

# The most common menopause symptoms you should know

June 16 2023, by Ann Schreiber

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Menopause, a natural stage of a woman's life marking the end of

menstruation, can bring many physical and emotional changes that may leave her feeling bewildered and alone. Hot flashes, night sweats and mood swings can disrupt her daily routine and affect her overall well-being.

Sound familiar? Think you might be starting menopause? Here's how to identify the most common [menopause symptoms](#).

## Menopause symptoms

The menopausal transition typically begins between 45 and 55 years of age, marking a significant time in a woman's life. [This phase](#) usually spans around seven years, although it can extend up to 14 years, according to the U.S. National Institute on Aging (NIH).

"Menopause is no [menstrual] period for one year," said [Dr. Adi Davidov](#), associate chair and director of obstetrics and gynecology at Staten Island University Hospital in New York.

And the duration of this transition can be influenced by factors such as lifestyle choices, including smoking, the age at which it begins, as well as race and ethnicity. As women journey through menopause, they may grapple with various physical and emotional changes that can disrupt their daily lives.

These symptoms can vary in intensity and duration, from irregular periods to [hot flashes](#). "The most common symptoms of menopause are hot flashes and vaginal dryness," Davidov said.

The Cleveland Clinic lists these as the [symptoms most often experienced](#) :

## Irregular periods

During menopause, hormonal fluctuations can lead to irregular menstrual cycles. Periods may become shorter or longer, lighter or heavier, and the time between them may vary. Some women may miss periods altogether. These changes occur due to the decline in estrogen and progesterone levels.

## Hot flashes

[Dr. Wen Shen](#), a gynecologist specializing in perimenopause and menopause at Johns Hopkins Medicine in Baltimore, describes [hot flashes](#) as quick bursts of hot skin and drenching sweat that last anywhere from 30 seconds to about five minutes. "Your face and neck may turn red, your heart rate may increase, and you will most likely break out in a sweat," she said on a Hopkins site. "Night sweats are the same thing, only you're asleep and are jolted awake by the heat and sweat sensation consuming your body."

## Vaginal dryness and discomfort

Declining estrogen levels can cause thinning and drying of vaginal tissues, leading to vaginal dryness. This can result in discomfort, itching and pain during intercourse. It may also increase a woman's risk for urinary tract infections.

## Mood swings and emotional changes

Hormonal fluctuations during menopause can impact a woman's emotional well-being, leading to [mood swings](#), irritability, anxiety and depression. Some women may also experience difficulty concentrating or memory lapses, commonly called "[brain fog](#)."

## Sleep disturbances

Many women experience sleep disturbances during menopause. This can include difficulty falling asleep, staying asleep or waking up too early. Night sweats, caused by hot flashes during sleep, can further disrupt sleep patterns, leading to fatigue and daytime drowsiness. The NIH suggests some women with trouble sleeping related to menopause try [over-the-counter sleep aids such as melatonin](#). Others may opt for prescription medications to help them get a good night's sleep.

## Changes in sexual function

Menopause can affect a woman's sexual health and function. Decreased estrogen levels can reduce libido, cause [vaginal dryness](#) and make it more difficult to achieve orgasm. These changes can impact a woman's sexual satisfaction and intimacy.

## Early and premature menopause symptoms

The Office on Women's Health notes that premature menopause refers to the [occurrence of menopause before age 40](#), while early menopause typically happens between the ages of 40 and 45. About 5% of women experience early menopause.

This transitional phase brings about unique challenges for these women as they navigate the physical and emotional changes associated with menopause at a relatively younger age.

Some symptoms to look out for include:

- Irregular or missed periods
- Hot flashes

- Mood swings
- Vaginal dryness
- Sleep disturbances
- Changes in sexual function

By understanding and recognizing the common early menopausal symptoms and signs of menopause, women can better navigate this phase of life. Seeking support from [health care providers](#), exploring various treatment options, and leveraging insights from [online resources](#) such as the [Menopause Preparedness Toolkit: A Woman's Empowerment Guide](#) from the Society for Women's Health Research, can help manage symptoms effectively, improving overall well-being and quality of life.

Transitioning through menopause can be a complex and transformative journey for women. Whether experiencing irregular periods, hot flashes or emotional changes, [women](#) must prioritize [self-care](#) and consult health care professionals who can provide guidance, empathy and tailored treatment options to help manage symptoms effectively.

Remember, you are not alone on this journey, and with the proper support, [menopause](#) can be embraced as a new chapter of growth and empowerment.

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Citation: The most common menopause symptoms you should know (2023, June 16) retrieved 21 May 2024 from <https://medicalxpress.com/news/2023-06-common-menopause-symptoms.html>

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