



Menopause - How to Get Relief from Menopausal Stress

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Menopause is a natural biological process. Where a natural decline in reproductive hormones occur when a woman reaches her 40s or 50s., when women has 12 consecutive months (1yr) without a menstrual cycle we call it as menopause.

First signs of menopause

- Irregular periods.
- Hot flashes and night sweats.
- Insomnia.
- Mood swings.

Why menopause occurs?

As we age, the reproductive cycle begins to slow down and prepares to stop. This cycle has been continuously functioning since puberty. When menopause nears, our ovaries make less of a hormone called estrogen. When this decrease occurs, menstrual cycle (period) starts to change. It can become irregular and then stop. Physical changes can also happen as body adapts to different levels of hormones. The symptoms experienced during each stage of menopause (perimenopause, menopause and postmenopause) are all part of your body's adjustment to these changes.

The time before menopause can last eight to 10 years (perimenopause). The time after menopause (postmenopause) will last until the end of your life. The average age of menopause is approximately 51 years.

Natural menopause is the permanent ending of menstruation that is not brought on by any type of medical treatment. For people undergoing natural menopause, the process is gradual and is described in three stages:

- **Perimenopause:** Perimenopause begin eight to 10 years before menopause when the ovaries gradually produce less estrogen. It usually starts in your 40s. the point when the ovaries stop releasing eggs. At this stage, many people may experience menopause symptoms. But you are still having menstrual cycles during this time.
- **Menopause:** Menopause is the point when you no longer have menstrual periods. At this stage, your ovaries have stopped releasing eggs and producing most of their estrogen. Menopause is diagnosed when you've gone without a menstrual period for 12 consecutive months.
- **Postmenopause:** This is the name given to the time you have not had a period for an entire year . During this stage, menopausal symptoms, such as hot flashes, may ease for many people. As a result of a lower level of estrogen, those in the postmenopausal phase are at increased risk for several health conditions, such as osteoporosis and heart disease.

What hormonal changes happen during menopause?

Menopause happen when ovaries no longer produce high levels of hormones. The ovaries are the reproductive glands that store eggs and release them into the fallopian tubes. They also produce the female hormones estrogen and progesterone as well as testosterone. Together, estrogen and progesterone control menstruation. Estrogen also influences how your body uses calcium and maintains cholesterol levels in the blood.

As menopause nears, ovaries no longer release eggs into the fallopian tubes.

What are the symptoms of menopause?

During transitioning into menopause following symptoms experienced:

- Hot flashes (a sudden feeling of warmth that spreads over the body).
- Night sweats and/or cold flashes.
- Vaginal dryness; discomfort during sex.
- Urinary urgency (a pressing need to urinate more frequently).
- Difficulty sleeping (insomnia).
- Emotional changes (irritability, mood swings, mild depression).
- Dry skin, dry eyes or dry mouth.

People who are still in the menopause transition (perimenopause) may experience:

- Breast tenderness.
- Worsening of premenstrual syndrome (PMS).
- Irregular periods or skipping periods.
- Periods that are heavier or lighter than usual.

Some people might also experience:

- Racing heart.
- Headaches.
- Joint and muscle aches and pains.
- Changes in libido (sex drive).
- Difficulty concentrating, memory lapses (often temporary).
- Weight gain.
- Hair loss or thinning.

Not all people get all of these symptoms. However, those affected with new symptoms of racing heart, urinary changes, headaches or other new medical problems should make sure there is no other cause for these.

What is premature menopause?

Some people can experience menopause early, either as a result of surgical intervention (like removal of the ovaries) or damage to the ovaries (such as from chemotherapy or radiation). Menopause that occurs before the age of 45 is called early menopause. Menopause that occurs at 40 or younger is considered premature menopause.

What are hot flashes ?

Hot flashes are one of the most frequent symptoms of menopause. It's a brief sensation of heat. Aside from the heat, hot flashes can also come with:

- A red, flushed face.
- Sweating.
- A chilled feeling after the heat.

Some people only have hot flashes for a short period of time during menopause. Others can have some kind of hot flash for the rest of their life. Typically, hot flashes are less severe as time goes on. The intensity, frequency and duration of hot flashes differ for each individual.

What triggers a hot flash?

There are quite a few normal things in your daily life that could set off a hot flash. Some things to look out for include:

- Caffeine.
- Smoking.
- Spicy foods.
- Alcohol.
- Tight clothing.
- Stress and anxiety.
- Hot weather.

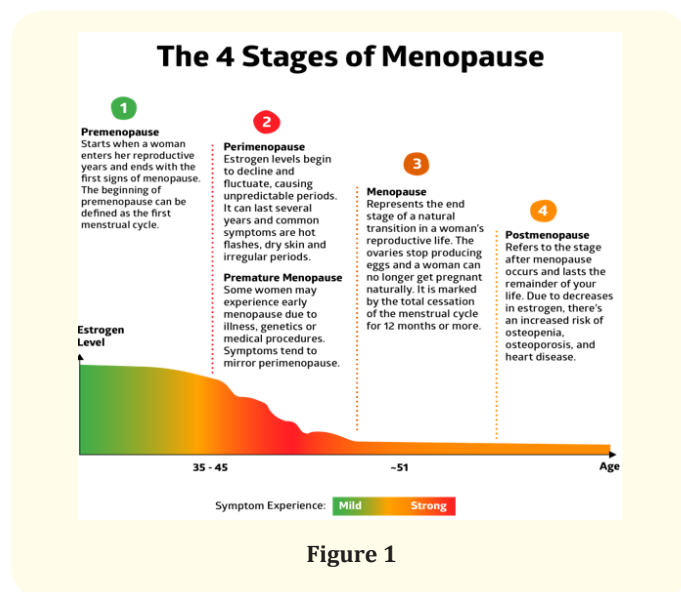


Figure 1

The hormonal change your body goes through during menopause can result in several physical changes to your body, including more facial hair than you may have had in the past. This is caused by testosterone being relatively higher than estrogen.

If you're having memory problems during menopause, call your healthcare provider. Several activities have been shown to stimulate the brain and help rejuvenate your memory. These activities can include:

- Doing crossword puzzles and other mentally stimulating activities like reading.
- Avoid passive activities like watching TV.
- plenty of exercise.

Can menopause cause depression?

There are extreme shifts in your hormone levels, you may not sleep well because of hot flashes and you may experience mood swings. Anxiety and fear could also be at play during this time. All of these factors can lead to depression.

Thyroid problems can sometimes be the cause of depression.

Menopause can cause a variety of emotional changes, including:

- A lack of motivation and difficulty concentrating.
- Anxiety, depression, mood changes and tension.
- Headaches. Aggressiveness and irritability

Managing emotional changes during menopause can be difficult, but it is possible. Your healthcare provider may be able to prescribe a medication to help you (hormone therapy or an anti-depressant). Support groups and counseling are useful tools when dealing with these emotional changes during menopause.

How does menopause affect my bladder control?

Unfortunately, bladder control issues (also called urinary incontinence) are common for people going through menopause. There are several reasons why this happens, including: lack of estrogen and weak pelvic floor muscles.

Specific bladder control problems that you might have can include:

- Stress incontinence (leakage when you cough, sneeze or lift something heavy).
- Urge incontinence (leakage because your bladder squeezes at the wrong time).

During a hysterectomy, your uterus is removed. You won't have a period after this procedure. However, If your ovaries are also removed, you will have symptoms of menopause immediately.

Management and treatment

Can menopause be treated?

In some cases, you may not need any treatment for menopause, it's about treating the symptoms of menopause that disrupt your life. There are many different types of treatments for the symptoms of menopause. The main types of treatment for menopause are:

- Hormone therapy.
- Non-hormonal treatments.

What is hormone therapy for menopause?

Estrogen and progesterone are produced by the ovaries. When your ovaries no longer make enough estrogen and progesterone, hormone therapy can be used as a supplement. Hormone therapy boosts your hormone levels and can help relieve some symptoms of menopause. It's also used as a preventative measure for osteoporosis [1,2].

There are two main types of hormone therapy:

- **Estrogen therapy (ET):** In this treatment, estrogen is taken alone. It's prescribed in a low dose and can be taken as a pill, cream or patch, vaginal ring, gel or spray. This type of treatment is used after a hysterectomy.
- **Estrogen Progesterone/Progestin Hormone Therapy (EPT):** This treatment is also called combination therapy because it uses doses of estrogen and progesterone. This type of hormone therapy is used if you still have your uterus.

What are non-hormonal therapies for menopause?

Non-hormonal treatments include changes to your diet and life-style. These treatments are often good options for people who have other medical conditions or have recently been treated for breast cancer. The main non-hormonal treatments that your provider may recommend include:

- Changing your diet.
- Avoiding triggers to hot flashes.
- Exercising.
- Doing Yoga saunas and Meditation
- Joining support groups.
- Prescription medications.

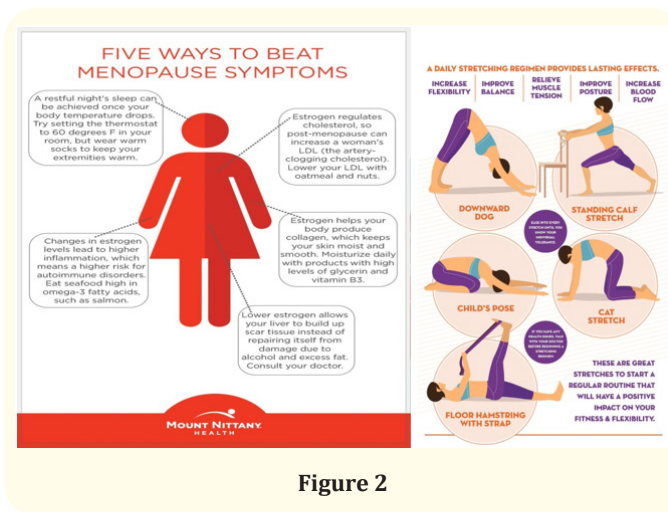


Figure 2

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