

Understanding perimenopause vs. menopause

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Menopause marks a significant transition for women, yet understanding its precursor, perimenopause, and its symptoms can be complex.

Dr. Stephanie Faubion, director of Mayo Clinic's Center for Women's Health and medical director of The Menopause Society, says

experiencing perimenopause and [menopause](#) can be confusing for some. She says it is not only patients who may find it confusing, but [medical providers](#) as well, due to lack of training in menopause management.

"Menopause is defined by no [menstrual cycle](#) for a year," says Dr. Faubion.

She says women won't know they've entered menopause until they've experienced a full year without menstruation.

"Perimenopause is the time leading up to that, and for many women, it can last a long time—six to 10 years is possible," Dr. Faubion says.

That's when you may experience irregular periods and a host of symptoms, including hot flashes, night sweats, sleep issues and mood changes.

Dr. Faubion says women may experience "sexual symptoms, [low sexual desire](#), [vaginal dryness](#), pain with sexual activity."

She says there's been a lack of education and resources for women regarding menopause. There are some reasons for that.

"One is that menopause can happen at different ages for women. So anything after age 45 is considered normal for menopause," says Dr. Faubion.

And perimenopause can begin as early as 35.

"In general, women aren't hearing this from their medical providers, which is problematic because, while some women may have no symptoms going into menopause, many women actually have a laundry list of symptoms, and sometimes they're very confusing to sort out," Dr.

Faubion says.

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