

Menopause 101

What Is Menopause?

Menopause is a **natural life stage** marking the end of menstrual cycles and reproductive years. It is officially reached after **12 consecutive months without a period**. The average age of menopause in the United States is **51 years**.

The Menopausal Transition

Menopause is not one moment, but rather a transition with **three stages**:

Menopause in Three Stages

Perimenopause (mid 30s-early 50s)

The transitional time when the body experiences a natural decline in reproductive hormones, resulting in the end of menstrual cycles.

This transition typically lasts 4-8 years, but can last more than a decade.

Menopause (average age 51)

The moment in life that is defined **once 12 consecutive months** have passed after the last menstrual cycle.

Postmenopause

The life stage after menopause has completed.

Symptoms can last 5-10 more years.

Medical procedures, such as surgery, radiation, or chemotherapy, that damage or remove the ovaries, can result in the onset of menopause, regardless of age.

Common Symptoms

Symptoms can vary widely by individual and over 40 have been recognized as associated to hormonal fluctuations.

Physical

- Hot flashes & night sweats
- Sleep disturbances
- Weight changes
- Joint/muscle pain
- Heart palpitations
- Hair thinning

Cognitive

- "Brain fog"
- Memory lapses
- Concentration difficulties
- Word-finding problems

Psychological

- Mood swings
- Anxiety/irritability
- Low mood
- Overwhelmed
- Loss of confidence

Reproductive & Other

- Vaginal dryness
- Reduced libido
- Urinary changes
- Headaches/fatigue
- Dry eyes/tinnitus
- Burning mouth

Why It Matters for Health

Menopause is a critical window for prevention and care. It is linked to increased risk of:

- Cardiovascular disease
- Genitourinary conditions
- Osteoporosis
- Cognitive and mental health changes

Menopause is a life stage, not a disease.

Glossary & Resources

Glossary of Common Menopause Terms

Perimenopause

The transitional phase before menopause when hormones fluctuate. Typically starts in the early 40s but can begin in the mid-30s. Lasts an average of 7 to 10 years.

Menopause

Defined as the point reached after 12 consecutive months without a menstrual period. The average age in the U.S. is 51.

Postmenopause

The life stage after menopause, signifying the end of reproductive years. Estrogen levels remain low, and symptoms may persist for years.

Vasomotor Symptoms (VMS)

Hot flashes and night sweats caused by changes in temperature regulation due to declining estrogen.

Hormone Replacement Therapy (HRT)

A medical treatment supplementing estrogen and/or progesterone to manage menopause symptoms. Also called menopausal hormone therapy (MHT).

Estrogen

A hormone that plays a key role in developing and regulating the reproductive system, and affects multiple body systems including the brain, heart, bones, and skin. Its decline is one of the factors that drives menopause symptoms.

Progesterone

A hormone that works alongside estrogen. Its decline affects sleep quality and mood regulation.

Primary Ovarian Insufficiency (POI)

When the ovaries stop functioning normally before age 40, leading to early menopause.

Surgical / Medical Menopause

Menopause induced by medical procedures (e.g., oophorectomy, chemotherapy, radiation) rather than natural hormone decline. Can occur at any age.

Brain Fog

A common term for cognitive changes during menopause, including difficulty concentrating, memory lapses, and word-finding problems.

Genitourinary Syndrome of Menopause (GSM)

Vaginal dryness, urinary symptoms, and related changes caused by declining estrogen levels.

Evidence-Based Treatment Options

There is no one-size-fits-all solution. Treatment requires individualization.

Lifestyle Modification	Evidence-Based Therapy	Hormonal Rx	Non-Hormonal Rx
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Nutrition & activity Sleep hygiene Stress reduction Alcohol moderation 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Cognitive Behavioral Therapy (CBT) Acupuncture Mindfulness practice Pelvic-floor therapy 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Hormone replacement therapy (HRT) Birth control 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Antidepressants (SSRIs/SNRIs) Oxybutynin NK-3 receptor antagonists

Key Takeaways

- Menopause is natural, but often misunderstood. Education and open conversation are essential.
- It impacts health, work, and quality of life across a 15-25+ year window.
- Everyone deserves informed, whole-person care.