

Menopause Treatments

General Information

Menopause is a natural process. It occurs when you stop having your monthly period for at least 12 months in a row (without being pregnant). This usually happens between the ages of 47 and 55.

During menopause, your ovaries no longer produce eggs and you cannot get pregnant. Until you have gone one full year without a period, you will still need to use birth control if you do not want to get pregnant.

Menopause can also happen if both ovaries are removed surgically. This is called surgical menopause.

You may start to feel menopause signs months or years before it starts. This is called perimenopause and it lasts up to one year after your final period.

About 75 percent of women have some negative symptoms during menopause. These include:

- hot flashes
- night sweats
- changes in your period
- sleep problems
- mood changes
- memory or concentration problems
- fatigue
- reduced sex drive
- vaginal dryness
- bladder infections.

If you smoke, you are more likely to begin menopause earlier than someone who doesn't use tobacco.

Hormone Changes

When your ovaries stop releasing eggs, they stop making the sex hormones estrogen and progesterone. Functions of these hormones before menopause:

- Estrogen tells your brain to signal your ovaries to release an egg once a month. It makes your uterine lining (endometrium) thicker. Estrogen also helps prevent heart disease, helps prevent osteoporosis (weak, brittle bones) and helps relieve some symptoms of menopause.
- Progesterone helps control your monthly periods. The levels drop when you do not get pregnant. This signals your uterus to shed the lining (your period).

The lack of estrogen during menopause can lead to bone loss (osteoporosis), heart disease and possibly Alzheimer's disease.

Treatments

- Do not smoke. Smoking will increase your risks of heart disease, cancer, breathing diseases, osteoporosis and Alzheimer's disease.
- Exercise at least three to five times a week. It helps strengthen bones, keep your weight down and relieve stress. Exercise can help your hot flashes. Talk with your health care provider about an exercise routine that is right for you.
- Eat well-balanced meals. Limit the amount of caffeine, sugar and salt you eat. Watch how much cholesterol and fat you eat.
- Increase the amount of calcium, folic acid and vitamins B, D and E in your diet. These are essential to bone strength and growth.
- Add soy foods to your diet. Soy has plant estrogens and may help balance your hormones.
- Lose weight if you need to. It is estimated that for every extra pound of fat, your heart needs to pump blood through an extra mile's worth of blood vessels. Being overweight puts you at risk for heart disease, diabetes and arthritis.
- Do not drink lots of alcohol or caffeine. More than two drinks or three cups of coffee a day prevent your body from absorbing calcium.
- Talk to your doctor about hormone replacement therapy (HRT). By taking extra estrogen, you can relieve menopause symptoms (such as vaginal dryness). However, there can be serious health risks from long-term use of HRT that your provider can talk about with you.

- If you are depressed, talk with your provider about your options.
- Use vaginal lubricating cream to make sexual intercourse easier.
- To keep hot flashes from coming on, avoid hot or spicy foods, hot drinks, alcohol, caffeine and warm surroundings.
- Share your feelings with your family or support group.

Alternative Treatments

An alternative treatment may be a good addition to your regular treatment. Talk with your health care provider to see if you could benefit from any of the following:

- aromatherapy
- yoga
- biofeedback
- herbal medicines
- massage
- qigong
- t'ai chi ch'uan.

**Information was adapted from
the National Institutes of Health, the
Alzheimer's Association
and the U.S. Food and
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