

Managing Menopause

Nikole Gettings, CNM, Clinical Services Coordinator, Choices: Memphis Center for Reproductive Health

What is Menopause?

Menopause is defined as the natural time in a woman's life when she no longer has the ability to mature eggs in her ovaries and thus she is no longer fertile, or able to get pregnant.

How do I know if I have gone thru menopause?

You can only know that you have gone thru menopause after you have gone for at least 12 consecutive months without having a menstrual cycle bleed or period.

There are a few exceptions to this. One exception is surgical removal of the ovaries or uterus. When a woman has surgery to remove her uterus or ovaries, she will no longer be fertile and will no longer have monthly bleeds. This change is immediate after the surgery.

The other exception has to do with taking hormonal birth control. This type of medication will alter your monthly bleeding such that you may go through many months or years without bleeding but have not completed menopause. When you stop these medications or have the contraceptive device removed, you should re-start bleeding within 3-6 months, although it may be sooner. If you do not re-start bleeding within 12 months of stopping one of these hormonal methods, you should make an appointment to be evaluated with a woman's health care provider.

What age does menopause usually occur?

Typically, menopause happens sometime between 45 and 55. If you have stopped having menses and you are under age 40, and you are not pregnant, have not had surgical removal of your ovaries or uterus, and are not on one of the hormonal contraceptives discussed above, you should make an appointment to be evaluated with a woman's health care provider.

What is perimenopause?

Perimenopause is the time around menopause during which women's bodies are transitioning. The transition from producing eggs in your ovaries every month to no longer producing eggs does not happen overnight. Just like puberty, perimenopause happens over a period of 3-5 years for most women.

How do I know I am going through perimenopause?

There are three primary signs of perimenopause:

- Irregular periods or menses and eventual stopping of menses (menopause)
- Hot flashes
- Vaginal changes

How can I get through perimenopause and menopause in good health?

The keys to good health at any stage of life are to eat plenty of fruits and vegetables, maintain a healthy weight, exercise to maintain muscle strength and bone health and stay connected with friends, family, partners and your community. If you need special help, contact your health care provider.

Where can I get more information about Menopause?

Check out “Our Bodies, Ourselves” By The Boston Women’s Health Book Collective. A good website is: www.menopause.org

Choices is a non-profit women’s health center providing a range of services including menopause management. Call 901-274-3550 or visit www.MemphisChoices.org