

Menopause

Menopause is a natural and normal part of life for women. It is the time when women stop having periods and are no longer fertile. Women are considered to be in menopause after going 12 months without having a period. Menopause usually happens around age 50, but can happen earlier or later. Menopause causes many changes to a woman's body because hormone levels change.

Signs of Menopause

- ★ **Periods become very irregular**
 - Bleeding may be very heavy or very light.
 - Periods come less frequently or more often.
 - Periods last for different amounts of time; longer or shorter than usual.
- ★ **Hot flashes or night sweats**
 - A sudden feeling of heat, especially around the upper body. The face and neck can get red and flushed. Red blotches may appear and heavy sweating or cold shivering can follow.
- ★ **Vaginal dryness**
- ★ **Decrease in libido (desire to have sex)**
- ★ **Mood swings, depression, anxiety, or increased irritability**
- ★ **Loss or thinning of hair, changes in weight, or joint or muscles aches**
- ★ **Difficulty sleeping and fatigue**
- ★ **Difficulty concentrating or memory lapses**

Possible Health Complications with Menopause

- ★ **Osteoporosis (weakening of the bones)**
 - As estrogen decreases with menopause, bone density can decrease
- ★ **Cardiovascular Disease**
 - Chance of getting heart disease can increase with menopause
- ★ **Incontinence (urinating accidentally)**
 - Elasticity around the genitals can change causing accidental urination, especially while coughing, laughing, sneezing or exercising
- ★ **Weight Gain**
 - Metabolism can slow down so many women need less calories per day and need to exercise to maintain a healthy weight

Treating Menopause Symptoms

Menopause is not something that you can prevent or stop, but it is possible to treat some of the symptoms.

Take care of yourself and take time for yourself

In order to decrease irritability, depression and anxiety and have less health complications with menopause, it is important to take care of yourself and take time for yourself. Make sure you are:

- **Eating healthy foods, such as**
 - ◆ Fruits, vegetables, and whole grains
 - ◆ Foods with less or no sugar added and less unhealthy fats
- **Eating foods with calcium and Vitamin D and taking vitamin/mineral supplements**
 - ◆ Helps your bones stay strong and decrease chances of getting osteoporosis
- **Exercising regularly**
 - ◆ Strengthens pelvic floor muscles to have better control of your bladder
 - ◆ Helps you sleep and reduces anxiety, irritability and depression
 - ◆ Keeps bones strong
- **Getting enough sleep**
 - ◆ Decreases anxiety and irritability
 - ◆ Reduces fatigue
- **Practicing relaxation (ask about handouts on Relaxation and the Relaxation Response)**
 - ◆ Reduces stress, decreases your heart rate, helps with concentration and mood swings, and makes it easier for you to sleep
- **Practicing calming hobbies or participating in activities that make you happy**
 - ◆ Decreases depression, irritability, and anxiety
- **Staying connected to close friends and family**
 - ◆ Decreases depression and anxiety
- **Limiting or decreasing caffeine, stimulants, and alcohol**
 - ◆ Helps you sleep, concentrate, relax, and keep control of bladder movements
- **Not Smoking**
 - ◆ Decreases menopause-related health complications

Medications

Medications are available to relieve the symptoms of menopause. Talk with your health care provider to see if any medications may be right for you.