

Understanding the Menopause Transition Period

What is menopause?

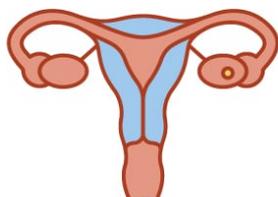
The peri-to-post-menopause transition is a completely normal & natural part of a woman's life. It's a time when our hormones change, & our bodies shift towards the end of fertility. It's a period of our lives to take stock & look after ourselves so that we can live our best lives & thrive going forward.

The word 'menopause' literally means the 'end of monthly cycles' (the end of monthly periods or menstruation), from the Greek word pausis ('pause') & mēn ('month').

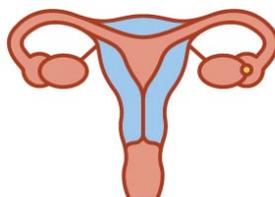
Menopause explained

Here's a short summary of what's going on in our bodies before menopause begins.

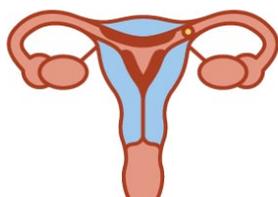
During our reproductive years, we release an egg monthly from our ovaries which triggers the release of hormones (chemical messengers), namely oestrogens, progesterone & androgens.



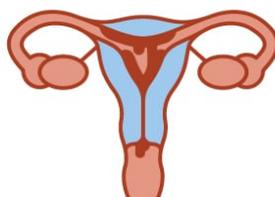
1. Each ovary holds thousands of eggs, also called ova. Estrogen and progesterone cause one egg to mature each menstrual cycle.



2. Halfway through the cycle, the body's hormones tell an ovary to release, or let go of, one of these mature eggs.



3. The lining of the uterus gets thick with blood and tissue. If an egg joins with a sperm cell, called fertilization, it will attach to this lining.



4. If pregnancy doesn't happen, the body gets rid of this lining. Blood and tissue flow out the uterus and through the vagina in the form of a period.

Meanwhile, our brains make hormones called follicle-stimulating hormone (FSH) & luteinising hormone (LH), which are essential for communication between the brain & the ovaries. Hormones relay messages from the brain to the ovaries & back again to keep everything running like clockwork.

This usual menstrual cycle is generally referred to as **pre-menopause**.

As we start to run out of eggs, our ovaries begin to produce fewer hormones, the levels of which can fluctuate wildly, particularly oestrogen. When oestrogen levels are low, our brains will then make more FHS to compensate. The changing levels of hormones from the ovaries give many of us symptoms – some of which are well known (hot flushes & brain fog) & some less so (joint pains).

This stage of the menopause transition is known as **peri-menopause**.

You can find out more by signing up for the next Menopause Basics Course and accessing the Menopause Symptoms & Signs resource found [here](#).

Menopause occurs when your ovaries permanently stop producing eggs. Your oestrogen levels are now always low, & your FSH levels are permanently high.

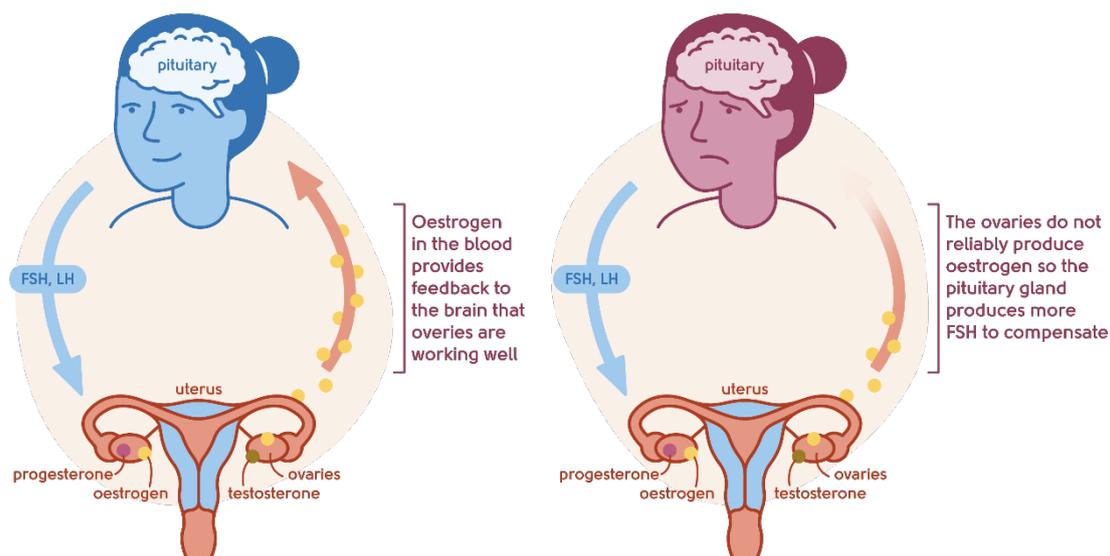


Illustration to show the feedback mechanism of the ovaries and the brain

What do the terms ‘surgical & ‘medical’ menopause mean?

Some women enter menopause for reasons other than natural changes in their hormones. The two most common types are surgical & medical menopause:

Surgical menopause – this occurs when a woman’s ovaries are removed. Hormone levels plummet, & she immediately experiences menopause.

Medical menopause – this occurs when a woman’s ovaries stop working due to chemotherapy, other medicines, or radiotherapy.

It’s estimated that almost
50% of women in the UK
are in the peri-to-post-



MENOPAUSE
transition



There are an estimated 15.5m women in the UK today who are at some stage of the menopause transition (peri-menopause, menopause, & post-menopause). Each of these stages is explained in more detail below.

What are the different stages of the menopause transition?

There are three stages to the menopause transition:

- Peri-menopause
- Menopause
- Post-menopause

The menopause transition usually starts when a woman is in her mid-to-late 40s, while the average age for a woman to reach menopause in the UK is 51-52.

8 in 10 women experience symptoms during menopause, the duration of which can vary greatly. For most women symptoms last around eight years, but can be shorter for some women & longer for others – it’s different for everybody.

Peri-menopause

Peri-menopause is the time leading up to menopause when your ovaries start to run out of eggs. This means hormone production decreases &, as a result, periods can become irregular, less frequent, heavier or lighter, & generally unpredictable. Although for some women, their periods don't change.

You may also experience symptoms during peri-menopause as hormone levels can be all over the place & generally drop.

Many women don't realise they are in the peri-menopause because menopause symptoms can creep up on them. They may be subtle, such as feeling a little more anxious, or mood swings can dip lower than usual. Symptoms can come & go & change in intensity. Symptoms may be also associated with other medical conditions or just put down to 'ageing' rather than being recognised as being due to the menopause.

You can find out more by signing up for the next Menopause Basics Course and accessing the Menopause Symptoms & Signs resource found [here](#).

Peri-menopause typically starts in your mid-to-late 40s.

Menopause

Menopause occurs after 12 consecutive months of no bleeding because your ovaries have stopped producing hormones (that is, there is no other obvious cause for your periods to have stopped such as pregnancy, breastfeeding, or taking hormonal contraception).

You're menopausal literally for a day, & after that you're post-menopausal.

The average age of menopause in the UK is 51-52 & for most women, their periods have naturally stopped by the age of 55.

Post-menopause

As soon as you hit menopause, you immediately become post-menopausal & are post-menopausal for the rest of your life. In this third phase of the menopause transition, you may still experience symptoms for a further five to seven years, though many experience symptoms for longer.

In the UK

Average age of Menopause = 51

Average life expectancy = 82

A woman will spend approximately 1/3rd
of her life in Menopause

THAT'S POTENTIALLY 1/3rd OF YOUR LIFE!

What is premature menopause or Premature Ovarian Insufficiency (POI)?

Premature menopause or Premature Ovarian Insufficiency (POI) occurs when a woman experiences menopause under the age of 40. This occurs in 1% of women & can be a devastating diagnosis.

If you are worried that you may be becoming menopausal under 40, it's essential to speak to your doctor about it as they can give you the support you need.

Early menopause happens between 40-45 years of age & is experienced by an estimated 5% of women.

How long does menopause last?

It's different for every woman.

The peri-menopause stage lasts typically five years but can last up to eight to ten years.

You're officially in menopause as you've gone 12 consecutive months without a period. If you've had any bleeding in that time, you're likely still in peri-menopause. That said, menopause itself lasts a day & then you're postmenopausal for the rest of your life.

Symptoms can continue in post-menopause too, on average for around five to seven years. Take hot flushes for example: while women can experience these, on average, for about seven years, over 40% of women aged between 60-65 years will continue to experience hot flushes & night sweats & some will experience them for up to 20 years following menopause.

What if I am not having regular periods because of contraception?

If you don't have a period because you're taking hormones (like a Mirena™ coil or contraceptive hormone tablets), it can be difficult to tell if you're transitioning through menopause & if so, what stage you're in, because you won't know if your ovaries are still producing hormones. You can't tell if you would have been having periods or not if you weren't using that particular type of contraceptive.

Keeping an eye on your symptoms – or lack of them – is often the best way to tell if you're experiencing menopause or not.

As a side note, a Mirena™ coil can be a useful part of HRT.

What if I have had a hysterectomy?

If you've had a hysterectomy – (you have had your womb removed but you still have your ovaries) – your periods will stop as period blood comes from your womb.

Your ovaries will continue to produce hormones for as long as they were programmed to, but you won't know when your last period was meant to be. Therefore, monitoring symptoms & how you feel is essential.

NB On average, women who have had a hysterectomy before menopause may have an earlier menopause than if they hadn't had a hysterectomy.

Thriving through menopause

Menopause is usually presented as a terrible life phase we'd rather avoid, full of doom & gloom. So, it's little wonder that many women find themselves looking for magic solutions to make it all go away.

But what if things were different? What if menopause was seen as a time of growth, strength, health, well-being & empowerment?

Yes, there's a lot of changes that are happening to our bodies that we can't control, however there are also things we can do to positively influence how we experience this natural rite of passage:

- Our nutrition
- Our exercise
- Our lifestyle
- & Most of all, how we view menopause & what we want this life phase to look like.

By addressing each of these areas, we have the opportunity to invest in ourselves, cultivate better health & well-being, & actually thrive during & after menopause.

Find out more about staying healthy in post-menopause life here, & read more about effective solutions that will help you improve your symptoms [here](#).

What next?

Hopefully, you now understand a little more about what menopause is.

However, you can find more information on the effects menopause has on your physical & mental health, how to stay healthy during your peri-to-post-menopause transition & beyond, & also how to implement effective solutions that will help you improve your symptoms & experience [here](#).

This information is not a substitute for professional medical advice, diagnosis, or treatment. Please speak to your GP or medical practitioner if you have any concerns, questions or queries with any issue relating to your menopause transition.