

What is Menopause?

In girl-speak:

The word “menopause” is the catchall women use to explain weird behavior attributed to our crazy hormone fluctuations. Like when we fill up the ice cube trays with water and then put them in the dishwasher; or forget the name of our best friend, and our kids; or struggle to put a sentence together with at least one noun ... that’s menopause. The victory here is that it really is our crazy hormone fluctuations. And no, it isn’t early onset Alzheimer’s — it just feels like it. Menopause kind of sneaks up on you though, starting with those wild and crazy initiation years: perimenopause.



This is **perimenopause**: The transition from reproductive life to menopause. It is characterized by irregularities in menstrual cycle. The average age is 45 to 47, but it may occur as early as 35. Some hallmark symptoms of perimenopause are: shortening of menstrual cycle, shorter or longer duration of bleeding, heavier bleeding, increased mood disturbances, sleeplessness, or hot flashes. Women have reported having up to 50 a day. As this illustrates, symptoms can be wide-ranging and are different for every woman. The really interesting perspective to perimenopause is that it really is a journey ...sometimes as long as ten years... Yikes!



This is **menopause**: Menopause is medically recognized after 12 months of amenorrhea (absence of menstruation). The ovaries severely reduce production of estrogen and progesterone and there is not a menstrual period for one year. If there is a period after six months of amenorrhea, then the clock begins again to count out the 12 months. In natural menopause (where there has been no medical intervention), it occurs at an average age of 51 in the Western world. The average range is between 45 to 55 years old and is impacted by smoking and genetics. Women who smoke may reach menopause two years earlier than non-smoking women, and daughters tend to experience menopause at nearly the same age as their mother.



This is **postmenopause**: Sometimes the terms menopause and postmenopause are used interchangeably. And sometimes postmenopause refers to being in the state of menopause for a longer period of time (as opposed to just the 12 months). Either way, you don’t have a period. Time for the happy dance.

In girl-speak: Hang on to your tampons Ladies because this will probably be a roller-coaster of emotions, and while some women will breeze through the transition, most of us are going to have lots to talk about. Be aware that your period could get so heavy that you may not be comfortable leaving home. Also be aware that your sleep patterns could be interrupted with all types of hot and cold adventures (not to be confused with those great hot and sweaty adventures...sigh).

In girl-speak: You know the part mentioned above about how the “ovaries severely reduce production of estrogen and progesterone” — well this is what you need to understand. Knowledge is power and it will enable you to make the best decisions for treatment, including no treatment at all. There is no one size fits all and it is critical that your Doctor assesses your risk factors along with your desired treatments. Learn more about these hormones and how they impact your life.

In girl-speak: You’ve arrived ... and now you’ve got some serious lifestyle decisions to make. Now the challenges are around staying active and healthy. Do yourself a favour — treat yourself to a copy of Dr Northrup’s book The Wisdom of Menopause and decide to have the best life ever.