



Understanding Menopause

Every woman, if they live long enough, will go through menopause. There are a lot of misconceptions about menopause, and while every woman's symptoms and experience is different, below is some key information:

What are the stages of menopause?

Perimenopause

The time 5-10 years before periods stop where you may start to notice changes

Menopause

The day when it has been 12 consecutive months since a woman had her last period

Post-menopause

The time after the 12-months since last period, and for the rest of her life

When do these stages happen?

Perimenopause

Normally, between the ages of **35-45**

Menopause

Typically, between the ages of **45-55**, the average age being 51

Post-menopause

Generally, from **45-55** onwards

What happens to the menstrual cycle in each phase?

Perimenopause

- Menstrual cycle may become *shorter*
- Menstrual cycle may become *longer*
- Periods may become *lighter*
- Periods might be *heavier*
- Cycle timing and bleeding can be *unpredictable*

Menopause/ Post-menopause

No period in 12-months, and thereafter.



What other signs/symptoms are there?

Research shows the prevalence of symptoms across Perimenopause, Menopause and Post-menopause are:

-Joint & muscle pain (65%)	-Mood swings (49%)	-Heart discomfort (42%)
-Phys/mental exhaustion (64%)	-Change to skin (46%)	-Vagina dryness (37%)
-Forgetfulness (54%)	-Dry skin (46%)	-Urinary problems (34%)
-Irritability (54%)	-Poor concentration (45%)	-Increased facial hair (27%)
-Hot flushes (53%)	-Sexual problems (45%)	-Formification (20%)
-Sleep issues (52%)	-Headaches (44%)	
-Anxiety (51%)	-Depression (43%)	

Fang et al. (2024).

What causes the symptoms?

There are a range of reasons why some women experience some of these symptoms. Some of the symptoms are also interlinked. For example, a woman may have significant sleep disturbance, or hot flushes, which may impact her mood and concentration.

There is still more research needed in this area, but one of the reasons for the change in how a woman may feel is due to changes in hormones.

Which hormones, and what happens?

The primary hormones which change throughout the menopause transition are:

-  Oestrogen
-  Progesterone
-  Testosterone

Prior to perimenopause, if a woman has a regular menstrual cycle, there is generally a predictable pattern in how her hormones change across the month to support ovulation. This can mean there is more predictability in how she feels in terms of mood, energy and other signs.

But, in perimenopause, as it becomes harder for the body to support ovulation, the hormones begin to peak and trough at irregular points in the cycle, sometimes leading to fluctuations in mood. As perimenopause progresses and menopause and post-menopause occur, the levels of hormones (without treatment) drop, which can lead to several of the physical and psychological symptoms above.