

Menopause symptoms

Symptoms of menopause and perimenopause

Hot flushes and night sweats are the most well known menopause symptoms, yet there are a whole host of other, lesser-known symptoms which often start years before the menopause, during the perimenopause. The perimenopause refers to the period of time between the first hormonal and menstrual cycle changes during your reproductive years, up until when you reach menopause and your periods stop.

What causes symptoms?

Symptoms of perimenopause and menopause are caused by changes in hormone levels. During your reproductive years (between the onset of periods and menopause) your ovaries produce several hormones, including oestrogen. As you get older, your ovaries start to produce less oestrogen and with this fertility decreases. It is this gradual decline in oestrogen that triggers the onset of perimenopausal and menopausal symptoms. Eventually, your ovaries stop producing oestrogen completely, and this is when periods stop.

When do symptoms start?

Symptoms typically start between the ages of 45 and 55.

However, it is not unusual for symptoms to start earlier. Early menopause occurs when periods stop before age 45, while Premature Ovarian Insufficiency (POI) refers to menopause before age 40.

Symptoms

Menopause affects everyone differently. 80% of women will experience one or more symptoms, with 25% experiencing severe symptoms. Some women experience menopause symptoms for a few months, but for most, symptoms last several years. The average duration of symptoms is seven years.

Most common symptoms, experienced by most women:

- **Changes in periods:** Menopause is associated with the end of periods, but there can be a period lasting up to several years before this where periods may become irregular (closer together or further apart), heavier, or lighter.
- **Hot flushes:** Sudden feelings of warmth or heat, usually felt most intensely in the face, neck, and chest. Hot flushes are often accompanied by sweating, dizziness, weakness, or nausea, and sometimes palpitations (a sensation of the heart thumping in the chest), and anxiety. A hot flush usually lasts a few minutes but can be very women may only experience occasional hot flushes, whereas others will experience them multiple times a day.

- **Night sweats:** Excessive sweating when in bed at night, often interfering with sleep and necessitating changes in nightclothes and bedding.

Other common symptoms that are often overlooked as being associated with menopause

Physical symptoms

- **Fatigue:** Persistent tiredness and low energy levels.
- **Joint and muscle aches:** Pain, stiffness, and discomfort in joints and muscles.
- **Headaches and migraines:** Increased frequency and intensity.
- **Hair changes:** Dry, thinning hair or hair loss.
- **Facial hair:** Increased facial hair growth.
- **Skin changes:** Dry, itchy, irritable skin, or oily skin and the onset of acne.
- **Urinary symptoms:** Urinary incontinence and frequent urinary tract infections.
- **Palpitations:** Noticeable heartbeat.
- **Tinnitus:** Ringing or buzzing in the ears.
- **Weight gain:** Especially around the abdomen

Psychological symptoms

- **Anxiety:** Increased feelings of worry and unease.

- **Low mood and depression:** Persistent sadness and loss of interest in activities.
- **Irritability:** Heightened sensitivity and frustration.
- **Loss of confidence:** Decreased self-esteem and confidence.
- **Not feeling 'yourself':** A general sense of discomfort and unfamiliarity with oneself.

Cognitive symptoms

- **Difficulty concentrating:** Trouble focusing on tasks.
- **Memory loss:** Forgetfulness and difficulty recalling information.
- **Brain fog:** A term often used to describe the effects of menopause on concentration and memory
- **Fatigue:** Overwhelming tiredness affecting mental and physical activities.

Reproductive health symptoms

- **Loss of sex drive (libido):** Reduced interest in sexual activity.
- **Worsening premenstrual symptoms:** More severe PMS symptoms.
- **Vaginal dryness/irritation:** Discomfort and pain during sexual intercourse.

Long-term effects of menopause

In addition to the symptoms you experience, the changes in your hormone levels have a significant impact on your long-term health. Oestrogen has many important roles in the body beyond reproductive health. Because of this, when oestrogen levels drop, other areas of the body are affected too, including your bones and cardiovascular system.

Osteoporosis: Oestrogen is important for bone maintenance. Lack of oestrogen during menopause affects bone strength and density. This increases the risk of osteoporosis, a condition where bones become thin and brittle, making them more likely to break, especially with a fall. A bone fracture (broken bone) is usually the first sign of the condition.

Cardiovascular disease: The risk of heart disease and stroke increases after menopause. Oestrogen protects blood vessels by reducing the production of atheromas (fatty deposits). Atheromas can lead to the development of heart disease and stroke.

Reducing symptoms and lowering risks

Our aim is to empower you to take control of your menopause journey and create a positive experience. Perimenopause and menopause can be the perfect opportunity to optimise your health and to minimise your future risk of cardiovascular disease, osteoporosis, and other conditions including diabetes and dementia. We provide evidence based advice, information and treatment to enable you to live your best life throughout

perimenopause, menopause and beyond.

We offer:

- **Individualised Hormone Replacement Therapy (HRT):** To improve symptoms and protect long-term health.
- **Lifestyle advice:** Support to implement lifestyle changes for symptom management and overall well-being.
- **Non-hormonal treatment options:** For women who cannot or prefer not to take HRT.