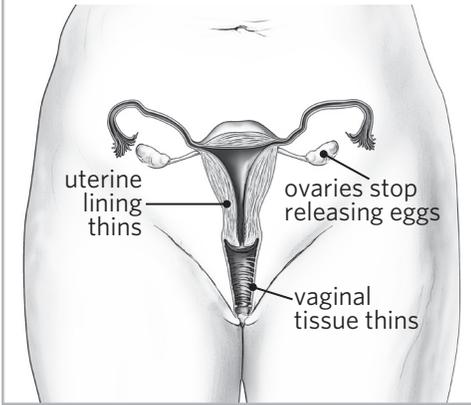


Menopause

Female Reproductive System



Most women experience menopause in their late 40s or early 50s. But if you've had surgery to remove your ovaries, you'll immediately go through menopause—no matter your age. You reach menopause one year after your periods have completely ended.

There are treatments and lifestyle changes you can make to help ease the uncomfortable symptoms of menopause. Talk to your doctor about your treatment options.

Stages of Menopause

The changes your body experiences during menopause happen gradually because of falling levels of two important hormones—estrogen and progesterone. See the chart below to learn how these hormonal changes affect the symptoms you may have.

Stage	Perimenopause (before menopause)	Menopause	Postmenopause
What Happens	Your ovaries start making less estrogen and progesterone.	You have a quick drop in estrogen and progesterone levels. Your ovaries stop releasing eggs.	You can't become pregnant anymore.
Symptoms	You have irregular periods, hot flashes and trouble sleeping.	Your periods end, and you may gain weight and have vaginal dryness.	You may continue to have some symptoms as your body adjusts to working with less estrogen and progesterone. You're also at risk for health conditions like heart disease and osteoporosis.

Symptoms

The following are telltale signs of menopause:

- **period changes**—including being irregular, having longer or shorter periods, or having heavier or lighter periods
- **hot flashes or night sweats**
- **less interest in sex, pain during sex, or trouble getting aroused or having an orgasm**
- **vaginal dryness**
- **trouble sleeping**
- **frequent urinary or vaginal infections**
- **trouble controlling your bladder**
- **weight gain**, especially around your waist
- **mood swings**, including feeling irritable or depressed
- **trouble concentrating or being forgetful**

These changes won't happen all at once, and you may not have all of them.

Treatment

All women experience menopause differently, so there isn't one treatment that works for everyone. Talk openly with your doctor about what you're experiencing so you can work together to decide what's best for you.

- **Vaginal estrogen**—This is something your doctor might prescribe to relieve vaginal dryness. It comes in a tablet, ring or cream and is safer than other hormone treatments because it releases only a small amount of estrogen that's absorbed by tissues in your vagina.



- **Hormone therapy**—This works by replacing the estrogen and progesterone that your body isn't making anymore. It can help with hot flashes, night sweats, vaginal dryness and mood swings.

Only your doctor can help you decide if hormone therapy is right for you. Hormone therapy increases your risk of heart disease and breast cancer, but it lowers your risk of osteoporosis and colon cancer, in addition to easing menopause symptoms. If your doctor prescribes hormone therapy, take the smallest dose that works for you, for the shortest amount of time.



To learn more, visit
**HealthyAdvice.com/
MenopauseLifestyle**

You can also visit these websites:

- **The Hormone Foundation**
www.hormone.org
- **The National Women's Health Information Center**
www.womenshealth.gov

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What You Can Do

You can also help your symptoms with these tips:

Stay active. Exercise can help prevent weight gain, improve your sleep and reduce your risk of other menopause-related health conditions like osteoporosis and heart disease. Vary your workouts to stay interested and motivated—take a dance class, garden or do water aerobics.

Sleep better. If you have night sweats, wake up during the night or have trouble getting to sleep, keep your bedroom dark and cool. Keep a bucket of ice water and a washcloth next to your bed so you can use it to cool off quickly.

Improve your mood. Consider seeing a counselor or joining a support group. Also, ask your doctor if taking a low-dose antidepressant for a short period of time could help you.

Prevent hot flashes. Try to avoid triggers like hot drinks, caffeine, spicy foods, alcohol, warm temperatures, stress or tight clothing. If you're having a hot flash, go somewhere cool, or turn on a fan; remove a layer of clothing (if you can); drink a glass of cold water or juice; or splash cold water on your face or wrists.

Stay healthy. Before and after menopause, falling estrogen levels can increase your risk of developing certain health conditions. Talk to your doctor about when to schedule health screenings to help prevent osteoporosis and heart disease. And remember, after menopause you still need to have regular breast and pelvic exams, as well as Pap tests to screen for cervical cancer.

Remember:

- Menopause happens when your periods stop because of decreasing hormone levels.
- Your doctor can help you decide if hormone therapy is the right treatment for you.
- Talk to your doctor about when to schedule screenings to help prevent menopause-related health conditions.

