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MENOPAUSE

Q: What actually IS menopause?

Menopause is the **permanent cessation of menstruation** caused by your ovaries **no longer producing significant levels of estrogen, progesterone, and androgens.**

Diagnostically, menopause officially starts after **12 consecutive months without a period in the absence of other physiological or pathological causes.**

Q: When might I expect to experience menopause?

The average age of natural menopause is around 51 years, **though some women may enter early menopause through conditions, procedures, or treatments including hysterectomy, chemotherapy/radiation, or primary ovarian insufficiency.** The hormonal changes associated with menopause can lead to a variety of physiological effects throughout the body, including vasomotor symptoms, urogenital atrophy, bone loss, and alterations in lipid metabolism and cardiovascular risk factors.

Q: What symptoms might I experience during menopause?

There are well over 40 documented symptoms women may experience during menopause. These are the most commonly reported symptoms though some women experience symptoms that may not be listed here or “commonly reported.”

Vasomotor Symptoms:

- Hot flashes
- Night sweats

Urogenital:

- Vaginal dryness
- Vaginal irritation/itching/burning
- Increased urinary frequency/urgency
- Increased risk of UTIs

Sleep Disturbances:

- Difficulty falling and/or staying asleep

Mood & Cognitive Changes:

- Irritability
- Anxiety
- Depressed mood
- Difficulty concentrating/brain “fog”
- Memory issues

Sexual Function:

- Decreased libido
- Painful intercourse (dyspareunia)

Somatic Symptoms:

- Fatigue
- Joint/muscle pain
- Headaches
- Breast tenderness

Other Potential Changes:

- Weight gain
- Skin/hair changes
- Palpitations
- Burning mouth syndrome (less common)

Important Considerations:

Variability: The experience of menopause is highly individual. Not all women will experience all of these symptoms, and the intensity can vary greatly.

Multifactorial Nature: Some symptoms, like mood changes and weight gain, can be influenced by various factors beyond hormonal changes, including aging, lifestyle, stress, and other health conditions. Hormonal changes may accelerate bone loss, cause increased susceptibility to cardiovascular disease, and diabetes

Ongoing Research: The scientific understanding of menopause and its diverse symptoms is continually evolving and growing.

Q: What does menopausal treatment involve?

Effective menopause treatment is personalized to your unique needs, focusing on both symptom relief and long-term health.

It may include the following therapies depending on what is most appropriate for you and your medical history, symptoms, and goals of care:

• **Hormone Therapy (HRT):** Often the most effective for symptoms like hot flashes and dryness, using individualized doses of bioidentical hormones (estrogen, progesterone, sometimes testosterone). This also includes thyroid optimization when needed.

• **Non-Hormonal Therapies:** For those who prefer or can't use HRT, options include specific medications for hot flashes, and localized non-hormonal or low-dose vaginal estrogen for dryness.

• **Lifestyle & Wellness Support:** A crucial part of care, offering guidance on nutrition, exercise (especially strength training), sleep management, and stress reduction. We also address broader sexual health.

