

Menopause what are the symptoms?

Menopause occurs when you have not had a menstrual period for 12 months. Menopause is a natural part of life occurring at around age 51 years but can also happen for other reasons including after:

- surgery to remove ovaries (oophorectomy) and/or your womb/uterus (hysterectomy)
- chemotherapy
- radiotherapy to your pelvis.

At menopause, you stop producing oestrogen (the main sex hormone in women) and this can lead to menopausal symptoms. Oestrogen levels can vary in the time leading up to the final menstrual period (called the perimenopause)

Early symptoms - change in menstrual periods

Menopausal symptoms often start before periods stop. Many women have a change in their menstrual cycle (period) before their periods stop. You should see your doctor if your periods become heavy or more frequent.

Hot flushes and night sweats

Hot flushes and night sweats can range from mild to quite severe. Some women find these symptoms disturb their sleep – they may even need to change the sheets during the night because of heavy sweating.

Almost all women experience hot flushes and sweats, but these are not always troublesome.

Problems sleeping

Some women have problems sleeping even if they don't have hot flushes and night sweats.

Changing hormone levels can affect your body clock or make it more difficult for you to fall asleep or stay asleep. This can happen especially if you have other conditions that affect your sleep – for example, pain, snoring or if you have consumed alcohol or caffeine before bed.

Pain in your joints and tiredness

Studies have shown that the hormonal changes of menopause can cause some women to feel pain in their joints or make them feel more tired than usual.

Anxiety or mood changes

Most of us feel anxious at times, but you might find that things that you can usually cope with make you feel overwhelmed with anxiety. You might also feel upset, sad or angry in situations that would not have bothered you before.

These increases in anxiety and mood changes can be caused by hormonal changes.

MENOPAUSE AT A GLANCE

- Every woman is affected by menopause in some way – either they experience symptoms or other physical changes.
- The average age of menopause is 51 years but you can enter menopause earlier.
- Hormonal changes cause menopausal symptoms.
- Most women will have some symptoms.
- Most women have symptoms for 5 to 10 years.

Dry vagina

Some women feel discomfort in their vagina, especially during sex. This is a common symptom caused by a decrease in moisture produced by the lining of the vagina.

Overactive bladder or discomfort

Women can also find they have bladder changes during menopause. If you have this symptom, you might find you need to urinate more often, you can't "hold on" or your bladder might feel full and uncomfortable.

What can you do about your symptoms?

Understanding menopause and developing a strategy to manage your symptoms can improve your health and lifestyle.

If your symptoms are bothering you, your doctor can help. Your doctor can tell you about the changes in your body and offer options for managing your symptoms. Many treatment options are available and include:

- **Lifestyle:** changes Improving diet, regular exercise and stopping smoking improve overall wellbeing and can make symptoms easier to tolerate. Some psychological treatments e.g. cognitive behavioural therapy (CBT) and mindfulness may also help (See AMS information sheets – *Lifestyle advice for healthy ageing and Menopause and body changes*)
- **Menopausal Hormone Therapy:** (See AMS information sheets – *Combined menopausal hormone therapy and Treating the menopause – the concept of risk and benefit*)
- **Non-hormonal treatment options:** (See AMS Information Sheet *Non-hormonal treatments for menopausal symptoms*)
- **Complementary therapies:** (See AMS information sheet – *Complementary and herbal therapies for hot flushes*)

If you have any concerns or questions about options to manage your menopausal symptoms, visit your doctor or go to the Find an AMS Doctor service on the AMS website.

