal.

Source: The American Congress of Obstetricians and Gynecologists

## DIAGNOSIS

If you've missed your period for three months in a row, it's time to talk with your health care provider. Your doctor might recommend other tests and exams, including thyroid testing, breast and pelvic exam. Together, you may decide on a treatment plan, especially if you're having menopausal symptoms that are affecting your quality of life.

## TREATMENT

No matter how you experience menopausal symptoms or which ones you have, there are very good ways to treat them. Because you are unique, your symptoms will be unique and your treatment will be unique.

Hormone replacement therapy may be right for you. This is a decision that you and your health care provider can make together.

## TIPS FOR STAYING HEALTHY

- Eat a healthy diet
- Avoid smoking
- Get regular exercise
- Get enough calcium and vitamin D



## QUESTIONS TO ASK YOUR DOCTOR

Is hormone replacement therapy right for me?

Are there non-prescription (over-the-counter) treatments that might help?

What are some other ways to treat my menopausal symptoms?

What are the risks and benefits of my treatment options?

Am I at risk for bone fractures and do I need treatment?

**Patients have questions. We have answers.**

Endocrine Society is your trusted source for endocrine patient education.

Our free, Menopause Map™ My Personal Path is available at [endocrine.org/menopausemap](http://endocrine.org/menopausemap).

