

Menopause and your menstrual cycle

What is menopause and how are women affected?

Menopause is a normal event that affects every woman. Every woman will be affected in really different ways that can include both physical and emotional symptoms.

10-20% of women **no symptoms**

60% of women **mild to moderate symptoms**

10-20% of women **severe symptoms**

As hormone levels fluctuate increasingly as a woman gets older and approaches menopause, she can notice changes in her menstrual cycle and sometimes other symptoms. This is known as Perimenopause, a transition time that can take up to six years in some women. Eventually the hormone levels fall to a level where menstruation stops altogether and menopause is reached.

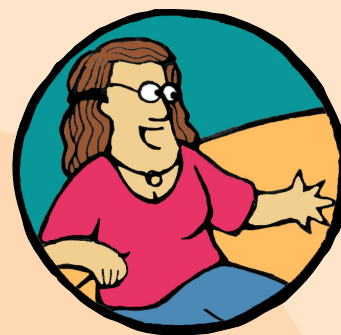
Do we need to use contraception during menopause?

A woman needs to continue using contraception for 12 months after her last natural period.

Caring for myself during menopause

Caring for our health and well-being is an ongoing process for all women. This is no different at midlife and there are many ways to manage this time in your life.

It is important not to ignore major symptoms, especially if they are interfering with daily life. Taking time out to talk about it with trusted friends, family and health professionals can help enormously.



What kind of check ups should I have at midlife?

- Pap tests every 2 years. See your GP, Woman's Health Nurse or contact a Well Woman's Clinic at nearest hospital.
- Breast screens every 2 years when you are over 50 years old. Call Breast Screen Victoria on 132 050 to make a booking.
- Have your blood pressure checked regularly by your GP
- Have your blood sugar and cholesterol levels tested regularly by your GP
- Have your bone density tested if you have a family history of Osteoporosis



Some common menopausal symptoms and ways to manage them are:

Hot flushes and night sweats

- Wear comfortable clothing e.g. cotton
- Drink less caffeine and hot drinks
- Exercise more
- Talk to a trusted GP
- Include phytoestrogens in your diet, this comes from soy products, linseed and tofu
- Think about hormone replacement
- Think about herbal/complementary treatments

Osteoporosis

(fragile bones which break more easily)

- Include calcium in daily diet
- Quit smoking
- Limit caffeine to no more than 3 cups per day
- Do weight-bearing exercise like:
 - brisk walking for 30 minutes a day
 - appropriate weights
 - dancing

Mood changes and irritability *(this will depend on your past experience of depression, stress, self-esteem, body image, social and cultural factors)*

- Talk to friends, family or a trusted health practitioner
- Learn and use relaxation techniques
- Keep a diary of thoughts and feelings
- Take time out to do something special
- Make a list of your strengths
- Set aside time to problem solve

Stress because of changes to your body

- Talk about your stress
- Write it down
- Get a good sleep
- Eat regular and well-balanced meals
- Exercise more
- See a GP that you trust

Concentration and short term memory loss

This will be temporary and is caused by increased stress levels, so see suggestions for stress.

Disturbed sleep

Avoid coffee, alcohol and cigarettes. Exercise every day and practice relaxation techniques.

Headaches

See your GP and make sure you drink enough water.

Skin changes

Drink water, avoid smoking and sunlight.

Weight gain

Your fat will move to the abdominal area, it is natural part of life and difficult to avoid.

Vaginal dryness

Use water-based lubricants such as KY jelly, Replens, or oestrogen cream applied locally.

Loss of bladder control at times

Drink 6-8 glasses of water every day. Drink less caffeine. Do pelvic floor exercises and avoid smoking, chronic coughs and constipation.



For more information

Ring the Power On Team at
Women's Health West on 9689 9588
or look us up online at www.whwest.org.au

Source: Rachel Sabbagh,
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women's health west

Power On!

peer education program for women
who have experienced a mental illness