

Understanding the Menopause

The menopause is a natural stage of life that all women experience. For some, it passes with little difficulty, while for others, it can bring physical and emotional symptoms that affect daily life.

This leaflet explains what the menopause is, how it may affect you, and the options available to help manage symptoms. If you have concerns or questions, a healthcare professional can offer advice and support.

What is the menopause?

The menopause is the time in a woman's life when menstrual periods stop and the ovaries gradually stop producing eggs. This usually happens between the ages of 45 and 55, although it can occur earlier in some women.

The menopause is linked to changes in hormone levels, particularly a reduction in oestrogen. These hormonal changes affect many systems in the body and are responsible for the symptoms commonly associated with the menopause.

The transition leading up to the menopause, when symptoms may begin and periods become irregular, is known as the perimenopause. This stage can last for several years.

Why do symptoms occur?

Oestrogen plays an important role in regulating many body functions, including temperature control, sleep, mood, bone strength, and the health of the skin and vaginal tissues.

As oestrogen levels fall, the body adapts gradually, which can lead to a range of symptoms. The type and severity of symptoms vary widely between individuals.

Common symptoms of menopause

Menopausal symptoms can be physical, emotional, or both. Some women experience only mild symptoms, while others find them more disruptive.

Common symptoms may include:

- Hot flushes and night sweats
- Sleep disturbance or fatigue
- Changes in mood, anxiety, or low mood
- Vaginal dryness or discomfort
- Urinary symptoms or recurrent infections
- Reduced interest in sex
- Changes to skin or hair

Symptoms can change over time and may last for months or several years.

Long-term health considerations

Not all women experience long-term health problems after the menopause, and many remain healthy with appropriate lifestyle measures and routine care.

Lower oestrogen levels after the menopause can affect long-term health. One important area is bone strength, as reduced oestrogen can increase the risk of osteoporosis, a condition where bones become weaker and more likely to fracture.

Hormonal changes after the menopause may also be associated with changes that can affect long-term cardiovascular health. These changes are often gradual and may not cause immediate symptoms.

Maintaining a healthy lifestyle and attending routine health checks can help reduce long-term risks.

How is menopause diagnosed?

Menopause is often diagnosed based on symptoms and changes in menstrual patterns. In women over the age of 45, blood tests are not usually required, as hormone levels can fluctuate during the perimenopause.

In younger women, or when symptoms are unclear, blood tests may sometimes be considered to support diagnosis.

Knowing when your last period occurred can be helpful, particularly when considering contraception or managing symptoms. A healthcare professional can advise you based on your individual circumstances.

What can help manage menopausal symptoms?

There are different ways to manage menopausal symptoms, depending on their severity and how they affect your daily life.

Lifestyle measures

Healthy lifestyle choices can help ease symptoms and support long-term health. These may include:

- Eating a balanced diet rich in calcium and vitamin D
- Keeping physically active
- Avoiding smoking
- Limiting alcohol intake
- Practising relaxation or stress-management techniques

Hormone replacement therapy (HRT)

Hormone replacement therapy replaces some of the oestrogen that the body no longer produces. It is one of the most effective treatments for relieving

menopausal symptoms such as hot flushes, sleep disturbance, and vaginal dryness.

HRT is not suitable for everyone, and some women may experience side effects, particularly when starting treatment. The benefits and risks of HRT vary between individuals and should be discussed with a healthcare professional.

Complementary and alternative approaches

Some women choose to explore complementary therapies to help manage symptoms. These may include approaches such as relaxation techniques, mindfulness, yoga, or acupuncture.

Scientific evidence for these therapies varies, and they may not be suitable for everyone. It is important to discuss any alternative treatments with a healthcare professional to ensure they are safe and appropriate.

When to seek medical advice

You should speak to a healthcare professional if menopausal symptoms are affecting your quality of life, emotional well-being, or ability to carry out daily activities.

Medical advice is also important if you experience unexpected bleeding, severe symptoms, or have concerns about long-term health risks.

Looking after yourself during the menopause

The menopause can be a time of change, both physically and emotionally. Many women find it helpful to learn more about what is happening in their bodies and to seek support when needed.

Regular health checks, maintaining healthy routines, and accessing reliable information can help you feel more in control during this stage of life.

Finding reliable information and support

Reliable information about the menopause is available from trusted healthcare organisations and professional bodies. Using accurate sources can help you make informed decisions about your health.

If you are unsure about information you have found, a healthcare professional can help explain how it applies to you.

SABA Health clinicians can discuss symptoms, treatment options, and the support available based on your individual needs.