

Understanding Menopause

50% of women go through the menopause transition without consulting a health professional, yet 4 out of 5 women have symptoms. Don't struggle in silence. Use this sheet to inform yourself, make a note of your symptoms and talk to a doctor. There are lots of treatment options for troublesome symptoms.

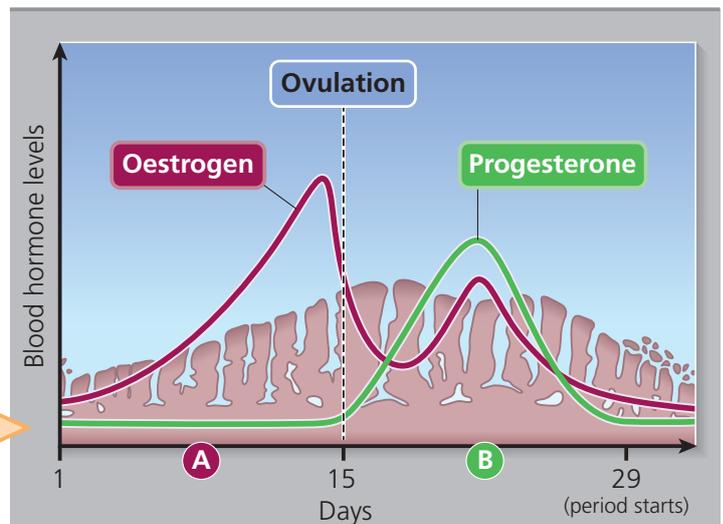
Menopause is your last menstrual period. The more accurate term for the time before and after this event is perimenopause, which is the transition (gradual change) from your reproductive years up to 12 months after your last period. Perimenopause can last a few months or many years.

In a normal menstrual cycle...

...your ovaries produce two hormones – oestrogen and progesterone.

- A** First, rising levels of oestrogen cause the lining of the uterus (womb) to thicken.
- B** Then, rising levels of progesterone prepare the lining of the womb to receive a fertilised egg.

If the egg is not fertilised, levels of oestrogen and progesterone decrease and the lining of the womb is shed – this is your period.

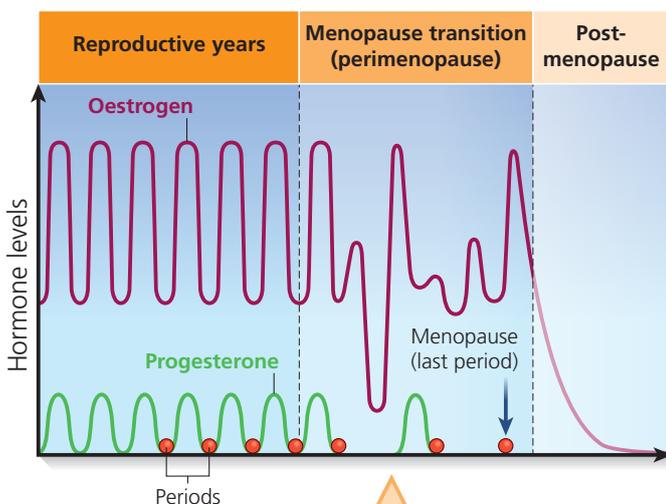


Now that I'm going through the menopause, I don't need to use contraception

Even if your periods have become irregular you can still get pregnant, so you should use contraception until you are 55

MYTH BUSTED

As you get older, the levels of oestrogen and progesterone start to vary. These unpredictable hormone levels cause the symptoms of perimenopause. Also, the lining of the womb may become too thick and shed chaotically, resulting in irregular, heavy periods.



Am I perimenopausal?

The menopause transition affects women in different ways. If you are aged 40–50, have any of the symptoms overleaf and your periods are irregular, you are likely to be perimenopausal.



The average age at which women start the menopause transition is 46 years

Keep a track of your periods...

- When they start
- How long they last
- How heavy they are
- Any spotting between periods
- Any abnormal bleeding, pain or discomfort
- Any other symptoms (see overleaf)

...and talk to your doctor

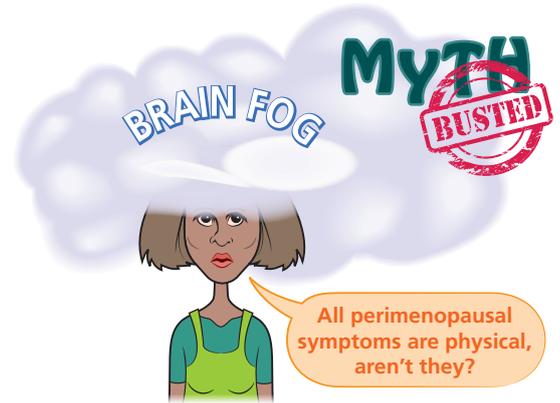
My symptoms

Use the table below to keep track of your symptoms over 2–3 weeks so that you can talk to your doctor about them.

Make a note of the severity – **mild: 1, moderate: 2, severe: 3** – and how long the symptoms last.

Your doctor can help you manage these symptoms with lifestyle changes, treatments for individual symptoms and hormone replacement therapy.

Week: _____	Severity			Duration/ other comments
	1	2	3	
Heavy bleeding				
Hot flushes				
Night sweats				
Vaginal dryness				
Emotional irritability, tearfulness				
Urgent, frequent or accidental urination				
Poor sleep				
Forgetfulness				
Poor concentration				
Difficulty coping				
Lack of drive				
Anxiety				
Depression				
Changes to hair				
Changes to skin				
Loss of interest in sex				
Joint pains				
Muscle pains				
Headaches				
Racing heart				
Other				



Menopause can also affect your mood and emotions. Some women report 'brain fog', forgetfulness and poor concentration.

Long-term consequences

Lack of oestrogen during perimenopause increases the risk of cardiovascular disease, osteoporosis, cognitive decline, and vaginal and bladder problems. Ask your doctor about this.

Questions to ask your doctor

Could my symptoms be due to a condition other than menopause?

What treatments will help to reduce my symptoms?

What are you prescribing for me and how does it work?

How often and for how long will I need to take this treatment?

What are the benefits and risks of the treatment?

When can I expect to notice improvements in how I feel?

Will this treatment interact with any other medications that I am taking?

Am I on the right contraception?

REMEMBER

**There is no 'normal'.
The menopause transition affects
different women in different ways
and your doctor can help!**