

MENOPAUSE

Menopause is the permanent cessation of menstruation. It can occur as early as age 40 or as late as nearly age 60s. It is normally diagnosed in females after 1 year of absent menstrual flow. Menopause is only one event in the “climacteric period,” which is a biological change in all body tissue and body systems that occurs in both sexes between the mid-40’s and mid-60’s. Menopause occurring before age 40 is termed premature and may need medical evaluation for the cause. Menopause does not occur suddenly. It is a slow transition and peri-menopause usually begins a few years before the last menstrual cycle.

Frequent symptoms and signs

- Physical changes (directly associated with decreased blood levels of female hormones):
- Menstrual irregularity – the menstrual flow can be heavy and / or prolonged.
- Hot flashes or flushes—sensations of heat spreading from the waist or chest toward the neck, face and upper arms (symptoms are often referred to as vasomotor instability). Often associated with excessive sweating.
- Headaches.
- Dizziness.
- Rapid or irregular heartbeat.
- Vaginal itching, burning or discomfort during intercourse, usually beginning a few years after menopause.
- Bloating in the upper abdomen.
- Urinary symptoms such as bladder irritability.
- Mood changes, pronounced tension and anxiety.
- Sleeping difficulty.
- Depression or melancholy and fatigue.

Causes

- This is a part of normal aging process, when there is decline in ovary function, resulting in decreased levels of the female hormones.
- Surgical removal of both ovaries (surgical menopause)
- Loss of ovarian function resulting from certain immunological diseases, infection, effects of radiotherapy or chemotherapy.
- Genetic or chromosomal disorders

Risk factors

- Smoking.
- Hysterectomy.
- Chemotherapy or radiotherapy.

Prevention

- Menopause cannot be avoided and currently there is no preventive strategy to avoid or delay it.

Possible complications

- Increased irritability and susceptibility to infection in the urinary tract.
- Decreased skin elasticity and vaginal moisture.
- Increased risk of hardening of the arteries, heart disease, stroke and osteoporosis after menopause.
- Changes in feelings of self-worth.

Treatment

- Menopause is a normal process, not an illness. Most women can make an easy transition without difficulty.
- Diagnosis is determined by patient's age and symptoms. Laboratory tests are often not required for diagnosis.
- Lifestyle changes may be necessary with the onset of menopause. Stay as healthy and happy as you can and live life to the fullest.
- Psychotherapy or counseling may be required if emotional changes interfere with personal relationships or work.
- If you are sexually active, do continue to use birth-control measures until at least 12 months after your last menstrual period.
- Reduce stress in your life as much as possible. Acupuncture, meditation, and relaxation techniques are all harmless ways to reduce the stress of menopause.
- Herbal (or products termed as natural remedies) may be of help to some women, especially those with significant hot flashes. Discuss this with your health care provider.
- Women who smoke may start menopause about two years earlier than nonsmokers. Also, smoking is linked to a decline in oestrogen. If you smoke, talk to your health care provider about programs to help you quit.
- See your doctor on a regular basis for health screening (Pap smear, mammogram, ultrasound scan and blood tests). Discuss the screening intervals with your doctor.
- Activity – there are no restrictions. Active exercise is beneficial. Weight-bearing activities (such as walking) are helpful for bone strength.
- Diet - eat a well balanced diet. Increase your calcium intake.
- Medications
 - Hormone replacement therapy (HRT) or estrogen replacement therapy (ERT) is an option. Hormone treatment has benefits as well as risks. HRT has to be considered on a patient-by-patient basis.
 - Medications to prevent and/or treat loss of bone density may be prescribed.
 - Take calcium and vitamin D supplements every day.
 - Antidepressants may be effective for treating hot flashes.
 - For vaginal dryness, moisturizers and non-estrogen lubricants, such as KY Jelly, Replens, and Astroglide are available.

SEE YOUR DOCTOR IMMEDIATELY IF THERE IS:

- Any unexplained vaginal bleeding during the menopausal period.
- New or unexplained symptoms develop. Drugs used in treatment may produce side effects.

Disclaimer

This is for informational purposes only and is not intended to be a substitute for professional medical advice, diagnosis, or treatment. It is important for readers to seek proper medical advice when necessary.

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