

# EMBRACING [THE] CHANGE

## The 3 stages of menopause

Your mother went through it. Your grandmother went through it. Now you're going through it. If you're not sure whether you're in **perimenopause**, **menopause** or **postmenopause**,

you're not alone. Our experts break down each stage of menopause and what it means for you.



### PERIMENOPAUSE

- **WHAT IT IS:** The “transition period” leading up to menopause. Hallmarks are hot flashes, vaginal dryness, sleeplessness and changes in libido.
- **WHY IT HAPPENS:** Estrogen and progesterone levels fluctuate and fall. The ovaries release eggs less often. Pregnancy is unlikely but possible.
- **WHEN IT OCCURS:** Typically in your 40s (average age, 47). Usually lasts 4 years but can range from a few months to 10 years.



**TIP:** As estrogen loss accelerates in the last 1-2 years, symptoms can worsen. Ask your doctor about the risks and benefits of hormonal and non-hormonal treatments to ease symptoms and bleeding.

### MENOPAUSE

- **WHAT IT IS:** The official end of monthly periods and your reproductive years.
- **WHY IT HAPPENS:** The ovaries no longer release eggs and no longer secrete estrogen or progesterone.
- **WHEN IT OCCURS:** Typically between 45-55 (average age, 51). Early menopause occurs between 40-45.



**TIP:** Menopause represents one point in time. It is only diagnosed 1 year after all menstrual bleeding has stopped.

### POSTMENOPAUSE

- **WHAT IT IS:** The beginning of life after child-bearing — without periods! Symptoms ease or disappear.
- **WHY IT HAPPENS:** The ovaries have stopped secreting reproductive hormones and releasing eggs. As estrogen levels stabilize, symptoms like hot flashes subside.
- **WHEN IT OCCURS:** Typically begins in your early to mid-50s and lasts for the rest of your life.



**TIP:** After menopause, women's risks for heart disease and osteoporosis soar. Talk to your doctor about key screenings and lifestyle changes that will reduce your personal risk.

## Your mother and grandmother made it through **The Change**. You will, too!

Talk to your doctor about where you are and what you need. Keep track of your symptoms. Try a menstrual calendar. Identify stressors in your life that intensify your symptoms. Then make positive lifestyle changes to ensure a long and healthy life.

### EXTRAS



• **KNOWING THE STAGE YOU'RE IN IS LESS IMPORTANT THAN GOOD SYMPTOM CONTROL.** A menstrual calendar won't be helpful if you're on hormone replacement therapy (HRT) to ease troublesome symptoms. And blood tests aren't always accurate (hormones fluctuate too much).



• **PREGNANCY IS LESS LIKELY, BUT STILL POSSIBLE, IN PERIMENOPAUSE.** Hormonal contraception and progestin-only IUDs not only prevent pregnancy but also treat bleeding and symptoms. (If you still wish to become pregnant, fertility-enhancing treatments can help.)



• **MENOPAUSE CAN HAPPEN IN YOUR 30S AND EARLIER.** The cause of premature ovarian loss is usually unknown. But surgical removal, chemotherapy and pelvic radiation can also send you into menopause prematurely. Tell your doctor about any symptoms. You have options!

### SOURCES

Speaking of Women's Health: [speakingofwomenshealth.com](http://speakingofwomenshealth.com)

The Cleveland Clinic Guide to Menopause: [amazon.com/Cleveland-Clinic-Guide-to-Menopause-Guides/dp/1427799709](http://amazon.com/Cleveland-Clinic-Guide-to-Menopause-Guides/dp/1427799709)

North American Menopause Society: [menopause.org](http://menopause.org)

National Institute on Aging: [nia.nih.gov](http://nia.nih.gov)

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