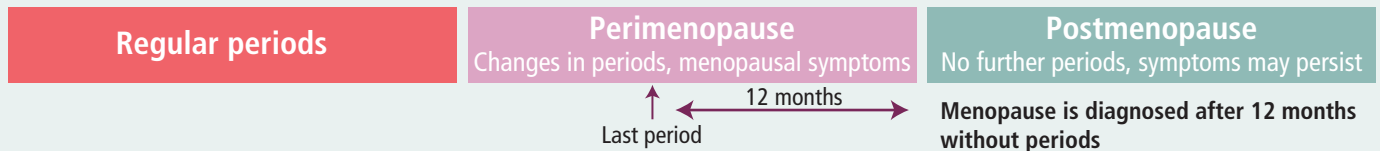


What is the menopause? Menopause is a natural process for most women.

- It usually happens between the ages of 40 and 55
- Between 40 and 45, it is known as early menopause but for some women it may occur before the age of 40, called premature menopause or premature ovarian insufficiency
- It is the time when a woman stops having periods and can no longer get pregnant naturally
- The ovaries stop releasing eggs and stop producing the hormones oestrogen and progesterone
- The menopause is diagnosed after 12 months without a period



What might happen during the menopause and perimenopause?

- Most women will get symptoms. For 1 in 4 they will be severe and can have a big impact on daily life.
- Symptoms can continue for many years and may change
- Symptoms can appear years before periods stop as the body makes its changes leading up to the menopause. This is called the 'perimenopause' or 'menopause transition'
- Symptoms can continue long after the menopause. This is known as the postmenopause.

MOST COMMON SYMPTOMS



changes to your period

Before they stop, periods can get lighter or heavier, happen less often or more often, or become unpredictable



mental health symptoms

Changes to your mood, like low mood, anxiety, mood swings and problems with memory or concentration (brain fog)



hot flushes & night sweats

Hot flushes are when you have short, sudden feelings of heat or cold, usually in your face, neck and chest. They can make you sweaty or dizzy and make your heart race



vaginal dryness

Vaginal dryness and pain, itching or discomfort during sex



headaches

Headaches, including worsening of existing migraines



joint pains

Muscle aches and joint pains



poor sleep

Difficulty sleeping, which may be the result of night sweats



reduced libido

Reduced sex drive

You may also experience:

- Changing body shape
- Repeated urinary tract infections (UTIs)
- Skin changes, including dry and itchy skin

Contraception

Pregnancy is still possible during perimenopause and for some time after the menopause. Generally, contraception is still needed for a year after periods stop and for 2 years if under the age of 50, but you should discuss this with a health professional.

MANAGING YOUR MENOPAUSE

For most people, **hormone replacement therapy (HRT)**, is the best treatment for the symptoms of the menopause.

Lifestyle changes and self-care can also help:



Healthy eating



Regular exercise



Stop smoking



Reduce alcohol



Get enough rest



Watch your weight



Talk to others going through menopause.

You can ask for help from healthcare, who can help with an NHS stopping smoking course.

Talk to healthcare if you need access to further support with your symptoms.

As well as HRT, a healthcare professional may be able to offer you non-hormonal treatments.



Mood problems and anxiety

- Regular sleep, exercise, relaxation techniques and mindfulness can help
- Cognitive behavioural therapy (CBT) is a form of talking therapy that can help, but is not available everywhere



Vaginal Dryness

You can buy vaginal moistures and vaginal hormone tablets from NHS pharmacists. A GP can prescribe estrogen as a cream, pessary, or vaginal ring to apply to the vagina



Hot Flushes & night sweats

- Wear lighter clothing
- Keep a cool bedroom temperature
- Take cold showers
- Use a fan, if you have one
- Take regular exercise
- Consider weight loss
- Avoid triggers like spicy food
- Work on reducing stress levels



Thinning of bones (Osteoporosis)

Osteoporosis is a health condition that weakens bones, making them fragile and more likely to break. HRT is best for preventing thinning of bones. You can also try:

- Regular weight-bearing exercises
- Eating a healthy diet including fruits, vegetables, and calcium-rich foods like low-fat milk and yogurt
- Increase your intake of vitamin D through supplements and sunlight
- Reducing alcohol and stopping smoking



Low sex drive

If HRT does not restore your sex drive, you may be offered a testosterone gel or cream to apply to the skin of your abdomen, upper legs, or buttocks

HRT Benefits

- HRT can effectively deal with common symptoms such as hot flushes, night sweats, mood changes and vaginal dryness, often providing relief within a few days.
- Other symptoms like joint pains take longer to improve
- It can also improve quality of life and provides a protective effect for bone health and heart health

HRT Risks

- Some types of HRT, particularly those containing estrogen, can slightly increase the risk of breast cancer and blood clots
- So estrogen by mouth is not recommended for those with a history of stroke or deep vein thrombosis (DVT)
- As long as the benefits are greater than the risks, HRT can be used long term

WHEN TO SEEK MEDICAL HELP

Speak to your healthcare or an officer and ask for further support if you think you have perimenopause or menopause symptoms and one of the following:

- You want to know more about treatment
- You want to discuss contraception
- Your symptoms are a problem, including your mental health
- You are under 45
- You are already on hormonal treatment or have had a hysterectomy
- Your periods have stopped unexpectedly

See a professional within a week if:

- You have reached the menopause and then experience any vaginal bleeding