

Menopause

What is menopause?

Menopause is the transition starts years before your period stops. This happens because as a woman ages, her ovaries stop making enough of the female hormones estrogen and progesterone.

When does menopause occur?

Menopause usually occurs any time from age 41 to 59. A woman often goes through menopause at about the same age as her mother.

If you stop having periods early--before age 40--your doctor can do a blood test to see if you're going through menopause.

Menopause is a gradual process that can take several years. You're not really through menopause until you haven't had a period for 12 months. (During this time, you should use birth control if you don't want to become pregnant.)

What are the common signs and symptoms of menopause?

A change in your menstrual cycle. This is one of the first signs of menopause. You may skip periods or they may occur closer together. The blood flow may be lighter or heavier than usual.

Hot flashes. Hot flashes are the most common symptom of menopause. When you have a hot flash, you'll suddenly feel heat from your chest to your head, in wave-like sensations. Your skin may turn red and you may sweat. You may feel sick to your stomach and dizzy. You may also have a headache and feel like your heart is beating very fast and hard.

Thinning of your vagina and vulva (the area around your vagina). The skin of your vagina and vulva becomes thinner with menopause. Your vagina also loses its ability to produce as much lubrication (wetness) during sexual arousal which renders it dry. These changes can lead to pain during sex.

Urinary tract problems. You're more likely to have bladder and urinary tract infections during and after menopause. Report to your doctor if you have to go to the bathroom often, feel an urgent need to urinate, feel a burning sensation when urinating or are not able to urinate.

Headaches, night sweats, trouble sleeping and tiredness are other symptoms. Trouble sleeping and feeling tired may be caused by hot flashes and night sweats.

Does menopause have emotional symptoms?

Many women experience emotional symptoms during menopause. These symptoms may include sadness, anxiety and loss of sleep. For some women, symptoms can be severe. If you find that you're having emotional problems, you should talk to your Doctor.

What is hormone replacement therapy?

Hormone replacement therapy (HRT) involves taking estrogen alone or estrogen combined with another hormone, progestin. Some women have found that HRT can relieve symptoms such as hot flashes, vaginal dryness and some urinary problems. However, HRT is not for everyone, as the recent studies shows that for many women, the risks of using HRT may outweigh the benefits. You should talk to your doctor about the risks and benefits of HRT.

How to manage menopause without using HRT??

1. Behavioral interventions wear layered cotton clothing. Avoid coffee, alcohol, spicy foods, and stress! Sip cool drinks or use ice packs. Relaxation and deep, abdominal breathing (6-8 breaths per minute) have been shown to reduce hot flashes by about 40% when practiced as minimally as twice per day. Eliminate hot baths or showers before bedtime.

2. Use estrogen creams and lubricants use of an estrogen cream (put in and around the vagina) or a water-based lubricant to decrease the dryness.

3. Vitamin E some women experience a reduction in hot flashes when taking Vitamin E.

4. Soy the results of the research on soy are inconclusive and contradictory. Some studies have found that soy has a positive effect on hot flashes, whereas others suggest that there isn't any beneficial effect. The following servings contain about 35-50 mg of soy isoflavones: one cup soy milk, 1/2 cup tofu, 1/2 tempeh, 1/2 cup green soybeans (edamame), and three handfuls of roasted soy nuts.

5. Other prescription drugs your Doctor may prescribe you some medication to reduce hot flashes, low doses of antidepressants have been effective. Clonidine, a drug normally used to treat hypertension, can sometimes help relieve hot flashes. However, it may lower normal blood pressure.

6. Exercise, research shows that exercise alone can alleviate hot flashes. In one study, aerobic exercise reduced the severity of hot flashes in 55% of postmenopausal women.