

What is the menopause?

The menopause is the time in a female's life when periods stop. This happens because of loss of ovarian reproductive function, and the ovaries producing less oestrogen. Usually this occurs between the ages of 45-55 and a female is classed as officially being in the menopause when they haven't had a period for 1 year or more.

The peri-menopause is the period leading up to the menopause and is when the menstrual patterns change and cycles can become longer.

Resources:

[NHS](#)

[BMA](#)

[Menopause Support](#)

Symptoms of the menopause

10-20% of menopausal females don't experience any symptoms and 25% will have severe or debilitating symptoms. Some of the most common symptoms are:

- ◆ Hot flushes & night sweats
- ◆ Disturbed sleep
- ◆ Low energy, low mood, anxiety
- ◆ Impaired memory & concentration (also referred to as brain fog)
- ◆ Joint aches & headaches
- ◆ Dry skin, hair, eyes & nail changes
- ◆ Low sex drive
- ◆ Vaginal dryness / urinary symptoms
- ◆ Weight gain - especially with high carb foods

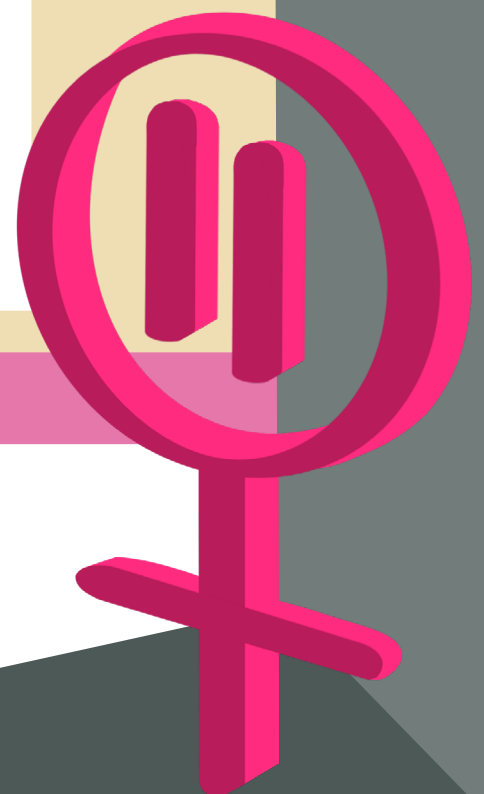
Diagnosis

Your GP will be able to tell if you're in the menopause or not, based on your symptoms and changes in menstrual cycles in those over the age of 45. If the GP thinks there are potentially other causes for the symptoms that are being experienced, they may conduct a blood test, however hormone blood tests are generally unhelpful when diagnosing the menopause as hormone levels can fluctuate monthly.

Does lifestyle make a difference?

Yes! Having a healthy lifestyle and making some changes to your daily routine can have a big impact on your body. Some changes you can make are:

Eating a healthy and balanced diet - Try to have a lower carbohydrate diet, avoid lots of salt and eat foods rich in calcium and vitamin D for bone health.



Regular exercise - Keep exercise regular and varied, include weight training and strength training.

Stop smoking - Smoking increases the risk of osteoporosis and heart disease which is the most common cause of death in females.

Reduce alcohol and caffeine intake - Alcohol increases hot flushes and increases the risk of breast cancer.

Relaxation - Find the right relaxation method for you to help reduce stress and anxiety.

Avoid using sleeping tablets - This can help with short term symptoms of the menopause but long term can cause other side effects.

Do regular pelvic floor exercises



Hormone Replacement Therapy (HRT)

HRT is a common treatment option, however it's not the only one. It's important to explore treatment options with the GP and discuss the benefits and side effects of HRT. This type of treatment can come in the form of patches, sprays and gels, vaginal oestrogen which can be used for life and if you still have your womb, you may need progesterone in addition to oestrogen. Some points to be aware of with HRT are:

- ❖ Weight loss injections can impact the dose of HRT required
- ❖ Previous history of blood clots influences which HRT type is safe to use
- ❖ Previous history of breast cancer or other hormone-dependent cancer influences which HRT type is safe to use
- ❖ Herbal medicines may help BUT the quality and safety are not known
- ❖ Prescribable non-hormonal medications can help

Contraception & the menopause

It's possible to still get pregnant even when periods become irregular. If you're under the age of 50 then it's recommended to use contraception for 2 years after your last period and if you're over 50 it's recommended to use it for 1 year after the last period. It's also important to note that HRT is not a form of contraception and will not prevent pregnancy.

The menopause & the workplace

There are some workplace factors that can impact on a female's menopausal symptoms that can be easy to help with. Think about the ventilation and temperature in the work environment to help with hot flushes, think about the material of work uniforms, have a quiet area for staff to use, accessible toilet facilities, cold drinking water and sufficiently educate and train managers and supervisors on health and safety issues relating to the menopause.