

Menopause

What is menopause?

The word 'menopause' comes from the Greek words 'menos' meaning month and 'pause' meaning to cease. Menopause means the monthly period stops.

Menopause is the final menstrual period. Usually you only know you have had a final menstrual period if you have had no period for 12 months.

What happens at menopause?

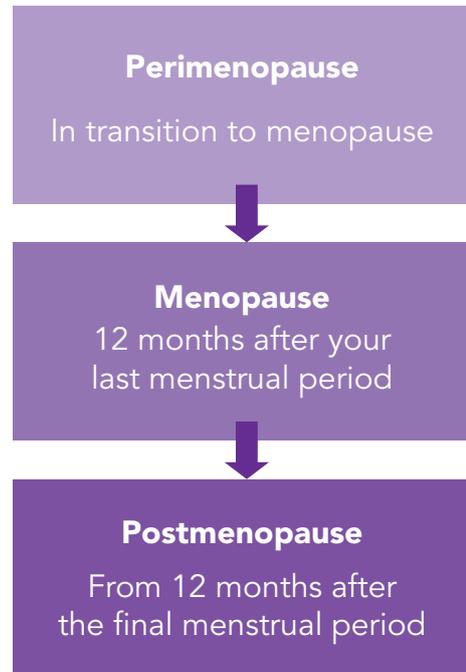
Women are born with about a million eggs in each ovary. At puberty approximately 300,000 eggs remain – by menopause there are no active eggs left. On average women in Australia have 400-500 periods in their lifetime. From about 35-40 years, the eggs left in your ovaries decrease quickly and you ovulate (release an egg from the ovary) less regularly until your periods stop.



When does menopause occur?

Most women reach menopause between 45-55 years – the average age of menopause for women in Australia is 51-52 years. Menopause sometimes occurs earlier than expected as a result of cancer treatment, surgery or unknown causes.

The stages of menopause



Hormones & menopause

Hormones are chemicals made in your body, which send out messages through the blood stream. They help control many body functions such as repair of cells, reproduction, sexual function, digestion and temperature. They alert the body to eat, stop eating, to sleep, wake up, to grow, or when hormone levels decrease, to stop growing. The hormones of particular relevance at menopause are oestrogen and progesterone. The symptoms are created by changes in the levels of these hormones. The changes in oestrogen and progesterone usually happen over months or years as you approach menopause. If menopause is induced by surgery or cancer treatment, there can be a sudden drop in all of these hormones, causing symptoms to be more severe.

Menopause symptoms

Symptoms of menopause generally include hot flushes, vaginal changes and mood swings. There are other physical and emotional symptoms such as aches and pains, crawling or itchy skin, sore breasts, irritability, but no one woman will experience menopause in the same way. Culture, health, previous experience of mood problems, lifestyle and whether you have had a natural, surgical or chemotherapy induced menopause will all impact on menopausal symptoms.

What can you do to help with menopause?

- Seek information and increase your understanding of what changes are happening and what you can do to help yourself
- A healthy lifestyle can help to reduce symptoms of menopause:
 - A nutritious diet helps with fatigue and moodiness
 - Being physically active helps with hot flushes, stress and mood
 - Keep an eye on your alcohol intake, as alcohol is known to make hot flushes worse
- Practical strategies to stay cooler such as carrying a hand fan, water facial spray and wearing layers of clothing to peel off when you are hot
- Complementary therapies including:
 - Herbal and natural remedies: the herb black cohosh and eating phytoestrogens (eg soy, lentils) may help with hot flushes; St John's Wort may help with mood changes at menopause. The safety and effectiveness of other herbal remedies is not proven

- Relaxation: practising relaxation and controlled breathing may help hot flushes
- Hormone replacement therapy (HRT): used mostly for up to 5 years to ease menopausal symptoms in healthy women. Risks and benefits should be considered when deciding with your doctor whether to use HRT
- If you cannot take HRT, other medications such as antidepressants, serotonin norepinephrine reuptake inhibitors (SNRIs) and anti-epileptic medicine can reduce hot flushes
- Keep a record of the physical and emotional symptoms troubling you and list their frequency and effect on your daily life. This information can help to see what changes you can make to reduce their impact
- Look after your emotional health along with your physical health
- Depending on your symptoms, you may like to see a registered naturopath, psychologist, dietitian, exercise physiologist, general practitioner, gynaecologist or endocrinologist (hormone specialist)

See your doctor if:

- you are troubled by less regular periods
- you are worried about heavy bleeding
- you have symptoms of menopause that interfere with daily life
- you have symptoms of depression and anxiety, including changes to your thinking, eating, sleeping and enjoyment of activities

For more information go to jeanhailes.org.au/health-a-z/menopause

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This fact sheet is designed to be informative and educational. It is not intended to provide specific medical advice or replace advice from your medical practitioner. References are available on request.

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