
Information from your Patient Aligned Care Team

Menopause Fact Sheet



What is Menopause?

Menopause is a natural biological process in a woman's life when she has reached the permanent end of menstruation and fertility, defined as occurring 12 months after her last menstrual period. During this process a woman's body makes less of the hormones estrogen and progesterone.

Who is Affected by Menopause?

- Menopause naturally occurs in woman between the ages of 45 and 55.
- Menopause may occur at earlier ages due to medical treatments such as surgery to remove the ovaries, family history, or cancer treatments such as chemotherapy or radiation in the pelvic area
- Symptoms usually begin to appear several years before menopause.

Signs and Symptoms of Menopause

- Hot flashes (getting warm in the face, neck, or chest)
- Night sweats
- Mood swings

- Irregular periods
- Decreased fertility
- Sleep disturbance
- Increased abdominal fat
- Vaginal dryness
- Thinning of bones and hair

Stages of Menopause

Menopause is a transition that occurs over months and years. It is characterized by two stages, perimenopause and postmenopause. Here are some things to expect during the stages of menopause:

Stage	Characteristics
Perimenopause	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • May last 4 to 5 years, or longer • Onset of menopausal signs and symptoms, such as mood swings, hot flushes, and diminished sex drive • Menstruation continues, but it may become irregular • Pregnancy is possible but unlikely
Postmenopause	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Menopause occurs after 12 months with no menstruation. The years that follow are called postmenopause. • The ovaries produce much less estrogen and stop releasing eggs • Postmenopausal bleeding may occur (keep a healthcare provider informed if this happens) • Some women notice higher energy levels • Risk for certain health conditions increases, so regular medical visits are important

Treatment for Menopause

***Before deciding on any form of treatment, talk with your doctor about your options and the risks and benefits involved with each.**

Are there treatments, ways to prevent the health concerns, or proactive efforts I could make?

- Maintain sufficient levels of calcium and vitamin D
- Hormone therapy, low-dose antidepressants, and Gabapentin have been shown to decrease menopausal hot flashes
- Strengthen your pelvic floor – pelvic floor muscle exercises, called Kegel exercises, can improve some forms of urinary incontinence.
- Eat a balanced diet that includes a variety of fruits, vegetables and whole grains and that limits saturated fats, oils and sugars. Aim for 1,200 to 1,500 milligrams of calcium and 800 international units of vitamin D a day.
- Optimize your sleep – avoid caffeine and engage in relaxation techniques, such as deep breathing, guided imagery and progressive muscle relaxation, to help with sleep problems.
- Decrease vaginal discomfort – use over-the-counter, water-based vaginal lubricants (Astroglide, K-Y) or moisturizers (Replens, Vagisil). Staying sexually active also helps.
- Don't smoke – smoking increases your risk of heart disease, stroke, osteoporosis, cancer and a range of other health problems. It may also increase hot flashes and bring on earlier menopause.
- Exercise regularly – get at least 30 minutes of moderate-intensity physical activity on most days to protect against cardiovascular disease, diabetes, osteoporosis and other conditions associated with aging.
- Schedule regular checkups – talk with your doctor about how often you should have mammograms, Pap tests, lipid level (cholesterol and triglyceride) testing and other screening tests.

Health Concerns and Menopause

What are some of the health concerns following menopause?

- Cardiovascular disease
- Osteoporosis
- Urinary incontinence.
- Weight gain
- Cancer

Resources

Information contained in this fact sheet was adapted from the following sources:

<http://www.mayoclinic.com/health/menopause/DS00119>

<http://www.cdc.gov/reproductivehealth//WomensRH/Menopause.htm>

[The North American Menopause Society](#)

For additional concerns about or assistance managing menopause, please consult your primary care provider or your behavioral health provider in primary care.