

Difficulty sleeping/insomnia

The menopause may cause a woman to experience problems sleeping, particularly if they're also experiencing night sweats. Women can experience these difficulties for months, sometimes years and it can impact on daily life as it can result in constant tiredness, irritability and difficulty in concentrating on everyday tasks.

Top tips for a tip top night sleep

- Try and relax for at least one hour before bed e.g. take a bath or read a book
- Make sure your bedroom is dark, quiet and cool
- Exercise regularly during the day
- Make sure your mattress, pillows and covers are comfortable



Low mood/anxiety

Women can experience low mood as a symptom of the menopause including sadness, anxiety, panic or a feeling of low esteem which can then flip to feelings of anger.

Low mood usually occurs in short spells but if these feelings don't go away talk, speak to a GP about your symptoms. The NHS Choices website has a number of self-help suggestions/therapies.

Problems with memory and concentration

Many women experience periods where their memory isn't as good as it used to be prior to the menopause, for example forgetting why they went into a room or unable to recall the name of an object. This can be a result of changes to hormone levels. If these symptoms continue speak to your GP.

What treatment can help with the symptoms of menopause?

Many women manage the symptoms of the menopause without the need to seek medical support however additional support can be obtained by contacting your GP.



Further support and advice

www.nhs.uk/conditions/menopause

www.womens-health-concern.org

www.menopausematters.co.uk

The Menopause Matters

Whether you're in the midst of the menopause or think you may be showing signs, don't be daunted - be prepared and informed with our handy guide to support you on your menopause journey.

- What causes the menopause?
- When will it start?
- What should I expect?



What causes the menopause?

The menopause is something that all women experience. It most commonly takes place naturally in response to a decrease in a woman's oestrogen levels as she gets older. These changes in hormone levels result in the ovaries no longer releasing an egg each month which marks the end of a woman's monthly period and ability to have a child.

The menopause can also be brought on by some treatments – such as surgery to remove the ovaries, chemotherapy or radiotherapy. It can also be brought on by an underlying medical condition. Sometimes, a woman may start the menopause prematurely but there is no clear explanation or reason why this occurs.

When should I expect the menopause to start?

The menopause typically occurs between 45 and 55 years of age. Around one in 100 women experience the menopause before 45 years of age which is called 'premature menopause'. As mentioned above, there's no clear reason for this occurring.

What are the stages of the menopause?

The menopause does not have a clear-cut start and finish – it can involve a gradual build up over time and involves three different stages:

Stage 1: Perimenopause

This is the period of time leading up to a woman's last period and can take months or even years. During this stage, the ovaries start to make less oestrogen and a woman's hormone levels can become very erratic. Periods usually become less frequent before they stop altogether, but for some women they can stop suddenly. GP's can confirm this via a blood test.

Stage 2: Menopause

Technically, a woman is in the menopause after she's missed her period for 12 straight months. At this stage a woman is no longer considered able to have children.

Stage 3: Postmenopausal

Postmenopause starts one year after a woman has missed her period for 12 straight months and the ovaries no longer produce eggs. During this stage menopausal symptoms will ease for most women but some women will continue to experience symptoms for a number of years after.

What are the symptoms of the menopause?

Hot flushes

Hot flushes or flashes are often described as a sudden feeling of heat that seems to come suddenly – starting at the feet and then spreading throughout the body. They usually only last a few minutes and may make a woman sweat and appear flushed in the face.

The frequency and severity of hot flushes can differ from woman to woman. Some women experience the occasional hot flush, whilst others may experience them frequently throughout the day. Some women find them uncomfortable, disruptive and possibly embarrassing.

DID YOU KNOW?

Hot flushes can continue for a number of years after a woman's last period.

DID YOU KNOW?

The average age in the UK to reach the menopause is 51.

DID YOU KNOW?

The transition from perimenopause through menopause to postmenopause can take one to three years.

Top tips to reduce hot flushes and ease their symptoms:

- Reduce intake of coffee, tea and alcohol
- Cut back on spicy foods or those containing monosodium glutamate (MSG) that can trigger a hot flush
- Stop smoking
- Avoid woolly jumpers and polo necks – stick to loose layers of light cotton or silk clothes so you can easily remove layers
- Keep cool – use a fan and keep rooms cool or take a cool bath or shower
- Try and reduce stress or anxiety as this can trigger a hot flush

Some medication, treatment for certain types of cancer and some health conditions can also trigger hot flushes. Please seek advice from your GP.

Night sweats

As with hot flushes, a night sweat is a sudden feeling of heat which usually causes excessive sweat. Some women sweat so much that clothes and bedding are soaking wet and will require changing. It may help to have loose sheets rather than a duvet so layers can be removed as temperature increases.

Vaginal dryness

Some women only have symptoms of vaginal dryness at certain times – such as during sex, while others may experience dryness all the time. This can cause irritation, discomfort, itchiness or a burning sensation.

Reduced sex drive (libido)

This is due to falling levels of oestrogen which can occur both during and after the menopause.