

# MENOPAUSE DISPARITIES: PREVALENCE AND HEALTH IMPACT ACROSS THE UNITED STATES

→ Approximately **1.3 million** women transition into menopause each year, at age 51, on average.

→ **34%** of women with menopause symptoms are not diagnosed and do not know they are in the menopause transition.

→ **20%** of women go 12+ months before their transition into menopause is formally identified by their health care provider.



## Menopause is a point in time at least 12 months after a woman's last period.

The years leading up to menopause, when women may have changes in their menstrual cycles, hot flashes, or other symptoms, are called the menopausal transition or perimenopause. The menopausal transition most often begins between ages 45 and 55. It usually lasts about seven years but can be as long as 14 years. The duration can depend on lifestyle factors, such as smoking, age it begins, and race and ethnicity. African-American, Asian-American and Hispanic women on average begin menopause earlier than non-Hispanic white women. African-American women reach menopause at 49, two years earlier than the national median age and spend more time in the menopause transition than non-Hispanic white women. Hispanic women reach menopause two years earlier than the median age. Research indicates that socioeconomic status and chronic stressors contribute to menopausal transition at an early age.

### CAREGIVERS

Many women experiencing the first symptoms of menopause often find themselves in the role of caregivers. Feelings of irritability, confusion, depression, and fatigue become intensified when the challenges of caring for a loved one combine with the physical and mental toll of fluctuating hormones, which can worsen symptoms. Experts recommend managing stress levels to help reduce the impact of menopausal symptoms on your day-to-day routine.

### GEOGRAPHY

Studies show women living in rural areas were more likely to reach menopause earlier than their urban counterpart. However, geography may not be the sole predisposing factor for early menopause. Smoking, physical activity and body mass index (BMI) are three variables consistently linked to the onset of menopause. Improvement of social, economic, and environmental conditions in rural communities should focus on better access to programs and facilities for women to adopt healthier lifestyles.

### MENOPAUSE AND THE WORKPLACE

Menopause typically begins for women between ages 45-55, when most are in senior or executive positions in the workplace. They experience mild to severe symptoms including depression, anxiety, sleep deprivation, and cognitive impairment. Corporate health policies, on average, do not address menopausal symptoms and many companies are reluctant to accommodate the health needs of older employees. Although menopause contributes to stress and burnout, it is considered a taboo subject in the workplace and women are hesitant to voice their concerns. Managers are encouraged to talk to their staff and offer options regarding flexible work schedules and remote work as well as educate leadership about the impact of menopausal symptoms on productivity, work culture, and the well-being of employees.



### Common Signs & Symptoms

- Bladder control
- Change in period
- Depression
- Hot flashes
- Mood changes
- Sleep disturbances (including sleep deprivation and disruption due to VMS and a lack of continuity in sleep)
- Vaginal health and sexuality

### Vasomotor Symptoms (VMS)

More African-American and Hispanic women report experiencing VMS (hot flashes and night sweats) than white women, and Hispanic women experience more vaginal dryness than other women.

Among the women who report VMS, white women experience hot flashes for around 6.5 years, while Hispanic women do for 8.9 years, and African-American women for 10 years. Research shows that Native American women may experience the worst perimenopausal hot flashes of all. Asian-American women experience significantly fewer symptoms overall and lower total severity than other racial or ethnic groups.

## Barriers to Care/Access

- Bias
- Cultural competency of clinicians
- Health literacy
- Lack of knowledge about menopause
- Lack of trust in health care
- Language
- Technology (Digital and Generational Divide)
- Uninsured or underinsured

## Health Risks

Women who experience menopause earlier than the median age will likely experience certain physiological effects of menopause earlier in life. This includes bone density decline, increase in fat mass, decrease in muscle, and increase in cholesterol, which also increases the likelihood of later-life health consequences (osteoporosis, heart disease, falls).



## Economic Impact

The total health expenditures for menopausal symptoms were estimated at **\$3 billion** annually in the United States. The annual direct costs of VMS was estimated at **\$1,346 per person**, and the annual indirect costs, primarily resulting from absenteeism, were estimated at **\$770 per person**. Other indirect costs may include the loss of productivity at work or at home, increased energy use for air conditioning and laundry, and hygiene-related personal costs. Globally, menopause-related productivity losses can amount to more than **\$150 billion** a year, on top of the cost to the health care system and each individual patient.



Society for  
**Women's Health Research**

The Society for Women's Health Research (SWHR) **Women's Health Equity Initiative** highlights statistics on women's health in the United States and aims to engage communities on solutions to improve health equity with the treatment of menopause and other medical conditions.

## Health Equity Roadmap

The roadmap features U.S. data on the disproportionate impact of Alzheimer's disease, bone health, maternal health, and menopause.

[www.swhr.org/healthequity](http://www.swhr.org/healthequity)



## HEALTH EQUITY ROADMAP

This roadmap features U.S. data on the disproportionate impact of four diseases on women's health based on race and ethnicity, geography, age, and role as a caregiver. SWHR plans to add additional disease states, life stages and issues to this map in the future. Download the fact sheets for more information.

- **Alzheimer's Disease** Approximately **5.8 million** people in the U.S. have Alzheimer's disease — **two-thirds** of them are women.
- **Bone Health** Women account for **80%** of the estimated 10 million Americans with osteoporosis and experience bone loss at an earlier age than men.
- **Maternal Health** Black women are **three to four times** more likely to die from childbirth than non-Hispanic white women.
- **Menopause** **34%** of women with menopause symptoms are not diagnosed and do not know they are in the menopause transition, while **20%** of women go 12+ months before it is formally identified by their health care provider.

### References

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National Institute on Aging: What is Menopause?  
<https://www.nia.nih.gov/health/what-menopause>

EndocrineWeb: Menopause Is Different for Women of Color  
<https://www.endocrineweb.com/menopause-different-women-color#:~:text=The%20research%20in%20SWAN%20shows,transition%20than%20white%20women%20do.>

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<https://www.everydayhealth.com/menopause/what-experts-want-bipoc-women-to-know-about-menopause/>

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### Additional Resources

Society for Women's Health Research: Menopause Preparedness: Fact Sheet  
[https://swhr.org/swhr\\_resource/menopause-preparedness-fact-sheet/](https://swhr.org/swhr_resource/menopause-preparedness-fact-sheet/)

Society for Women's Health Research: Menopause Mindfulness: Calls for Research Funding and Addressing Stigma Related to Menopause, Oct. 29, 2021  
<https://swhr.org/menopause-mindfulness-calls-for-research-funding-and-addressing-stigma-related-to-menopause/>