

The 3 Phases of Menopause

What to expect and how to care for yourself

Your life may already be full of transitions. Perhaps you're caring for aging parents, supporting children as they move into adulthood or taking on new responsibilities at work. Menopause represents an additional transition that can last several years. Going through menopause may seem daunting. For most women, menopause is a gradual, natural process, not a disease or disorder. And we offer treatments to relieve symptoms of both mind and body.

1 Perimenopause



Around age 45 to 55, you may notice your menstrual periods aren't as regular as usual. That's because your ovaries have started to slowly make less estrogen. The intensity of your sex drive may also seem different, and you may have mood swings. Other common symptoms are a sudden sensation of overheating or hot flashes, vaginal dryness and sore breasts.



- Less estrogen can accelerate bone loss and worsen cholesterol. A good diet and exercise can help stem these negative effects.
- Regular sexual activity may help keep your vagina healthy by promoting blood flow. If you have pain, your doctor may suggest treatments that lessen it.

2 Menopause



An average of about four years after you started perimenopause, your periods will stop. And when you've gone 12 consecutive months without a period, you're said to be in menopause. Your ovaries are no longer releasing eggs or producing much estrogen. At this point, your hot flashes may occur more often. Besides lowered sex drive (often triggered by continuing vaginal dryness), you may find your usual sleep patterns changing as well.



- Without the risk of pregnancy, some women find sex more relaxing and fun.
- Just because you can no longer get pregnant, don't ease up on safe sex practices. You can still get a sexually transmitted disease.

3 Postmenopause



Immediately after the 12 months that signal menopause, the postmenopause phase begins. Some symptoms, such as hot flashes and sore breasts, ease over time — usually within about four years. Others, such as vaginal dryness, may remain. But good self-care, combined with nonmedical or medical treatments as needed, can help you manage your symptoms and stay healthy.



- Risks related to the loss of estrogen, such as osteoporosis and heart disease, increase.
- Preventive care and routine screenings to check on heart and bone health are even more important.

Early Menopause

Some women can go through menopause early. It can be the result of surgery — if their ovaries are removed in a hysterectomy — or damage to their ovaries, such as from chemotherapy for cancer. If it happens before age 40, for any reason, it's called premature menopause.

Talk With Your Doctor

Whatever phase of menopause you're in, your doctor can guide you to a healthier and smoother transition.

Schedule a checkup with your primary care provider or OB/Gyn today.

To find a doctor, visit: sutterhealth.org/yourwellness

