

What is Menopause?

If thinking about menopause has you concerned, anxious, or maybe curious, you're not alone. All women eventually go through this stage of life. Knowing more about menopause can better prepare you for it.

Menopause marks a major change in your body. It's the time when you stop having periods because your ovaries no longer make enough of the hormones estrogen and progesterone for reproduction. You are in menopause when you have not had a period or any bleeding for 12 months in a row.

Many women reach menopause around age 51. But every woman is different. You may enter menopause earlier or later. In the years leading up to menopause, your hormone levels will fluctuate a lot. This time of transition is called perimenopause. It can last from 2 to 8 years.

During perimenopause, hormone changes may cause you to have various symptoms. You may have irregular periods. Your period may be longer, shorter, lighter, heavier, and occur more or less often.

You may also have: Hot flashes; Sleep problems like night sweats and insomnia; Vaginal dryness, which may cause pain during sex; Mood changes; Less interest in sex; Memory problems; And other body changes, like thinning hair and skin or weight gain.

These common symptoms may be very mild or very intense. Your experiences will be unique to you. If such symptoms bother you, you can do many things to feel better. For example, wearing layers may help with hot flashes. Deep-breathing exercises may improve your mood and your sleep.

Your healthcare provider can tell you about other lifestyle changes and treatments, such as medicines, that may help as well. Together, you can figure out what's best for you as you enter the next stage of your life.