

MENOPAUSE INFO

The average age to reach menopause is 51/52 and is confirmed when you have gone 12 consecutive months without a period (or 24 months if under 50) Any bleeding at all during this time, no matter how light, will mean the counting starts over!

Peri menopause begins when hormones start to decline. Most women notice symptoms from early to mid-40's. Hot flushes or changes in your menstrual cycle are early indications you're in peri-menopause.

Post menopause immediately follows menopause. You will now remain in this cycle for the rest of your life. Hormones are now at an all-time low and you are no longer fertile. Symptoms will eventually calm down, but do not expect this to happen straight away, they may go on for several years!

HRT (hormone replacement therapy) does not delay or stop menopause. It can give relief from symptoms while taking it. It does not make your menopause last any longer.

It is not necessary to see a doctor to confirm menopause and blood tests are unreliable as fluctuating hormones give false results. Be guided by your age and your symptoms. However, do speak to your doctor if you are concerned, or symptoms are affecting you.

Baby girls are born with 1-2 million immature eggs already in their ovaries and will never produce anymore in their lifetime. The eggs decline throughout the course of life. When you reach menopause, you have no eggs left.

Oestrogen is not just one hormone, it's a group of three. Oestradiol is the most dominant oestrogen before menopause. Oestrone is less potent and is produced in adipose tissue and the adrenal glands, as well as the ovaries. Oestriol is prominent during pregnancy. Oestradiol is the oestrogen used in HRT.

Oestrogen and Progesterone are made from cholesterol in the ovaries and adrenal glands. These hormones affect all parts of the body, including the brain, bones, digestion, circulation, nerves, muscles and the immune system. Which is why so many symptoms can be attributes to menopause as the body withdraws from these vital hormones.

SYMPTOMS

Hot flushes are the hallmark of menopause with over 75% of women experiencing them. They happen when the body's thermostat gets confused due to hormone fluctuations.

Top 10 menopause symptoms are: Irregular periods, hot flushes & night sweats, sleep disturbances, memory & concentration problems, low moods, anxiety, heart palpitations, aching joints & muscles, dryness, headaches/migraines.

Bone and Heart health are the main concerns in post menopause, as we continue to live without the beneficial effects of oestrogen. It is important to exercise most days and eat healthy. Make sure you include plenty of calcium in your diet, along with magnesium, vitamin D and K for proper absorption.

Aching joints and sore muscles are a result of declining oestrogen. HRT can help. Or natural supplements including glucosamine, chondroitin or SAM-e may offer relief. Increase omega 3's in your diet and include turmeric to reduce inflammation. Swimming and aqua aerobics are a good choice if you find exercise painful.

Continuous lack of sleep exaggerates other menopause symptoms. Fluctuating hormones disrupt our natural circadian rhythm. Night sweats, anxiety, loo calls, all add to use being sleep deprived. Progesterone is the calming, soothing hormone, discuss this with your doctor. Increase progesterone naturally with vitex supplements, eat more cruciferous veg. beans, kale and nuts. Use magnesium to help you feel calm & relaxed.

Dry, wrinkled, itchy skin is caused by oestrogen loss. This hormone is responsible for building collagen, which keeps skin firm and smooth. 30% of collagen is lost during the first 5 years of menopause! For best results use products formulated especially for menopausal skin, such as the Phytomone brand.

Menopause symptoms do not stop immediately on reaching post menopause. Don't be surprised if you are still experiencing some symptoms several years on. While the severity will decrease, it is important to maintain a healthy, active life.

Weight Gain is a common complaint – Falling oestrogen can alter the way we store fat and change our body shape. Our metabolism slows down, making it harder to burn calories. Fat cells also produce small amounts of oestrogen, which the body is desperate to hold on to. Top Tips = exercise daily, eat healthy, reduce portion sizes and be consistent.

DIET

Declining hormone levels can cause your body to stop producing lactase, the digestive enzyme necessary for the breakdown of lactose in dairy products. This can result in bloating, trapped wind, stomach cramps and diarrhoea. Try cutting out dairy to see if this helps or take a lactase supplement.

Declining hormones cause fat to accumulate around your mid-section, rather than hips and thighs. The upside is, your legs may look slimmer, but your waist thickens. While you may not regain that hourglass shape again, you can keep it in check by eating healthy and exercising.

The average daily calorie intake for a 50-year-old woman is 1600 calories but varies depending on lifestyle and activity level. If you're looking to lose weight you need to reduce your calorie intake by 500 per day to lose 1 pound in a week. 1lb of fat=3,500 calories.

Most of us eat more than we need. We seem to equate good value with a plate over-laden with food, rather than good quality. We do not need to over burden our digestive system. Try using smaller plates so that your portion sizes still look appealing, but your calorie intake could be up to 25% less.

We know water is important in our diet and we should all be drinking 6-8 glasses per day. But you will stay hydrated for longer if you add a pinch of Himalayan salt to some of your drinking water throughout the day. Sodium is a critical electrolyte that helps to deliver water to your cells. Alternatively swap some of your daily water for coconut water, which is naturally high in beneficial electrolytes, including sodium, potassium, calcium and magnesium.

EXERCISE

Heart and bone health are the main cause of concern in post menopause years as we live without the beneficial effects of oestrogen.

Aim to do some form of exercise most days, even if it's only a brisk 20-minute walk, or a run up and down the stairs a few times. Anything that gets the heart pumping and you out of breath will be beneficial.

Your weekly exercise routine should include aerobic exercises for heart health, resistance exercises for muscle and bone health, stretching and balancing exercises for flexibility and coordination. For maximum effects, try and incorporate HIITs (high intensity interval training) into your routine too.

Speak to a fitness instructor to get an exercise programme in place to suit your needs and your fitness level. We should not be working out the same as a 20-year-old, our body requires more attention in some areas and less in others. For example, The Plank is a great core strength exercise, but if you are suffering with bladder or pelvic floor problems caused by loss of oestrogen, this can be a dangerous exercise to do and it should be modified, or not done at all!

Give your hands and wrists a mini workout. Make a tight fist, hold for 5 seconds and then slowly open, stretching your fingers and thumbs out as far as you can. Now stretch your thumb over towards your small finger and then back in the opposite direction. Repeat regularly.

Face exercise are a great way of releasing some tension and toning the muscles. Try these three quick tips. (1) Look up to the ceiling and try to kiss it! Repeat 5 times. (2) Purse lips move to the right, and then to the left, Repeat 10 times. (3) Put index finger in mouth and suck as hard as you can. Hold for 5 seconds. Repeat 5 times.

Brain exercises should be done every day to keep those menopausal 'spacey' moments at bay. Take time to do a puzzle, such as a crossword or logic puzzle. Learn something new, take up a new hobby or revisit an old one. Get into the habit of journal writing. Play card games or board games. Spend some time with your memories, look at old photo albums and let your mind reflect on them as it takes you back to that place in time.



SELF CARE



Self-care isn't selfish. You have been there for everyone else for so long that you have probably forgotten how to put your own needs first. Prioritise yourself and take care of yourself as well as you do everyone else. Say no more often and don't feel guilty. It may feel strange at first, but it will grow on you! Start by having at least one event on the calendar each week to look forward to. It's essential to have this me-time to help you adjust to your changing needs.



Make a promise to yourself to learn meditation and practice most days for at least 10 minutes (if you don't already) Meditation can save your sanity during menopause. It affects the body in exactly the opposite way that stress does, restoring a calm state and helping the body repair itself. Get into the habit, you won't regret it.



Psychological symptoms during menopause can be worse than the physical ones sometimes and Cognitive Behaviour Therapy (CBT) can be incredibly helpful. This non-medical approach focuses on modifying negative thought patterns and behaviours. It can be helpful for anxiety, stress, depressed moods, sleep problems and fatigue.



While we all seem to love spending more time on our own in the comfort of our home, it really is soul nourishing to make the effort to meet up with friends, (like being here right now!) It's great to connect and have a network of friends that understand. Supporting each other and sharing experiences really can be the best type of therapy sometimes.

It can be difficult to try and explain to your loved ones, friends and work colleagues what is happening to you exactly, especially when you don't understand yourself. It's important to keep the communication lines open, to explain how you feel and the effects menopause is having on you and to ask them for their support and understanding. We need to talk more about menopause to bring awareness to it, which is exactly what this event is about. Together we can change the stigma attached to menopause and we are the ones who will make the difference for future generations. Something we should all feel very proud of.
