

# Menopause

## What is menopause?

Menopause means your final menstrual period. You will only know you have had your final period if you have had no bleeding, spotting or staining for 12 months.

## When does menopause happen?

From about 35 to 40 years of age, the number of eggs left in your ovaries decreases and you may ovulate (release an egg from your ovary) less regularly, or occasionally more often. When you reach menopause, you have no active eggs left in your ovaries and your periods stop.

Most women reach menopause between 45 and 55 years of age. Menopause sometimes occurs earlier than expected – for example, as a result of cancer treatment or surgery – but can also occur later, sometimes up to age 60.

## Hormones and menopause

Hormones that affect menopause are oestrogen and, to a lesser degree, progesterone. In the years or months leading up to menopause, these hormone levels can change, swinging up and down, and can cause a number of symptoms. At this time, your periods may change. For example, they might become less heavy and less frequent, stay the same, or become heavier.

## Symptoms of menopause

Every woman experience menopause differently. There are many factors that can influence your symptoms, including: culture, health, mood problems and lifestyle.

Symptoms of menopause, caused by low levels of oestrogen, might include:

- hot flushes, night sweats or feeling hot
- vaginal changes such as dryness and painful intercourse
- mood swings, which may include low mood, anxiety or irritability
- joint or muscle aches and pains
- itchy skin
- headaches
- lowered libido (sex drive)
- tiredness
- sleep disturbance, including insomnia
- forgetfulness
- weight gain, especially around the waist.



## How to get help with symptoms of menopause

There are many ways you can get help with menopausal symptoms

### Practical strategies

You can:

- find more information about menopause and understand the symptoms
- keep a record of your physical and emotional symptoms and list their frequency and effect on your daily life
- improve your health by drinking plenty of water, eating health food and doing regular physical activity
- stay cool by keeping a hand fan or water spray handy, or by wearing layers of clothing that you can take off/put back on as needed
- try relaxation practices such as yoga and meditation. They can make you feel better, and better able to cope with symptoms.

### Therapies

Therapies that are used to treat menopausal symptoms, especially hot flushes and sweats, include:

- menopause hormone therapy (MHT) or HRT – the most effective therapy for moderate to severe symptoms
- other medications such as antidepressants when MHT is not able to be used
- cognitive behaviour therapy (CBT) – a useful therapy for breast cancer survivors
- herbal and natural remedies, such as the herbs black cohosh and St John's Wort
- hypnotherapy.

You can ask your doctor about the risks and benefits of all these therapies.

### Visit your doctor

- You should see your doctor if:
- you are worried about your periods
- you have symptoms of menopause that interfere with your daily life
- you have symptoms of depression and anxiety, including changes to your thinking, eating, sleeping and enjoyment of activities.

Depending on your symptoms, you can also see a gynaecologist, endocrinologist (hormone specialist), registered naturopath, psychologist or dietitian.

For more information go to [jeanhailes.org.au/health-a-z/menopause](http://jeanhailes.org.au/health-a-z/menopause)

#### Updated August 2019

This fact sheet is designed to be informative and educational. It is not intended to provide specific medical advice or replace advice from your medical practitioner.

Jean Hailes for Women's Health gratefully acknowledges the support of the Australian Government.

This project is funded by the Victorian Government.

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Jean Hailes for Women's Health takes a broad and inclusive approach to the topic of women's health. This fact sheet generally uses the terms 'women and girls'. These terms are intended to include women with diverse sexualities, intersex women, and women with a transgender experience.

**Jean Hailes**  
FOR WOMEN'S HEALTH

1800 JEAN HAILES (532 642)  
[jeanhailes.org.au](http://jeanhailes.org.au)