

Menopause

Are you a woman approaching menopause, with questions about what to expect? Contrary to what many think, menopause is not a sudden change. During the months or years before menopause, usually referred to as perimenopause, you may experience a gradual onset of symptoms. Your body makes less estrogen and progesterone. You've fully reached menopause when you have not had a period for one year. From that point on, you are in menopause.

In perimenopause, your hormones begin to change, which is what can cause symptoms. This may start when you reach your mid-40s. During this time, estrogen levels go up and down, finally decreasing. As a result, you may have some of these symptoms:

- Menstrual periods that occur more or less often
- Worse premenstrual syndrome (PMS) symptoms
- Hot flashes
- Night sweats
- Mood swings
- Vaginal dryness and pain during sex
- Lower sex drive and function
- Needing to urinate often

To help manage some of these symptoms, your doctor may suggest pills or an intrauterine device (IUD) that contains the hormone progesterone. This can make your periods more regular and can prevent excess bleeding. If you have symptoms due to lower estrogen levels, your doctor may suggest pills that have estrogen or progesterone. This is called hormone therapy. Other prescription medicines can help control symptoms such as hot flashes, mood swings and vaginal dryness.

The following are ways for you to help ease symptoms.

- Hot flashes: Wear layers that you can take off. Try all-cotton clothing, sheets and blankets. Keep a glass of cold water by your bed.
- Pain during sex: A water-based lubricant or vaginal moisturizer may help. Your doctor might prescribe an estrogen cream for your vagina.
- Mood swings: Talking with friends who are going through the same changes can help.

You can still get pregnant until 12 months have passed since your last period. Ask your doctor about birth control choices.

Menopause can absolutely be a positive time in your life. Myths can contribute to misconceptions about this normal aging process. Although menopause can cause some noticeable and possibly uncomfortable changes, they can be effectively managed. Talk with your doctor about what options may be best for you to ensure that you feel your best as you move through this season of your life.

Ask the Expert

May 2 at noon

Join a 30-minute Ask the Expert session with Wen Shen, Assistant Professor of Gynecology and Obstetrics for the Johns Hopkins School of Medicine to talk about menopause.

[Click here](#) to join the meeting.

Success Story

Sherry Campbell-Heim, RN II

Johns Hopkins Bayview Medical Center

I make my well-being a priority everyday and schedule extra time for myself on the days I am off. I had to reach a point where I made myself a priority and upheld my promise to myself. My morning consists of coffee, scripture, journaling, followed by exercise. Before I commit to anyone else's obligations including emails, I commit to myself!

