

Managing Menopause

About menopause

Menopause is reached when a woman stops having monthly periods for 12 months in a row. It happens as a natural part of aging, but can also occur when less estrogen is being made by the ovaries due to treatments, such as surgery, radiation therapy, or chemotherapy.

Estrogen is a hormone made by the ovaries. When less estrogen is made, signs of menopause can occur. The signs vary and can be uncomfortable, but often improve over time. Talk about your body's changes with your health care provider. Discuss treatments that may be best for you to manage your signs of menopause.

Signs of menopause

Let your doctor know about any changes you are having. These signs may be part of menopause, but they may also be signs of other health problems.

Common signs of menopause include:

- Changes in periods or menstrual cycles
- Hot flashes or warm flush feeling and sweating
- Problems sleeping
- Mood changes
- Headaches
- Feeling anxious
- Vaginal dryness
- Lack of sex drive or painful intercourse
- Dryness of the skin or hair

What you can do to help symptoms

To help with hot flashes

- Wear absorbent, cotton clothing and dress in layers. Remove pieces of clothing at the first sign of flush.
- Avoid wearing tight clothing.
- Keep room temperature at a lower setting.
- Use fans to circulate air.
- Avoid hot baths or showers.
- Reduce the amount of caffeine you consume. Caffeine is in coffee, tea, colas, and chocolate.
- Avoid spicy foods and eat lighter meals when it is hot outside.

- Reduce how much alcohol you drink, especially red and white wines.
- Exercise each day for at least 30 minutes.
- Reduce stress. Use relaxation techniques, such as yoga, meditation, and massage.
- Avoid smoking.
- Talk to your doctor about the use of herbs and dietary supplements.
- Check with your doctor or pharmacist before using soy products, black cohosh, dong quai, ginseng, or others. They can help you weigh the risks and benefits for your health. There may be possible interactions with other treatments.
- Discuss use of medicines with your doctor. Your doctor may recommend dietary supplements or nonprescription medicines, such as Vitamin B complex, Vitamin E, ibuprofen, or prescription medicines such as:
 - Hormone Replacement Therapy (HRT). For moderate to severe hot flashes, your doctor may recommend short term (less than 5 years) use of HRT if you do not have other health problems. HRT contain estrogen and sometimes progesterin.
 - Antidepressants, such as sertraline (Zoloft), venlafaxine (Effexor), and paroxetine (Paxil).
 - Blood pressure medicine, such as clonidine (Catapres).
 - Birth control pills.
 - Anti-seizure medicine, such as gabapentin (Neurontin, Gabarone).

Many of these medicines are used for other health reasons, but may reduce hot flashes. Often, these medicines are begun in small doses and are then increased over time to control your signs.

To help with sleep

- Keep a regular sleep schedule. Go to bed and wake up at the same time each day, even on weekends.
- Keep the room cool and wear lightweight clothes.
- Try a warm bath or shower at bedtime or after waking up at night.
- Exercise regularly.
- Do not rely on sleeping pills. They can disrupt restful sleeping patterns.
- Avoid products with caffeine or alcohol in the evening.
- Try cereal and milk at bedtime or after waking.
- Avoid late meals and filling snacks.

To help your moods or anxious feelings

- Talk with your doctor about your feelings, moods, and frustrations.
- Discuss treatments, such as antidepressants.
- Join a support group or seek counseling if needed.
- Keep involved with social and family activities that you enjoy.
- Reduce stress. Practice deep, slow abdominal breathing for relaxation.
- Focus on 1 or 2 tasks at a time. Set realistic goals. Avoid multiple, conflicting tasks.
- Exercise regularly.

To help with vaginal dryness or sexual problems

- There are products available to help with vaginal dryness or with painful intercourse:
 - Water-based lubricants, such as Astroglide or K-Y relieve vaginal dryness during intercourse.
 - Moisturizers, such as Replens or Lubrin restore vaginal moisture and comfort.
 - Vaginal estrogen therapy, such as estrogen cream, estrogen ring, and estrogen tablet relieve vaginal dryness. Talk to your doctor to see if estrogen can be safely prescribed for you.
 - Testosterone creams can be used to increase sex drive.
- When you have sex, increase foreplay time. This helps boost natural lubrication.
- Avoid using douches, feminine hygiene sprays, lotions, soaps, and bubble baths that may irritate your vagina.
- Kegel exercises may help to strengthen the muscles that control the bladder.
- Communication with your partner is very important.

To help with dry skin and hair

It is normal as estrogen decreases for the body to produce less oil for the skin and hair.

- Use lotion on dry skin two times each day. Do not use lotions with heavy perfumes or alcohol. They can cause more drying.
- Limit your time in the sun. For your skin, use sunscreen with 30 or 45 SPF and reapply as directed. Wear a hat or head covering.
- Brush your hair more often. This helps spread your hair's natural oils from the root of the hair to the tip.
- Wash hair less often. When washing, use a conditioner each time.
- Limit use of hair coloring, straightening or permanent waves. These chemicals can dry your hair.

Lower your risk of heart disease and osteoporosis

During menopause and after, women have a greater risk for heart disease and osteoporosis. This is linked to the changes in hormones. You can take steps to lessen your risk and stay healthy.

To prevent heart disease

- Stop using tobacco products, such as cigarettes. Ask your doctor for help to quit tobacco.
- Limit alcohol to one drink per day.
- Eat a wide variety of vegetables, fruits, and whole grains.
- Limit salt, saturated fat, and cholesterol in your diet.
- Control your weight. Extra weight means your heart has to work harder.
- Exercise regularly.

To prevent osteoporosis

- Have a bone densitometry test to check your bones before menopause.
- This gives a baseline measurement. Then, have periodic follow-up scans to recheck bone density or treatment progress.
- Increase weight-bearing exercise. For example, walk 2 to 3 miles a day, 4 to 5 times each week.
- Get enough calcium in your diet. Women ages 50 and under need 1,000 milligrams (mg) each day. Women over 50 and post-menopausal women not on HRT need 1,200 mg each day.
 - Foods high in calcium include milk, yogurt, cheese, calcium-fortified cereals, orange juice and tofu, broccoli, spinach, collard greens, soy milk, and fish with bones (canned salmon, sardines).
 - Talk to your doctor about taking a calcium supplement. The best calcium supplements are those that contain vitamin D since your body needs vitamin D to use calcium. Your doctor may recommend taking 1,000 mg or more of calcium per day in divided doses. Talk to your doctor about taking a vitamin D supplement if your exposure to sunlight is low.
- If you have thinning bones, avoid dangerous physical activities and try to prevent falls. Remove loose throw rugs that might cause you to trip and fall at home.
- Avoid use of tobacco products.
- If needed, talk to your doctor about medicines that can help your bone health.