

When menopause comes early: Symptoms & treatment

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While women generally understand that at a certain age they will go

through "the change," officially known as menopause, some women find themselves dealing with it much earlier than expected.

Early and [premature menopause](#) affect up to 5% of women. What is [early menopause](#)? Is it the same as premature menopause, or is there a difference? Why do some women reach menopause so early? How can a women tell if she's in early menopause? Is there any way to treat it, or even reverse it?

Early versus premature menopause

Menopause, by definition, is the point in a woman's life when her menstrual cycles stop. Once you have gone 12 months without a period, you have gone through menopause, according to the [Cleveland Clinic](#).

While menopause normally occurs between the ages of 45 and 55, some women experience it earlier. When menopause occurs between the ages of 40 and 45, it is called early menopause, according to the [U.S. Office on Women's Health](#). Early menopause symptoms include irregular cycles. An early menopause age occurs in about 5% of women.

Premature menopause, on the other hand, occurs when a woman is 40 or younger, the [North American Menopause Society](#) says. This occurs in about 1% of women in the U.S. It's rare to experience menopause in your 20s, occurring only in about 0.1% of women, according to the [Cleveland Clinic](#).

What causes early or premature menopause?

Early or premature menopause is caused by anything that damages your ovaries or stops your body from producing estrogen, according to the [Cleveland Clinic](#). Here are several possibilities:

- Chemotherapy or radiation treatments for cancer
- Surgery to remove your ovaries (oophorectomy)
- Surgery to remove your uterus (hysterectomy). While this ends your period, according to [Mayo Clinic](#), if you still have your ovaries and you still had periods before your surgery, your ovaries continue producing hormones and eggs until you reach natural menopause.
- A [family history](#) of early menopause
- Getting your period before 11 years of age
- Some [autoimmune diseases](#) like [rheumatoid arthritis](#) or Crohn's disease
- Thyroid disease
- Smoking cigarettes
- Chromosomal abnormalities
- Chronic fatigue syndrome
- HIV or AIDS
- Mumps

Early menopause symptoms

The signs and symptoms of premature or early menopause are the same as natural menopause.

- Hot flashes and/or night sweats
- Trouble sleeping (insomnia)
- Frequent need to go to the bathroom
- More frequent urinary tract infections
- Mood swings, irritability, depression, anxiety
- Dry skin
- Thinning hair
- Tender breasts
- Headaches
- Aches and pains in your joints and muscles

- Vaginal dryness and discomfort during sex
- Decreased sex drive
- Forgetfulness, trouble concentrating, brain fog
- Changes in weight
- Racing heart

Early menopause treatments

While it isn't possible to [reverse](#) menopause once it occurs or make your ovaries function normally again, your physician can help you find treatments that minimize the symptoms. If you have not gone 12 months without a period, you are not officially in menopause yet, and it may be possible to get pregnant.

Treatment for early or premature menopause will most likely include hormone replacement. "No matter the underlying cause of early menopause, [hormone therapy](#) must be considered as a treatment option to prevent concerning long-term health outcomes," Dr. Carol Kuhle, a [family doctor](#) at the Mayo Clinic in Rochester, Minn., writes in a [clinic site](#). These long-term health risks include osteoporosis, heart disease, depression and various neurological diseases like dementia and cognitive decline.

Besides the physical effects of early or premature menopause, there are often [emotional](#) ones. If the patient still planned to have children, or menopause is due to [cancer treatment](#) or other health problems, anxiety and depression can become a serious issue.

Early or premature [menopause](#) usually comes as a surprise and can be stressful to navigate. With knowledge of the reasons behind your condition, a treatment plan and proper support, you are better prepared to manage the changes that come with this diagnosis. It is important to establish a good team around you, such as health care givers, family and

friends to support you as you go through this challenging time.

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