

Women's Health and Menopause

What You Should Know



Menopause is a common part of aging for women. Some women feel little change and others may feel as if they suffer. If symptoms bother a woman and affect her quality of life, there are a number of ways to find relief.

What is perimenopause?

Perimenopause is the phase that most often starts when a woman is in her mid-40s. Peri means “around menopause” and starts when a woman’s hormone levels and periods start to change. During perimenopause, the ovaries make less hormones, women start to have symptoms of menopause and periods start to vary and can be shorter and lighter, or heavier and longer. The number of days between periods may change and you may even skip a few periods. Perimenopause can last for many years up until a woman’s last period.

What is menopause?

When a woman has not had a menstrual period for a full year, she is thought to be in *menopause*.

What are the symptoms of perimenopause/ menopause?

Some women have few or mild symptoms, while others have symptoms that bother them more and are hard to manage.

Common symptoms of menopause are:

- **Hot flashes.** This is a sudden feeling of heat rushing to the face and upper body, like a sense of flushing. It can happen along with a feeling of heart flutters or heart racing, chills, sweating and a sudden intense sense of anxiety, usually lasting one to five minutes. Hot flashes can happen many times a day or a few times a month. Night sweats are hot flashes that happen while sleeping. These are also called *vasomotor symptoms of menopause (VMS)*.
- **Sleep changes/insomnia.** Some women have trouble falling asleep, wake up much earlier than usual or wake up during the night. If you wake up during the night, you might have trouble falling back to sleep. Some women have night sweats, which are hot flashes that happen at night. These symptoms may make you feel tired during the day because they disrupt your normal sleep pattern.
- **Mood swings.** Sudden changes in mood that you are not able to control can be linked with changes in hormones. You may find it harder to keep your feelings in check at work or at home.
- **Urinary changes.** The urethra (the tube that carries urine from the bladder) and bladder rely on estrogen to stay healthy and work well, both to hold urine and to pass urine. During menopause, you may be more likely to have frequent urinary tract infections (UTIs). You may have more issues with urine control and have a sudden urge to pass urine, or urine may leak when you workout, sneeze or laugh.
- **Vaginal changes.** As estrogen levels go down over time, the tissue of the vagina becomes thinner, dry, less elastic and often women may have more discomfort. This can



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cause pain during vaginal sexual activity. These changes can also lead to more frequent vaginal infections and UTIs.

How are symptoms of menopause treated?

Hormone replacement therapy (HRT), sometimes called hormone therapy (HT), helps manage menopause symptoms. For systemic symptoms, such as hot flashes, night sweats and mood changes, systemic HRT may be helpful. It can also help protect against bone loss that happens in menopause, and there is some data that claims it can protect the heart in some women as well. HRT can help protect against the urinary and vaginal changes linked with menopause that can lead to infections, urine leaks and painful sex.

For women who still have a uterus, HRT includes estrogen and progesterone. Taking progesterone helps to protect against the risk of getting cancer of the uterus that may happen when estrogen is taken alone. For women who have had a hysterectomy and no longer have a uterus, estrogen therapy alone may be used, but always talk to your doctor to find what is best for you.

Systemic HRT comes in many forms, such as oral pills, skin patches, gels and sprays that are put on the skin; all are meant to be absorbed into the blood stream for systemic therapy. Women who only have local vaginal symptoms can be treated with local vaginal estrogen therapy alone in the form of a vaginal cream, vaginal suppository/tablet or a wearable vaginal ring. Some women need both systemic and local vaginal therapy to manage all their symptoms.

If you are thinking about HRT, talk to your doctor. Your doctor will talk about the risks and benefits of systemic versus local hormone therapy based on your symptoms, age and risk factors to help find the best choice for you.

Other treatments are used by women for menopause. Some non-hormonal drugs or antidepressants may be prescribed to treat extreme hot flashes. Over-the-counter vaginal moisturizers help with local vaginal dryness and irritation, while vaginal lubricants are used during sex. Some women choose to use plants and herbs for symptoms, but research on these is limited, and they may even change the way other

drugs work. If you are thinking of taking a plant or herb supplement, know what is in it and talk with your doctor about whether it is really helpful and safe.

A healthy lifestyle is of great value for women during and after menopause. This may include a balanced diet with enough calcium and vitamin D to help keep your bones strong. Regular weight-bearing workouts, such as walking, slows down bone loss that happens after menopause. Strength training with handheld weights, a workout resistance band or using your own body weight can help strengthen muscles and bones. Balance training, such as tai chi or yoga, can help you avoid falls and broken bones.

The choice about how to treat menopause symptoms can differ for women. If you are bothered by your symptoms, there is no need to suffer in silence. Talk to your doctor about options for you so you can work together to find the best care to improve your quality of life.

About the Urology Care Foundation

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To learn more, visit the Urology Care Foundation's website, **UrologyHealth.org/UrologicConditions**.

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This information is not a tool for self-diagnosis or a substitute for professional medical advice. It is not to be used or relied on for that purpose. Please talk to your urologist or health care provider about your health concerns. Always consult a health care provider before you start or stop any treatments, including medications.

For more information, visit **UrologyHealth.org/Download** or call 800-828-7866.

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