

# Menopause

As a woman, your hormones control all sorts of things, including your menstrual cycle. The levels of estrogen and progesterone start to naturally dip right around age 45. From there, they sort of plateau. This is usually the beginning of menopause, or the stage in life when you stop having periods. This normal part of aging will likely cause some unwanted symptoms. So, how does your body get to this point?

Technically, menopause starts when your body goes a full 12 months without a period (that includes spotting). Your menstrual cycle may have been on auto-pilot since puberty, with your ovaries producing plenty of estrogen to keep your monthly flow regular. As you move into your late 40s and early 50s, the ovaries make less and less estrogen until there's no longer enough for your body to release an egg. This is what triggers natural menopause. We say "natural" because sometimes having your ovaries removed can also trigger menopause (premature menopause).<sup>1, 2</sup>

## What are the stages of menopause?

Natural menopause is a gradual process that happens in 3 stages: perimenopause, menopause and postmenopause.<sup>3, 4</sup>

### Perimenopause

Often called "transition to menopause," perimenopause is the time leading up to your last period. This is when your estrogen and progesterone levels slowly start to drop. Perimenopause can last 8 to 10 years, but the average time is right around 4 years. For example, if you start perimenopause when you're 40, you might not transition into full menopause until you're closer to 50.

### Menopause

Once you've gone a full year without any menstrual bleeding, you've officially reached menopause. The ovaries have stopped producing enough estrogen to release eggs and you're well on your way to postmenopause.

### Postmenopause

After a full year of menopause, your body moves into postmenopause. This just means you've gone through menopause and now you're living period-free for the rest of your life. During this stage, many symptoms will likely ease up. But, some could last for many years after menopause. It's also important to keep in mind that with lower levels of estrogen, you're at a higher risk for certain health conditions, like osteoporosis and heart disease.

## Tips for life after menopause (postmenopause)

Every woman's body reacts differently postmenopause. While hot flashes and weight gain are some of the more common things women are concerned with, things like bladder control, insomnia and risk for certain health conditions are also things you may have to manage after menopause. It's important to be patient with your body and pay close attention to how your body and mind are feeling. Then, talk with an expert about ways to help yourself work through these changes. Here are a few tips to get you started:<sup>5</sup>

- **Keep your body strong:** A nutritious diet and regular exercise can help keep your body weight in a good place, and get your bones and muscles strong. (It's a good idea to choose foods that strengthen your bones to reduce your risk of osteoporosis.)
- **Learn about your bone health:** It's important to work with your health care provider to find out if you are at risk for osteoporosis. There may be several steps involved in diagnosing osteoporosis. These include a physical exam and a bone mineral density (BMD) test. A bone mineral density test can measure the amount of bone in different parts of the skeleton to identify if you have osteoporosis or if it is worsening.<sup>6</sup>
- **Count your kegels:** Your pelvic floor muscle is what supports your uterus, bladder, small intestine and rectum. It's what controls your bathroom breaks. If you're having a few accidents or your bladder leaks a little when you sneeze, give kegel exercises a try. They strengthen your pelvic floor and help you to take back control of when you go.<sup>7</sup>
- **Practice healthy habits:** Avoid tobacco, eat a nutritious diet, exercise regularly, and take good care of your body and mental health.
- **Limit stress:** You're at a higher risk for developing heart disease postmenopause and stress only makes that risk higher. Consider things like yoga, meditation, massage therapy, acupuncture — or even a new hobby that helps calm you.

## Who should I see about menopause?

If you have questions or concerns about menopause, or you'd like some guidance on how to live with your symptoms, you may want to go right to your gynecologist. Your gynecologist specializes in the health of female organs and will likely be your best choice. You can also see your primary care provider (the doctor or provider you might see for your yearly physical). Be sure to come prepared with a list of your symptoms and questions.

### UnitedHealthcare® is here to help

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**1-866-887-9533**, 8 a.m. – 8 p.m. PT, Monday through Friday. TTY users, call **711**.

1. Menopause, Perimenopause and Postmenopause [clevelandclinic.org](https://www.clevelandclinic.org/health/conditions/menopause), 2019.
2. Menopause basics, [womenshealth.gov](https://www.womenshealth.gov/menopause), 2019.
3. Menopause, Perimenopause and Postmenopause, [clevelandclinic.org](https://www.clevelandclinic.org/health/conditions/menopause), 2019.
4. Menopause basics, [womenshealth.gov](https://www.womenshealth.gov/menopause), 2019.
5. Staying Healthy at Menopause and Beyond, [menopause.org](https://www.menopause.org), 2021.
6. Boning up on osteoporosis, National Osteoporosis Foundation, 2024.
7. Kegel exercises: A how-to guide for women, [mayoclinic.org](https://www.mayoclinic.org), 2020.