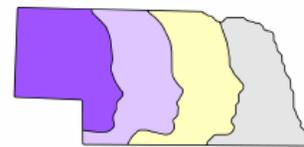


# Menopause: What You Should Know

*Every Woman Matters*



NEBRASKA OFFICE OF WOMEN'S HEALTH

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*Menopause is a normal change in a woman's life when her period stops. It is often called the "change of life" and marks the end of the reproductive years of her life.*

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During menopause, a woman's body slowly makes less of the hormones estrogen and progesterone. This often happens between the ages of 45 and 55 years old. A woman has reached menopause when she has not had a period for 12 months in a row, and there are no other causes for this change. As you near menopause, you may have symptoms from the changes your body is making. Many women wonder if these changes are normal, and many are confused about how to treat their symptoms. After menopause is complete, pregnancy is no longer possible.

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## Stages of Menopause:

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Menopause is only one of several stages in the reproductive life of a woman. The whole transition is divided into four main stages known as:

- *Premature Menopause*- menopause that happens before the age of 40, whether it is natural or induced.
- *Premenopause*- refers to the entirety of a woman's life from her first to her last regular menstrual period. It is best defined as the time of "normal" reproductive function in a woman.
- *Perimenopause*- means "around menopause" and is a transitional stage of two to ten years before complete cessation of the menstrual period and is usually experienced by women from 35 to 50 years of age. This stage of menopause is characterized by hormone fluctuations, which cause the typical menopause symptoms, such as hot flashes.
- *Postmenopause*- refers to a woman's time of life after menopause has occurred. It is generally believed that the postmenopausal phase begins when 12 full months have passed since the last menstrual period. From her a woman will be postmenopausal for the rest of her life.

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## Symptoms of Menopause:

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Every woman's period will stop at menopause. Some women may not have any other symptoms. But as you near menopause, you may have these symptoms:

- **Changes in your period.** The time between periods and the flow from month to month may be different.
- **Abnormal bleeding or "spotting."** This is common as you near menopause. But if your periods have stopped for 12 months in a row, and you still have "spotting," you should talk to your doctor to rule out serious causes.
- **Hot flashes ("hot flushes").** You get warm in the face, neck and chest.
- **Night sweats and sleeping problems.** These may lead to feeling tired, stressed, or tense.

- **Vaginal changes.** The vagina may become dry and thin, and sex and vaginal exams may be painful. You also might get more vaginal infections.
  - **Thinning of your bones.** This may lead to loss of height and bone breaks.
  - **Mood changes.** May include mood swings, depression, and irritability.
  - **Urinary problems.** You may have leaking, burning or pain when urinating, or leaking when sneezing, coughing, or laughing.
  - **Lack of concentration.** You may become forgetful.
  - **Sex drive decreases.** You may have less interest in sex and changes in sexual response.
  - **Weight fluctuation.** Weight gain or increase in body fat around your waist.
  - **Hair loss or thinning.** Hair thinning or loss is a problem for some women.
  - **Depression.** Some researchers believe that the decrease in estrogen triggers changes in your brain, causing depression.
- *Osteoporosis:* Day in and day out your body is busy breaking down old bone and replacing it with new healthy bone. Estrogen helps control bone loss. So losing estrogen around the same time of menopause causes women to begin to lose more bone than is replaced. In time, bones can become weak and break easily.
  - *Heart Disease:* After menopause, women are more likely to have heart disease. Changes in estrogen levels may be part of the cause. But, so is getting older. As you age, you may develop other problems, like high blood pressure or weight gain, that put you at greater risk for heart disease.

You can reduce long-term problems such as osteoporosis and heart disease by using the following guidelines:

- Don't smoke since cigarette smoke can cause early menopause.
- Exercise regularly to strengthen your bones.
- Take calcium and Vitamin D.
- Eat a low-fat diet.
- Control your blood pressure, cholesterol and other risk factors for heart disease.

Treatment for symptoms are available. Talk with your doctor about your health and your symptoms. If you want to treat your symptoms, your doctor can tell you more about your options and help you make the best treatment choices.

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#### **Additional Resources:**

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| American Menopause Foundation      | <a href="http://www.americanmenopause.org">www.americanmenopause.org</a> |
| National Institute on Aging:       | <a href="http://www.nia.nih.gov">www.nia.nih.gov</a>                     |
| National Office of Women's Health: | <a href="http://www.womenshealth.gov">www.womenshealth.gov</a>           |

For More Information:

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