



# What is menopause?



Menopause is usually defined as the time when periods stop. For those who reach menopause naturally (not due to a medical or surgical condition or intervention), you will be considered as having reached menopause a year after your last period. It is a retrospective diagnosis made 12 months after the last menstrual period.

Menopause usually occurs between the ages of 45 and 55 with an average age in the UK of 51.

If it occurs between 40 and 45 it is known as early menopause.

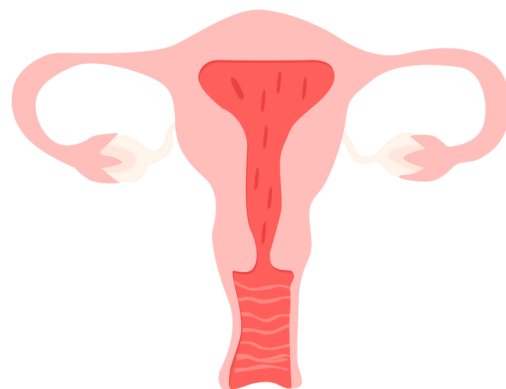
If it occurs before the age of 40 it is known as premature ovarian insufficiency (POI).

Some people will experience menopause for surgical reasons (e.g. a hysterectomy that removes the ovaries), chemical (certain drugs that are used to put women into menopause), or certain medical conditions or treatments like chemotherapy.

The period leading up to menopause is known as **perimenopause**. During this time hormone levels, particularly oestrogen, Follicle Stimulating Hormone (FSH) and Luteinising Hormone (LH) fluctuate. Oestrogen levels also decline over time resulting in various symptoms which can appear up to a decade before periods stop.

Common symptoms of the perimenopause include:

- changes to periods (heavier/lighter, closer together or further apart or irregular)
- vasomotor symptoms (hot flushes and night sweats)
- sleep difficulties
- mood swings, irritability, low mood, and anxiety
- joint and muscle aches
- brain fog (changes to memory and concentration)
- genitourinary symptoms – vaginal dryness, painful sex, increased urinary tract infections (UTIs) and bacterial vaginosis
- low libido/loss of interest in sex



There may be other symptoms too such as ringing in the ears, dry eyes, dry mouth, itchy skin, headaches/migraines, heart palpitations and weight gain to name a few. See the [symptom checker](#).

We are all different and each of us may experience different menopause symptoms. About 70% of individuals will experience some symptoms and around 30% will say their symptoms affect them severely, impacting on work, relationships and quality of life.

**IMPORTANT TO NOTE: USING CONTRACEPTION IS IMPORTANT IF YOU WISH TO AVOID PREGNANCY DURING THE PERIMENOPAUSE TRANSITION PERIOD.**

Symptoms often continue after the menopause too. This time of life is known as the '**post-menopause**'. Generally, vasomotor symptoms are said to fade within 4-7 years after menopause but some individuals will experience them for 10 to 15 years or longer, and some symptoms, like the genitourinary symptoms may be for life. Symptoms may change over time too.

**WHILE MENOPAUSE IS A NATURAL TRANSITION FOR MAJORITY OF PEOPLE, YOU DO NOT NEED TO PUT UP WITH SYMPTOMS IF THEY ARE A CONCERN FOR YOU. THE GOOD THING TO KNOW IS THAT THERE IS A LOT YOU CAN DO TO HELP RELIEVE THESE SYMPTOMS. SEE 'WHAT HELPS WITH MENOPAUSE SYMPTOMS.'**

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