

Menopause Symptoms Checklist

How do you know you're in menopause or beginning the transition into menopause (called peri-menopause)?

What kinds of symptoms indicate that you are entering this stage of your life?

When is the time to consider hormone replacement therapy or alternative remedies for menopausal symptoms?

These are questions many women begin to ask themselves around the age of 35-50 years of age.

Here is a checklist of menopausal symptoms that might help you identify that you are at least premenopausal and should start talking to your healthcare provider in order to better cope with menopausal signs and symptoms:

- 1. Hot flashes**
These are intense and variable feelings of heat that come from within the body in response to a decrease in female hormones normally made by the ovaries. Hot flashes are the number one symptom in menopause. When the ovaries are declining, the periods become more irregular and hot flashes begin to occur.
- 2. Night sweats**
These typically happen when you are sleeping. Because of the changes in hormone levels, you can wake up drenched in sweat with wet bed clothing, a wet pillow, and wet sheets/blankets. These are some of the most common symptoms of menopause.
- 3. Irregular periods**
With the fluctuation of hormones, you may sometimes get periods that are irregular. Sometimes they are too close together and sometimes they are too far apart. Eventually they space out and stop altogether. When you have no periods for 12 consecutive months, it is said that you are postmenopausal.
- 4. Loss of libido**
You need your female hormones as well as the small amount of testosterone in order to have a normal female libido. When these are diminished, the natural libido you used to have dissipates to varying degrees. Replacement of these hormones can help turn around these symptoms so that you can enjoy sex again.
- 5. Vaginal dryness**
Without estrogen protecting the vaginal lining, it can become thin and will produce less mucus. This can be remedied with estrogen given locally (using a ring, tablet, or

cream), using vaginal moisturizers, or using vaginal lubricants (like Astroglide or KY Jelly). Petroleum-based vaginal lubricants cannot be used as they can rupture latex condoms.

6. Mood swings

Mood swings are common, especially during the premenopausal state. It is the result of changes in female hormones that affect the neurotransmitters of the brain. This can lead to depressive symptoms or anxiety along with the typical irritability seen in menopausal mood swings.

7. Fatigue

Menopause can make you feel as though you are tired all the time. You tend not to sleep well and the normal activities of daily living can be interfered with because of the fatigue. The best thing you can do for yourself is to get plenty of sleep, exercise to bring back your energy level, and take naps if you absolutely have to.

8. Hair loss

Hair loss is one of the most noticeable symptoms of menopause. It is the result of estrogen loss because you need estrogen to sustain the growth of the hair follicles. You may experience sudden hair loss or gradual hair loss. It can occur in the pubic area or on the head and generally involves thinning of the hair rather than patchy hair loss. You can also have brittle and dry hair that comes out in the shower or when brushing the hair. If you fix the hormonal imbalance, some of the hair thinning can be managed.

9. Sleep Problems

Menopause can cause you to awaken many times in the night, unable to sleep well because you are uncomfortable with night sweats or hot flashes. Women undergoing menopause will find that sleep does not bring on restfulness and it becomes more difficult to fall asleep at night. It is not uncommon to have 5-7 years of sleeplessness in the years prior to menopause. If the sleep problem is very severe, you may need to see the doctor for some medical intervention.

10. Problems concentrating

In the years coming up to menopause, women often become concerned about memory loss. While it can be confusing, it does not last very long and soon your concentration will return. It is believed to be related to a deficiency in menopause. It can also be related to a disruption in sleep that happens during menopause. The doctor will examine you to see whether or not you have another problem with concentration besides menopause.

11. Problems with memory

Memory loss is one of the main symptoms of menopause. Women complain that they skip appointments, forget holidays, or misplace their keys quite often. Such memory loss can be very distressing, especially if you are not used to having memory problems. Memory loss is a common problem in menopause and is due to decreased estrogen levels and increased stress levels. If the problem is severe, you may need to see your doctor to see if the problem is just due to menopause.

12. Dizziness

The feeling of dizziness in menopause is more like vertigo or the sense that the world is spinning. This is associated with unsteadiness and a sensation of lightheadedness along with poor balance. You may have these symptoms for a couple of seconds or for several minutes. It can cause you to fall. The reasons behind it are the fluctuations in estrogen so commonly seen in menopause. If the symptom is severe, it is important to see your doctor to make sure nothing more is going on.

13. Weight gain

The weight gain in menopause is usually related to an increase in the thickness of the waist due to fluctuating female hormones. The hormonal changes seen in menopause appear to cause a redistribution of body fat. The body retains more fat cells that produce estrogen themselves. Decreased levels of testosterone cause a weight increase because the metabolic rate is lower. Even if you eat the same amount of food as you have in the past, you may still gain weight.

14. Incontinence

There are three different types of incontinence among menopausal women. These include stress incontinence (when you leak during coughing or sneezing), urge incontinence (in which you have the sensation to void without warning), and overflow incontinence (in which you don't sense that you have a full bladder and urine simply leaks out). Each of these types of incontinence can happen during menopause.

15. Bloating

Bloating can be because of digestive problems or related to having premenstrual syndrome. With bloating, you see a feeling of tightness in the abdomen, pain in the abdomen, and a swollen belly. It is usually caused by an increase in gas in the intestine from the slow transit of food. This is because of low bile levels caused by a lack of estrogen. Lactose intolerance is also a cause of bloating and is common in

aging. Bloating can be continuous or can come and go after you eat a meal.

16. Allergies

The immune system and your hormones are linked together. This means that the changes in hormones in menopause can cause increases in allergies. The allergies can be previous ones that simply get worse or a new allergy altogether. Some allergic symptoms include asthma, hay fever, and allergic dermatitis. Most of the time, this is a minor problem but, if the problem is severe, you should see your doctor about getting on allergy medication.

17. Brittle nails

There are several nail changes associated with menopause. This includes nails that break horizontally, splitting nails, and cracks in the nails. It can be due to a hormonal imbalance or to poor nutrition during menopause. If the problem is hormonal, it is usually due to decreased estrogen levels that results in dehydration and dryness of the nails, hair, and skin. You can also see spoon-like nails, infections of the nail bed, or ridges along the nail plate. If the nails are always painful or seem inflamed, you need to seek medical advice for treatment.

18. Changes in Odor

Menopause can lead to alterations in one's body odor. It can cause you to feel extremely self-conscious. There is an increase in sweat production during menopause and things like night sweats and hot flashes can produce a bad odor. It doesn't matter how much you clean yourself; the odor will persist until menopause results. Some of the problem is hereditary. The best way to treat this is to provide the woman with female hormone therapy and encourage lifestyle changes. Selecting breathable clothing can help reduce the experience of body odor.

19. Irregular heart rate

This can be a very concerning symptom of menopause. It involves having episodes of a rapid, pounding heartbeat that come on erratically. It is believed to be due to a deficiency of estrogen that over-stimulates the circulatory and nervous system. As this could be due to something more serious than menopause, such as anxiety, stress, or panic difficulties, you should see your doctor if the symptoms are concerning to you. Caffeine and nicotine can also cause these symptoms.

20. Depression

Depression in menopause can lead to feelings of despair or sadness. It is normal to experience these types of changes during the menopausal period. It can become severe in some women to the point where they need antidepressant medications. There can be feelings of sadness, sleep disorders, eating problems, and a lack of

interest in normal activities of daily living. Depression is extremely common, affecting 20 percent of US women at some time in their lives. It usually presents itself earlier than 30 years of age but a first diagnosis of depression in menopause is possible.

21. Anxiety

Feelings of anxiety involve an intense physical or psychological feeling associated with a loss of emotional control and agitation. Panic attacks are also possible, in which you feel shortness of breath, a rapid heart rate, and heart palpitations. These symptoms are due to reductions in estrogen levels, which affect the brain's neurotransmitters. Anxiety can be minimal and can occur just once. You should see your doctor if you are suffering from anxiety as there is treatment available for it that may work.

22. Irritability

Irritability can simply mean being in a bad mood, having less patience, having decreased tolerance, increase stress, and the sensation of wanting to lash out at others over minor things. It is caused by hormonal changes in menopause, particularly from decreased estrogen levels. Because many women feel that menopause is an innately stressful time, irritability is common. It can affect your performance at work, your familial relationships, and relationships with other people you know.

23. Panic Disorder

Panic disorder is a problem in which you have intense feelings of anxiety and fear that usually come on all at once and without warning. You may experience feelings of dread, rapid heart rate, nervousness, terror, and shallow breathing. You can have a single episode of panic or can have regular panic attacks over a period of time. Panic disorder usually is the result of an imbalance in female hormones and can be treated with medications, changes in lifestyle, or alternative medical therapies. See your doctor if this strongly affects your activities of daily living.

24. Breast pain

You can have breast pain or tenderness as a result of menopause. This is caused by changes in female hormones and resembles the breast pain seen in the premenstrual state or in pregnancy. Breast pain may be mild and sporadic, or severe and unrelenting. If it lasts for more than 2 months, or if you have a lump, discharge from the nipples, or other symptoms, you should seek medical advice.

25. Headaches

Women can get headaches as part of menopause if they drink excessive amounts of alcohol or if they have tension in the muscles or the flu. Hormonal imbalances can lead to headaches and can be found in a woman's life at times other than

menopause. Migraine-like headaches can happen in menopause because the estrogen levels are dropping. If you have, a particularly severe headache associated with other symptoms like fever or confusion, this may not be a typical menopausal headache, and you should see your doctor.

26. Joint Pain

Joint pain is a common menopausal symptom, affecting nearly half of all women after menopause. It can affect both the muscles and the joints and is due to fluctuating hormone levels. Normally estrogen protects joint inflammation so that, when estrogen levels drop, you can have the experience of joint pain. You should try to get this diagnosed and treated early in menopause as the arthritic symptoms can only worsen.

27. Burning tongue

This is also referred to as “burning mouth syndrome.” It involves having a sensation of a burning pain on the lips or tongue. It can affect the whole mouth in some cases. There can be bad breath or a bad taste inside the mouth but there is no indication of irritation of the mouth. This can affect about five percent of Americans; women have it 7 times more commonly than men do. Most afflicted people are older than 60 years of age but it can be seen in younger individuals. Menopause is one of the top causes of burning mouth syndrome; it is due to decreased levels of estrogen that damage the mouth’s taste buds. If you experience ongoing pain or evidence of inflammation, it may not be burning mouth syndrome and you should see your doctor.

28. Feelings of an electric shock

This feels similar to the sensation of a rubber band on the deeper layers of skin where it meets the muscles. It can mean that a hot flash is coming on and is more commonly seen in the head. Most of the time, this is a brief shock, albeit an unpleasant feeling. It is believed to be related to fluctuating estrogen levels and its effect on both the nervous system and the cardiovascular system. While it is harmless, you can treat it by treating the hormonal imbalance that causes this. Your doctor may have other treatments available to you if the sensations are frequent.

29. Digestive Disorders

This is usually related to changes in GI function. Women may experience intestinal cramping, nausea, and increased production of gas. It is believed to be caused by imbalances in the hormones that interrupt normal transition of food in the gastrointestinal tract. It may also be related to stress. Things like lactose intolerance or dietary changes may result in these digestive symptoms. If there is abdominal pain

lasting longer than 3 days or severe pain, you should seek the advice of a doctor as soon as possible.

30. Gum Problems

It appears that gum disorders are common in women going through menopause. Part of the problem may be a lack of good oral hygiene but it can also be due to a deficiency in estrogen. Gingivitis is the most common symptom seen in menopause and there can be bleeding in the gums. Tooth loss is not uncommon as are infections of the gums that can cause heart problems. You should see your doctor or dentist if your gums are extremely sore or bleeding as this may save your teeth from becoming decayed or falling out.

31. Muscle tension

This usually affects the muscles of the back, neck, and shoulders that will feel strained or tight. There can also be a generalized sensation of pains, aches, stiffness, and soreness of the entire body. This is a common symptom of menopause. Decreased levels of estrogen can cause an increase in cortisol that affects the muscles by causing them to be fatigued and tight. If you are normally healthy and fit, you may not have this symptom. Women who do not exercise or who have poor nutrition are more likely to have muscle tension. Relaxation exercises and the correction of the unbalanced hormones can positively improve these symptoms.

32. Itchiness of the Skin

Perimenopause is the time when estrogen levels are decreased and when the levels of collagen also go down. You need collagen in order to have fresh, resilient, and well-toned skin. When you have decreased collagen levels, the skin becomes drier, less youthful in appearance, flakier, and thinner. The dry skin is what leads to the itchiness, which can be extremely difficult to tolerate. This symptom occurs early in menopause and leads to increased wrinkles. Women who have premature ovarian failure will have more collagen loss than women who have menopause at the normal time (aged 51). The best treatment for this is to manage the imbalance in the hormones.

33. Tingling of the Extremities

This feels like you are having something crawling through your skin or may be a feeling of hypersensitivity or similar to an insect bite. It primarily affects the arms, hands, feet, and legs. It is generally a harmless symptom, due to a compressed artery or a pinched nerve that decreases the blood supply to the extremity. This causes the extremity to become tingly. It is usually related to a decrease in estrogen levels in the body. It can also occur if you are suffering from a tumor, stroke, diabetes, anxiety,

heart disease, or poor circulation. If the symptom is severe or affects one side of the body (as is seen in a stroke), you should seek medical intervention immediately.



34. Osteoporosis

Osteoporosis can happen to some women in menopause. It manifests itself in the weakening and thinning of the bone, which decreases in density and mass. As you age and go through menopause, more bone is lost than is created and the end result is an overall loss of bone. This can occur as early as 35 years of age. You need calcium and estrogen to build back thinning bones. When the hormone levels drop, there is an increase in bone loss and osteoporosis can occur. If you are suffering from osteoporosis, you are more likely to have fractures, particularly of the spine, hip, and wrist.