

# Managing Symptoms of Menopause

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Menopause is the time in a person's life when menstrual periods permanently stop. It happens as a natural part of aging or when less estrogen is being made by the ovaries. The time leading up to menopause is called "perimenopause." This can happen several years before your periods stop. Menopause is usually confirmed after you have not had a menstrual period for 1 year. Changes in estrogen may be caused by treatments such as surgery, radiation therapy, endocrine (hormonal blocking) therapy, chemotherapy, or other medicines. Menopause caused by treatment may happen more quickly than natural menopause. It can be temporary or permanent.

Here is information about the common changes that may happen during menopause and ways to help manage the symptoms.

## Hot Flashes

Hot flashes are caused by a change in hormone levels during perimenopause. They are also known as "vasomotor symptoms." Hot flashes often begin as a sensation in the head, neck and upper chest, spreading to the entire body. Most people feel warmth and sweating, sometimes followed by a cold chill.

Hot flashes that happen at night are called night sweats. Night sweats may cause problems in sleep. For most people, symptoms last 1 to 5 minutes. How long these symptoms last vary from person to person. Symptoms usually decrease over time.

### Things that may help:

- Exercise at least 30 minutes each day.
- If you smoke or vape, talk with your healthcare provider about ways to quit.
- Try to lower stress. (Yoga, meditation, or mindfulness may help.)

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**This handout is for informational purposes only. Talk with your doctor or health care team if you have any questions about your care.**

- Wear absorbent, cotton clothing and dress in layers.
- Keep room temperature at a lower setting.
- Try using cooler water when taking a bath/shower.
- Keep air moving with room fans or personal fan.
- If caffeine makes your symptoms worse, try having less caffeine.
- Reduce how much alcohol you use, especially red and white wines.
- Avoid hot and spicy foods if they make your symptoms worse.
- Talk with your doctor before using any medicines, herbal or dietary supplements for your menopausal symptoms.

## **Irregular Menstrual Cycles**

Your periods might be shorter or longer than usual. You may have changes in the amount of bleeding or clotting. Changes in menstrual bleeding can be a sign of other health conditions. Vaginal bleeding that happens after a full year without a period is called “post-menopausal bleeding.” This can be a sign of a more serious health condition such as cancer. It is important to talk about these changes with a healthcare provider.

### **Things that may help:**

- Keep track of your menstrual cycles (the date when they start and how long they last). Write down any symptoms that you are having. Take this information with you to your healthcare provider’s appointment.
- Talk with your doctor about preventing pregnancy while you are going through menopause. While fertility decreases during perimenopause, pregnancy may be possible.

## **Vaginal Dryness and Urinary Tract Changes**

As estrogen decreases, you may notice changes in the vagina, vulva (area outside the vagina), and urethra. These changes can cause vaginal dryness, pain during sex, itching, or vaginal infections. You may also feel like you need to urinate more often, have trouble controlling your urine (bladder leak), and get urinary tract infections more often. These symptoms are called “genitourinary syndrome of menopause”.

These symptoms may be more severe for people taking hormone-blocking therapy to prevent or treat breast cancer or other hormone-related cancers. If you have any of these symptoms, talk with your healthcare provider.

### **Things that may help:**

- Use a long-acting vaginal moisturizers such as Replens for day-to-day vaginal dryness. These work best when used regularly.
- Use water-based or silicone-based lubricants such as KY Extended or Astroglide. Lubricant should be used before, during and after intercourse. Do not use petroleum jelly like Vaseline. Oil-based lubricants should not be used with condoms because it can cause them to tear.
- Increase arousal building time (foreplay) before sex. This may help boost natural lubrication.
- If moisturizers and lubricants are not helping with your symptoms, talk with your doctor about the possibility of using an estrogen product that you apply to the vaginal area.
- Do not use douches, feminine hygiene sprays, or perfumed soaps.
- Wear loose, cotton underwear.
- Urinate after sexual intercourse.
- Drink at least 8 cups (8 ounces each) of water daily.

## **Skin & Hair Dryness**

During menopause, your skin and hair may become dry.

### **Things that may help:**

- Apply moisturizing lotion to your skin at least 2 times a day.
- Use sunscreen with SPF 30 or higher and reapply per package directions. Wear a hat or head covering.
- Brushing your hair more often may increase the amount of natural oil in your hair.
- Use hair conditioner on a regular basis.
- Limit chemical exposure to your hair, including perms, hair color, or straightening products.

## **Mood and Emotional Changes**

You may have changes in your feelings and moods. These changes may include depression, irritability or problems with concentration. Menopause may also affect your sleep.

### **Things that may help:**

- Talk with your doctor about the changes in your feelings and moods. There may be medicines or referrals to help you with these changes.
- Stay involved with healthy activities that you enjoy.
- Make healthy food choices.
- Exercise regularly.
- Try to reduce stress in your life.
- Focus on a few tasks at a time. Set realistic goals.
- Take care of your emotional health. You may find it helpful to talk to a counselor.

## **Osteoporosis**

Lowered estrogen levels can increase the risk of lower bone density or osteoporosis. Osteoporosis increases the risk that someone may break a bone. Anyone can develop osteoporosis, but it is more common in people with specific health conditions and with aging.

### **Things that may help:**

- Have a bone density (DEXA) scan to check your bones. This gives a baseline measurement. Your healthcare team will tell you how often this needs to be checked.
- Do weight-bearing exercises, such as brisk walking, hiking, yoga, dancing, golf, tennis, tai chi, or strength training.
- Talk to your doctor about taking calcium with vitamin D.
- Do not smoke.

## Complementary & Alternative Therapies

Therapies such as meditation, massage, acupuncture and exercise may help with the changes you have during menopause. You should talk with your doctor before starting any herbal or dietary supplement.

## More Information and Resources

Talk to your doctor or nurse if you have any questions. For more information, ask for these patient education handouts:

- [Cancer Therapy: Managing Side Effects - Vaginal Dryness](https://healthsystem.osumc.edu/pteduc/docs/CancerTherapyManagSideEffVaginalDryness.pdf) or view at: <https://healthsystem.osumc.edu/pteduc/docs/CancerTherapyManagSideEffVaginalDryness.pdf>
- [Non-Hormonal Products to Help with Vaginal Dryness](https://healthsystem.osumc.edu/pteduc/docs/Non-HormonalProductsVaginalDryness.pdf) or view at: <https://healthsystem.osumc.edu/pteduc/docs/Non-HormonalProductsVaginalDryness.pdf>
- [Dry Skin](https://healthsystem.osumc.edu/pteduc/docs/DrySkin.pdf) or view at: <https://healthsystem.osumc.edu/pteduc/docs/DrySkin.pdf>
- [Cancer and Depression](https://healthsystem.osumc.edu/pteduc/docs/CancerandDepression.pdf) or view at: <https://healthsystem.osumc.edu/pteduc/docs/CancerandDepression.pdf>