

What is menopause?

Menopause is the time in a woman's life when her menstrual period stops. It is also called the "*the change of life*". Menopause is a natural biological process that affects each woman differently. It involves a series of changes that happen in a woman's body as early as the age of 40 and can last well into her fifties.

Peri-menopause is the time when women begin to feel the changes of menopause, and may last for several years. Women are *post-menopause* when they have not had a period for 12 months.

What causes menopause?

During menopause a woman's ovaries make less of the hormones estrogen and progesterone (natural chemicals found in the body), causing other changes. Women in their late 30s may begin to experience irregular menstrual cycles, unpredictable or heavy bleeding. The remaining eggs in her body are less likely to be fertilized by a sperm, the ovaries release fewer eggs and she is less likely to become pregnant. Around the age of 50 to 55 she stops getting her period.

What is premature (early) menopause?

Premature menopause is menopause that happens before the age of 40. For some women, menopause occurs early due to family history (genes), medical treatments like surgery to remove the ovaries, total hysterectomy (removal of the uterus and the ovaries), some cancer treatments, like chemotherapy or radiation, or other hormonal reasons.

What are the symptoms of menopause? (What does menopause feel like?)

Every woman experiences menopause in a different way at different times. Some women have very few symptoms, however most women experience some of these physical and emotional changes:

- Hot flashes - Unpredictable periods
- It becomes more difficult to become pregnant -
- Problems with concentration or memory
 - Difficulty controlling bladder -
- Change in body shape or weight gain
- Hair thinning or loss - Vaginal dryness -
- Mood changes - Insomnia (sleeping problems)

Is there a treatment for menopause?

Menopause is not a disease or disorder and usually does not require medical treatment. For some women, the symptoms of menopause will go away over time without treatment. Other women may seek treatment for relief from the symptoms of menopause. Medications used to treat these are called Hormone Replacement Therapy (HRT), and there are other non-hormonal treatments as well. These medications can be effective in treating hot flashes, bone loss (osteoporosis), insomnia and vaginal dryness. However, some women cannot take these medications if they have certain other medical conditions. Others also choose to deal with menopause symptoms with herbal treatments, diet changes and alternative medicines. Before making any decisions about medical treatment women are advised to consult with their doctor and weigh the positives and negatives of each. Tell your doctor about ALL herbal treatments, vitamins and medicines that you are taking.

Talk to a doctor about the many ways to stay healthy during this time of your life.

What about sex?

For some women, menopause may bring an increase or decrease in sexual activity and interest. For women who experience vaginal irritation or sensitivity, sex may feel uncomfortable. However, avoiding sex is not necessary. Some medications may improve this, as will using vaginal lubrication. Talk to your doctor about the best choice for you. During and after menopause women are advised to use male or female condoms to prevent sexually transmitted infections including HIV if they are not in a monogamous (faithful) relationship.

Can I become pregnant if I am having symptoms of menopause?

Yes, it is possible to become pregnant if you have had a period within the past year, even if it is irregular. It is recommended that women continue using a form of birth control to avoid becoming pregnant until at least one year has passed without having a period.

*Do you have questions about **menopause**?*

Call the
CHOICE Hotline
at **215-985-3300** or
1-800-848-3367