

Menopause - Changes in women



Menopause is the period that symbolises the end of menstrual cycles.

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WHAT IS MENOPAUSE?

Is the period that symbolises the end of menstrual cycles. This is after a year of going without a menstrual period. [2]

Premature menopause: this is when a woman below 40 years of age experiences menopause.

Some causes include [3]:

- Smoking
- Family history
- Epilepsy
- Didn't have any children
- Diseases such as childhood cancer
- Medically induced after surgery

Perimenopause: this is the transition time to menopause. [3]

Late-onset menopause: this is when a woman experiences menopause after the age of 55 years.

Some of the causes include [3]:

- Obesity
- Having two or more children
- High intellectual score in children

SIGNS AND SYMPTOMS

- Decrease in fertility.
- Irregular uterine bleeding.
- Hot flushes, where skin temperature rises, and core temperature drops.
- Disturbances with sleep, for instance, having insomnia and night sweats.
- Urogenital changes, for instance, drying of the vagina and loss in elasticity of the vagina and urethra.
- Having regular urinary tract infections and symptoms of an overactive bladder such as having to go to the bathroom regularly, having drops of urine come out while laughing or sneezing or coughing, etc.
- Headaches.
- Mood swings and may also develop symptoms of anxiety and depression.
- Decrease in libido due to discomfort or pain when having sex.
- Bones may lose their calcification and thus increase the risk of fracture.
- Weight gain and redistribution of fat due to slowed metabolism.
- Eyes can become dry, itchy and develop more cataracts.
- Loss or thinning of hair.
- May experience joint pain.

COMPLICATIONS [2]

- **Osteoporosis** due to the decline in **bone density** which increases the risk of fractures.
- **Urinary incontinence** as there is loss of elasticity of the vagina and urethra and thus one will have a frequent, sudden and strong urge to urinate followed by involuntary loss of urine.
- Being overweight as your metabolism slows down.
- Increase risk of cardiovascular disease due to the decline of oestrogen.
- Risk of a heart attack increases during menopause.

LIFESTYLE MODIFICATIONS [4; 5]

- Sensation of smoking as it may increase the risk of cardiovascular disease or trigger hot flashes.
- Regular exercise for mood uplifting and reduction in weight.
- Avoid alcohol as it may trigger hot flashes.
- Eat healthy; decrease fast foods, decrease spicy foods, decrease animal products and restaurant or store-bought animal products that contain steroid hormones as they may trigger hot flashes.
- Regular doctor visits to monitor your blood pressure, vitamin D levels and test your bone density (every two years).
- Speak to your doctor about hormone replacement therapy.
- Dress in layers to avoid heat on the skin and avoid jerseys and scarves.
- Keep cool in your home by having a fan or aircon, putting a cold pack under the pillow when you sleep, drink beverages which have been cooled, etc.
- Therapies such as yoga, cognitive behavioural therapy, breathing exercises and relaxation techniques can improve sleep, well-being and vasomotor symptoms.
- Talk to your doctor about taking calcium tablets.