

Menopause

PATIENT FACT SHEET

The term **menopause** refers to the very last menstrual period a woman will ever have. For most women, menopause occurs between 45 and 55 years of age, with the average age of menopause at around 50 years. Menopause may occur early due to unexpected ovarian failure, chemotherapy or following surgical removal of the ovaries.

The end of menstrual periods is one of many changes that a woman may experience at menopause. Although every woman will experience her menopause differently, common complaints at this time include hot flushes, night sweats, mood changes, irritability, loss of libido, and irregular bleeding.

Some women may begin to experience these symptoms five to six years before their periods finally stop; this is called the 'peri-menopause'. A woman is said to be 'post-menopausal' when it has been one year since her last period, although some women will continue to experience menopausal symptoms for years after their periods cease.

Menopause occurs when the ovaries stop releasing eggs and no longer produce the sex hormones, oestrogen and progesterone. It is the decline in these hormones that causes the symptoms of menopause, and why hormone replacement therapy (HRT) may help to relieve these symptoms.

Not everyone finds the symptoms bothersome, but about 60% of women will have mild symptoms for around 5–8 years. Twenty per cent of women will have no symptoms at all while another 20% will be severely affected, with symptoms continuing into their 60s or later.



■ Feeling positive about the menopause

Women may experience physical and emotional changes during menopause, but that doesn't mean life has taken a turn for the worse! Menopause occurs at a time when many women may be juggling roles as mothers of teenagers, as carers of elderly parents, and as members of the workforce. It is important to set aside some 'me time' to maintain balance in your life.

Menopause can be seen as a new beginning: it's a good time to assess your lifestyle and your health, and to strive for continued wellbeing into the mature years.

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■ How you can help yourself

- Eat a well balanced diet
- Exercise regularly
- Stress management strategies
- Pelvic floor exercises
- Use of lubricants for comfortable sex
- Quit smoking

■ Talk to your doctor

Women should discuss with their doctor what treatment options are available if symptoms are interfering with quality of life. You don't need to put up with symptoms such as hot flushes, night sweats and mood changes. A number of treatments such as HRT, other prescription medicines, and herbal or natural remedies are available. Your doctor can help you decide if treatment is required and which one is suitable for you.

■ Where can I get more information?

- www.menopause.org.au/for-women/information-sheets
- www.jeanhailes.org.au/health-a-z/menopause
- www.womhealth.org.au/conditions-and-treatments/213-menopause

This factsheet has been produced by Aspen Australia and is of a general nature only. It is not intended to replace the need for consultation with your doctor. If you have further questions about menopause or its treatment, please speak to your healthcare professional.

References: 1. Col NF et al. Menopause 2009;16(3):453-7. 2. Australasian Menopause Society. July 2010. Menopause Information Sheet. <<http://www.menopause.org.au/for-women/information-sheets/528-what-is-menopause>> Accessed Nov 2014. 3. Women's Health Queensland Wide Inc. 2011. About Menopause. <http://www.womhealth.org.au/documents/About_menopause.pdf> Accessed Nov 2014.

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