

WHAT IS PERIMENOPAUSE?



MENOPAUSE is when you have had no periods for 12 months (if you are over 50), or 24 months (if you are under 50).

PERIMENOPAUSE is a time when you are still having periods, but experience symptoms due to changing hormone levels.

YOUR BODY & YOUR MIND

Your ovaries produce eggs and hormones (mainly oestrogen and progesterone) from when you start your periods until your periods stop.

These hormones affect your womb, but also your body and mind in lots of different ways.

When you are older and you have fewer eggs, your hormone levels go down as well. This means that you can experience some changes in your body and your mind even before your periods stop.

SYMPTOMS OF PERIMENOPAUSE:

- Changes to your periods (heavier or longer, more or less often, or may stop all together)
- Hot flushes (feeling hot all over) and night sweats
- Anxiety, low mood, anger, 'brain fog', poor sleep, tiredness
- Muscle and joint aches, breast pain
- Pain during sex or not wanting to have sex
- Pain when passing urine or repeated urinary tract infections (utis)
- Hair loss and weight gain

WHEN WILL I START EXPERIENCING PERIMENOPAUSAL SYMPTOMS?

Menopause typically happens around the age of 50 but women can have symptoms up to 10 years before their periods change. Women from different ethnicities may experience some symptoms earlier and more severely; for example, in the USA, black women report more hot flushes than white or Asian women. There's not enough research to say whether these differences are due to ethnicity or lifestyle factors. We know that health, weight, lifestyle, and even the country or area where women live in can also affect their menopause symptoms.

CAN I HAVE A TEST TO CHECK IF I AM PERIMENOPAUSAL?

Your doctor can normally diagnose perimenopause by talking to you about your symptoms. If you are over 45 then hormone blood tests are very unreliable. Your doctor may want to do other blood tests to check for other causes of your symptoms.

WHAT IS EARLY MENOPAUSE?

Menopause that happens before the age of 45 is called early menopause. This is not common and affects just 5% of women. Menopause before 40 is even rarer and only affects 1% of women. Your periods may also stop for other reasons, so if you are under 40, aren't pregnant, and haven't had a period for 6 months, you can go to your health care provider for tests to find out why.

WILL TAKING CONTRACEPTION AFFECT WHEN I GO THROUGH MENOPAUSE?

No. Neither your choice of contraception, nor the number of children you have, affects when you will have menopause. The most common predictor of when you will have your menopause is the age at which your mother had her menopause. Many types of contraception contain hormones that can help with menopause symptoms. If your contraception affects your periods, it may be harder to tell if you are going through menopause.

DO I NEED TO SEE A DOCTOR FOR PERIMENOPAUSE SYMPTOMS?

It depends. Perimenopause is a natural part of life and some women have very few symptoms and don't feel they need support. Other women may find themselves experiencing difficult symptoms and would benefit from support. There are many ways to manage these symptoms, from lifestyle changes to medication like Hormone Replacement Therapy (HRT).

WOULD SUPPLEMENTS OR ALTERNATIVE THERAPIES HELP ME DURING PERIMENOPAUSE?

It is important to take Vitamin D (10 micrograms a day) through the winter in the UK and for the whole year if you have darker skin or cover a lot of your skin with clothes. Taking Vitamin D is especially important during perimenopause as it helps keep your bones strong. 'Mind-body' practices like yoga, meditation and talking therapies can help with perimenopausal symptoms.

