

# Menopause

Menopause is a natural process that occurs in all women. It is the point in a woman's life when menstruation stops permanently, signifying the end of her ability to have children.

Known as the **change of life**, the average age at the time of menopause is 50, even though it can occur before age 40 or as late as 60.

Menopause is complete when a woman has been without periods for one (1) year. Cigarette smokers tend to reach menopause earlier than nonsmokers. There is no connection between the time of a woman's first period and her age at menopause. Race, height, and the number of children a woman has had, or whether she took oral contraceptives for birth control also do not influence her age at menopause.

## Stages of Menopause:

1. **Perimenopause:** begins when your ovaries produce less estrogen and ends when you have gone one (1) year without having a period. Finally, the levels of estrogen and progesterone produced by the ovaries drop so low menstruation stops altogether.
2. **Menopause:** menstruation stops and the woman can no longer bear children.
3. **Postmenopause:** begins one (1) year after your last period.
4. **Surgical Menopause:** a woman's ovaries are removed by surgery (bilateral oophorectomy), usually when she has a hysterectomy (removal of the uterus). This can cause a sudden drop in estrogen levels and worsen menopausal symptoms.

## Symptoms are caused by irregular estrogen and progesterone levels (female hormones). Common symptoms include:

1. **Hot Flashes and Night Sweats:** The most common symptoms of menopause. A hot flash is a sensation of heat within or on your body. During a hot flash or **flush** you suddenly feel hot. Sometimes only certain parts of your body get red or flushed. The most common parts of the body to get fully flushed are the face and neck. Night sweats may occur when you have a hot flash while you are sleeping. Fluctuating levels of estrogen and other hormones cause hot flashes.
2. **Vaginal Dryness:** Decreased estrogen levels can lead to vaginal dryness. This may lead to irritation, itching and soreness during and after intercourse.
3. **Irregular Periods:** Bleeding may be very heavy or very light. Some women skip periods, or have more than one (1) period in a month. This is usually one of the first signs of menopause.
4. **Fatigue:** Possibly caused by problems sleeping.
5. **Mood Swings**

After menopause you are at greater risk for heart disease due to estrogen loss, which can increase **bad cholesterol**, or LDL's and decrease HDL's or **good cholesterol**. HDL's help remove the LDL's, the type of cholesterol that cause fat deposits called plaque to build up along your artery walls, which increase your risk for coronary artery disease.

Estrogen prevents bone loss and works together with calcium and other minerals to help build bones. During and following menopause, estrogen is decreased and the process of building bones is slowed

## Health Tips

During and following menopause, estrogen is decreased and the process of building bones is slowed down which can lead to **osteoporosis**. Osteoporosis occurs when the bones are weak and brittle and hinder normal activities

### **How to relieve some of the problems brought on by menopause:**

- Drink plenty of water.
- Try to avoid alcohol and caffeine.
- Dress lightly.
- Maintain a regular exercise program which can reduce stress and help you sleep better.
- When a hot flash begins, go somewhere that is cool.
- Eat foods rich in calcium to prevent osteoporosis.
- Hormone replacement therapy. The doctor might suggest estrogen and progesterone (HRT). For women without a uterus, the doctor will recommend estrogen alone (ERT or estrogen replacement therapy). The hormones usually are taken in pill form, but are available as skin patches, creams, or vaginal inserts. Discuss HRT with your doctor to find out if it is right for you.

**ATTENTION:** This web page is intended to be used for health information ONLY. If you or a family member has a medical emergency, please call your doctor or 911, or your local emergency service number.

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