

Top Questions About Menopause

Menopause is when your period stops permanently, after you have not had a period for 12 months in a row. Menopause is a normal part of a woman's life. The average age for menopause in the United States is 52, but menopause does not happen all at once. As your body transitions to menopause over several years, you may have menopause symptoms and irregular periods.

Q: What are common menopause symptoms?

A: Changing hormone levels during menopause can cause symptoms such as:

- **Hot flashes (or flushes).** These are the most common menopause symptom. Hot flashes cause sudden feelings of heat and red blotches on the upper part of your body. You may also have heavy sweating during the hot flash and cold shivering after the flash.
- **Vaginal dryness,** which can make sex uncomfortable
- **Irregular periods.** Your periods may be lighter or heavier, or they may come more often or less often.
- **Problems sleeping**
- **Becoming forgetful or having trouble focusing**
- **Urinary problems.** You may experience leaking urine when you sneeze, or you may find it hard to hold urine long enough to get to the bathroom.
- **Mood changes.** You might feel irritable or have crying spells.
- **Depression and anxiety**
- **Changing feelings about sex**

If your menopause symptoms bother you, talk to your doctor or nurse. Your doctor or nurse can suggest steps to try at home or medicines to help with your symptoms.

Q: What is menopausal hormone therapy?

A: Menopausal hormone therapy, sometimes called hormone replacement therapy, is prescription medicine to help relieve hot flashes and vaginal dryness. Menopausal hormone therapy is safe for some women, but it does have risks. The Food and Drug Administration advises women who want to try menopausal hormone therapy to use the lowest dose that works for the shortest time needed.

Topical hormone therapy is a low-dose estrogen cream, vaginal ring, insert, or gel that is applied directly to the vagina. This type of hormone therapy can help with vaginal dryness but not other menopause symptoms.

Q: How will menopause affect my health?

A: After menopause, your ovaries make very little of the hormones estrogen and progesterone. This can raise your risk for certain health problems, such as:

- **Heart disease.** Estrogen helps keep blood vessels relaxed and open. It also helps the body maintain a healthy balance of good and bad cholesterol. Without estrogen, cholesterol may start building up on artery walls leading to the heart.
- **Stroke.** Your risk for stroke doubles every decade after age 55. The lower levels of estrogen in your body may play a role in cholesterol buildup on artery walls leading to the brain.

- **Osteoporosis.** Having less estrogen after menopause causes you to lose bone mass much more quickly than you did before, which puts you at risk for osteoporosis. Osteoporosis causes your bones to become brittle and weak and break easily.
- **Lead poisoning.** Blood lead levels can rise after menopause. This increases your risk for high blood pressure and atherosclerosis (sometimes called hardening of the arteries).
- **Urinary incontinence.** About half of postmenopausal women have trouble holding in their urine.
- **Oral issues.** Dry mouth and an increased risk for cavities are more common after menopause.
- **Be active.** Try to get 30 minutes of physical activity on most days of the week. Ask your doctor about what activities are right for you.
- **Eat well.** Getting vitamins, minerals, fiber, and other essential nutrients is important during and after menopause. You may need fewer calories for energy than you did before menopause. Ask your doctor or nurse whether you need a calcium supplement or whether you need more vitamin D.
- **Quit smoking.** Smoking damages your bones and can lead to heart disease and cancer in women. Stay away from secondhand smoke and get help quitting if you need it.
- **Practice safe sex.** As your body transitions to menopause, you can still get pregnant. Use birth control to prevent pregnancy. Also, during and after menopause, use a condom to prevent sexually transmitted infections (STIs, or STDs).

Q: How can I stay healthy during and after menopause?

A: You can take steps to build your health in the years around menopause.

For more information...

For more information about menopause, call the OWH Helpline at 800-994-9662 or contact the following organizations:

Centers for Disease Control and Prevention

800-232-4636 • www.cdc.gov

National Institute on Aging (NIA)

800-222-2225 • www.nia.nih.gov

Hormone Health Network

www.hormone.org

North American Menopause Society

440-442-7550 • www.menopause.org

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