

All about the perimenopause and menopause

Easy read



balance

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What is the menopause?



The **menopause** is something that will happen to all women.



The **menopause** is when you stop having periods and your ovaries stop producing eggs so you can no longer get pregnant.



Your ovaries produce hormones called oestrogen, progesterone and testosterone. In the **menopause** your ovaries produce less of these hormones.



The menopause occurs a year after periods stop and is due to the low hormones in your body.

Age 51



The average age of a woman to have the **menopause** is 51. Some women have it happen sooner or later than this age.



The **menopause** can be different for each woman which means there can be confusion about the symptoms and treatment.



What is the perimenopause?



Perimenopause is the time before the **menopause** happens and symptoms occur. This can be for a few months or many years. For many people the **perimenopause** lasts for 10 years.



There are different things that happen to you in the **perimenopause**.

1. Your periods might be lighter or happen at different times.

2. You might get symptoms like hot flashes, mood swings, brain fog and fatigue. You can read more about the symptoms on page 5.



Some women start to have these symptoms when they are in their early 40s. Some women can be younger.



Some women do not notice that it is happening as they might think the symptoms are just stress or being busy.



If a woman has changes to her periods and symptoms like hot flashes, mood changes, poor sleep or brain fog then a doctor or nurse can diagnose the **perimenopause**.



What causes the menopause?



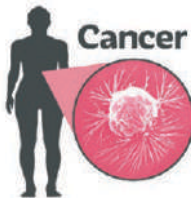
The **menopause** is caused by a change in the balance of your hormones which happens when they get older.



Hormone levels change when your ovaries stop producing as much of the hormone estrogen and no longer release an egg each month.



Some women can have the **menopause** happen early. This is called **premature** or **early menopause**.



The **menopause** can also happen if a woman has had medical treatment like having her ovaries removed, breast cancer treatment, chemotherapy or radiotherapy.



The **menopause** can happen early if the woman has Down's Syndrome or Addison's disease.



Symptoms of the menopause



Most women will have some or many of the symptoms of the **menopause**.



Some of the symptoms can stop you from doing everyday activities.



The symptoms that you can have are:



1. **Hot flashes.** This is short, sudden feelings of heat in the face, neck and chest. It can make your skin red and sweaty.



2. **Night sweats.** This is when hot flashes happen at night.



3. Finding it hard to sleep. This may make you tired and irritable in the day.



4. You might not want to have sex as much.



5. Problems with remembering things and being able to concentrate.



6. A dry and painful vulva and vagina, with itching and discomfort during sex.



7. Headaches.



8. Mood changes like feeling low or feeling worried.



9. **Palpitations.** These are where you can notice your heart beating.



10. Feeling stiff with aches and pains.



11. Having lots of **urinary tract infections.** These are infections which make it painful when you wee.



The menopause can also cause other problems like weak bones, which is called **osteoporosis** and **cardiovascular disease**, which is problems affecting your heart and blood vessels. Low hormones can also increase risk of **type 2 diabetes** and a condition affecting the way a person's brain works called **dementia**.

How to treat the symptoms of menopause



If a woman's symptoms are stopping her doing everyday things then her doctor or nurse can offer treatments or suggest things she can change in her life.



Treatments or changes are:

1. **Hormone replacement therapy (HRT).**

This is tablets, skin patches, gels and implants that give the woman more estrogen.



2. Estrogen creams, gels or vaginal pessaries for vulval and vaginal dryness. Or you can use a soft flexible ring or tablet inserted inside your vagina to help with dryness.



3. Cognitive Behavioural Therapy (CBT).

This is a type of talking therapy that can help if someone is feeling sad or worried.



4. Eating a healthy diet and exercising regularly. Being a healthy weight and staying fit and strong can make some of the symptoms better.



If these treatments do not work, the doctor or nurse might send the woman to see a **menopause** specialist.



You can find out more about the **perimenopause** and **menopause** here: www.balance-menopause.com