



LEARN THE LANGUAGE OF MENOPAUSE

*from those who
are living with it*

*Everything you need
to know about the
perimenopause and
menopause and what
to do if you think you
have symptoms*



B



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Introduction

Do you find yourself **getting overwhelmed** by life and its various demands when previously you felt like you had it all sorted?

For example, are you **feeling more anxious** than usual? Forgetting things? Are you sleeping less well? Have you noticed a change in your moods?

Are you **getting hot flushes**? Feeling irritable or down? Getting night sweats?

You may be experiencing the perimenopause or menopause.

Read on for a short overview of what the perimenopause and menopause are, and which symptoms you may experience.

If you have any of these symptoms, please talk to your doctor for help and to exclude other conditions.

So what exactly is the menopause?

Menopause means the end of your periods. You'll have had periods since you reached puberty and – unless you have an early menopause or a surgical menopause – you'll have continued having them until your late 40s or early 50s. You reach menopause when you have not had a period for 12 months.

While this sounds like a simple fact of life, there's a lot that goes on inside our bodies, from when we start puberty, until that time of our lives eventually comes to an end.

One of the reasons why you can get symptoms of the menopause is that your levels of the hormone oestrogen begin to drop before your periods eventually stop altogether.

What's the perimenopause?

While the menopause marks the end of your periods, your body generally starts to 'gear up' for the menopause long before this. The length of time this takes is different for everybody.

The **perimenopause** is the time when you may find your periods become irregular – that is, if you were used to having a regular monthly cycle.

You may find bleeding can be heavier or lighter than it was before, or some months you may have no period at all.

In the rest of this booklet, we'll look at the myriad of symptoms that can begin during the perimenopause, and can continue for many years or change over time.

Remember that everyone is different, and it's great if you have friends or family members to compare notes with, but even if your mum, sisters or friends have, or had, certain symptoms or none at all, you may experience the perimenopause and menopause completely differently to them.

There are many symptoms of the perimenopause and menopause impacting both physical and mental health. Here are some of the more common as well as the lesser-known.


A is for...

Anxiety

by Helen, 48, Reading

"When I'm thinking of everything I need to get done tomorrow and it feels like it's all going to come crashing down on my head."

Many people know that the menopause can cause hot flushes, grumpiness, and the end of periods, or a change in your periods, but did you know there are other symptoms that can be caused by the perimenopause and menopause, such as anxiety?



Not everyone will experience anxiety as part of their menopause. Anxiety can make one person feel overwhelmed at work or as though they cannot cope with the number of tasks they feel they need to complete in a day, while someone else may get nervous in another situation, such as a feeling of panic while driving.

B is for...

Bloating

*by Cheryl, 46,
East Sussex*

"It's like I've eaten too much and am uncomfortably full."

Bloating during the perimenopause and menopause may be due to changing hormone levels. It can also be caused by a build-up of gas in your digestive system. There are things you can do to try and relieve bloating, such as being more active and avoiding fizzy drinks. Alcohol may also cause bloating, so try and reduce your alcohol intake and drink plenty of water, as bloating can also be a sign that you are dehydrated.

Brain fog

*by Natasha, 51,
County Down*

"I'm like, 'Sorry, what were we just talking about?'"

Many women who experience brain fog during the perimenopause or menopause worry that they might be developing dementia. However, in this age group, it's far more likely that changes to your memory or ability to concentrate are caused by falling hormone levels. Eating healthily and being physically active can help, as can getting good quality sleep.





C is for...

Changes in taste

by Cheryl, 48, Coventry

"When your favourite food loses its charm..."

When you are going through the perimenopause and menopause you may notice a change in your sense of taste or have a dry mouth.

D is for...

Depression

by Debbie, 51, Glasgow

“When you’re used to being chirpy, then you get to your 40s and suddenly the world seems a very dark place.”

During the perimenopause and menopause, people can feel depressed due to changing hormone levels. Symptoms can include feeling down and less interested in doing things you usually enjoy.



If you think you may be suffering from depression, you're not alone - around half of those going through this time of life notice a change in their moods.

The good news is that there is plenty that can be done to help. Make an appointment to see your doctor and talk about how you're feeling.

E is for...

Excessive sweating

*by Tamara, 52,
Oldham*

"When you're wearing super strong deodorant designed for athletes but you're only going to the shops trying not to stink!"

As with many perimenopause and menopause symptoms, sweating more can be caused by hormonal changes. It may help to wear clothes made of natural fibres, like cotton and linen.

F is for...

Fatigue

*by Maxine, 49,
Macclesfield*

"In the office when the afternoon slump hits, and all I can think about is taking a nap under my desk."



While going through the perimenopause and menopause, changes to sleep patterns are common, with many of us experiencing disturbed sleep or sleeplessness at night. This has a knock-on effect of causing tiredness during the daytime that can feel debilitating.



G is for...

Gastrointestinal problems

by Martina, 45, Huddersfield

"I've not been able to go to the loo for days. It's like my bowels are giving me the silent treatment."

The perimenopause and menopause can cause changes in your stomach and digestion, leading to symptoms including diarrhoea, constipation and acid reflux. Exercise and a healthy diet may help relieve these symptoms.

H is for...

Headaches

*by Conchita, 57,
Aberdeen*

“When you almost literally want to bang your head against a brick wall, because the pain is so intense...”

During the perimenopause and menopause, you may get more headaches, but everyone is different. If you've always had headaches before and during periods, then when you reach the perimenopause and menopause, you may suffer less, but someone who has not previously had headaches may start to get them during the perimenopause and menopause.

Drinking lots of fluids may help and avoiding triggers if you know what yours are. It's a good idea to talk to your GP if headaches are getting you down because they may be able to help.

Hot flushes

*by Jennifer, 47,
Stoke-On-Trent*

“Standing in the freezer section at the supermarket and still breaking a sweat.”

Hot flushes can come on suddenly and are very common during the perimenopause and menopause. They may continue after the menopause too.



I is for...

Irritability

*by Chasnae, 51,
Southend*

“When everyone around you is full of the joys of spring and you want to wring their necks!”

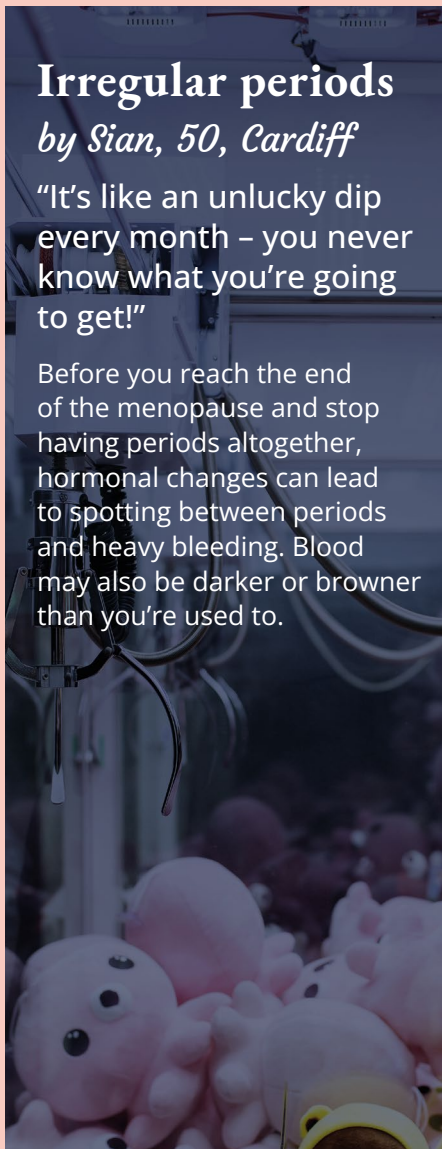
It's common when you are going through the perimenopause or menopause to be more easily irritated than you used to be. As well as hormonal changes, lack of sleep – another menopause symptom – can make it worse.

Irregular periods

by Sian, 50, Cardiff

“It's like an unlucky dip every month – you never know what you're going to get!”

Before you reach the end of the menopause and stop having periods altogether, hormonal changes can lead to spotting between periods and heavy bleeding. Blood may also be darker or browner than you're used to.





J is for...
Joint pain

by Clare, 48, Chelmsford

"When you're walking around the house and you realise the creaking sound you can hear is your knees, not the floorboards."

When levels of the hormone oestrogen drop during the perimenopause and menopause, you can get joint pain. It can be worse in the morning.

L is for...

Libido

by Fatima, 46, Slough

“Talking to my plants, doing my taxes, taking a good book to bed. I’ll do anything but have sex right now.”

During perimenopause and menopause, you might notice your interest in sex changes (also known as your libido). It could increase or decrease. A lower libido during menopause is often due to decreased hormone levels, which can cause dryness ‘down below’.

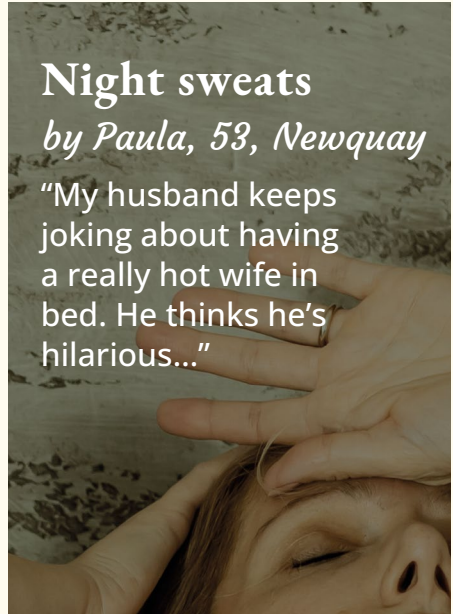
This can make sex uncomfortable or painful. Other menopause symptoms can also make you less interested in sex, such as weight gain, low mood and hot flushes.

N is for...

Night sweats

by Paula, 53, Newquay

“My husband keeps joking about having a really hot wife in bed. He thinks he’s hilarious...”



A night sweat is a common menopause symptom and is like having a hot flush at night, and it can disturb sleep. It can help to use light bedding – for example, a thin duvet – and to avoid alcohol and spicy foods.

Night sweats can vary from light sweating to waking up drenched in sweat.

O is for...

Osteoporosis

*by Manda, 59,
Wrexham*

"I hate having weak bones, when I've always worked so hard on my fitness..."

Oestrogen protects our bones, and because this hormone drops during the perimenopause and menopause, the risk of osteoporosis increases. Osteoporosis means weak bones.

The good news is that there are things you can do to protect your bones, so talk to your GP.

P is for...

Palpitations

*by Greta, 48,
Towcester*

"Nowadays, when my heart starts racing, it's not necessarily because I'm having romantic thoughts..."

The perimenopause and menopause can cause feelings like your heart is racing or jumping. These are called palpitations. If you get these, talk to your GP.

R is for...

Recurrent UTIs

*by Katrina, 51,
Hereford*

"I used to be raring to go. Now I'm just burning to go... for a pee... all the time."

UTI stands for urinary tract infection, and the symptoms of this include needing to pee more often than usual, pain or discomfort in the lower stomach, cloudy pee, and sometimes blood in the pee. You may also feel tired and as if you have a temperature.

UTIs can be more common if you're perimenopausal or menopausal, partly because oestrogen can protect this area of the body, and levels of this hormone drop during the menopause. UTIs are usually treated with antibiotics, so if you have symptoms, you should make an appointment to talk to your GP as soon as possible.

Reduced muscle mass

by Tanya, 51, Chester

"I don't want to look like a bodybuilder, but I do want to maintain my muscle strength so that I can feel and look well in my later years."

Because we lose oestrogen when we approach and go through menopause, we tend to lose muscle mass. Activity levels can affect how much muscle mass we have, so getting a good amount of exercise can help. Another way we can help our bodies maintain muscle mass is through our diet. Protein can help. Vitamin D can also help our muscle health.



S is for...

Sleep

by Frannie, 58, Cambridge

“When all I’ve been wanting to do all day is sleep but as soon as it’s time for lights out my body and brain decide to wake up.”

There can be a link between trouble sleeping and the perimenopause and menopause. This can make low mood and anxiety worse. Having a regular routine around going to bed and getting up in the morning may help, as can exercise. If sleep problems affect your daily life, it’s a good idea to make an appointment to see your GP for help and advice.

V is for...

Vaginal pain

by Clara, 58, Guildford

“Picture the Sahara desert if you will...”

Once again, we can blame dropping oestrogen levels for this perimenopause and menopause symptom: vaginal pain. Oestrogen helps to keep the area lubricated, and when our bodies produce less of this hormone, it can lead to vaginal dryness, which can make sex painful or uncomfortable. Not the easiest subject in the world to talk openly about, so please see our tips below for starting conversations about this type of subject.

W is for...

Weight gain

by Julia, 46, Maidenhead

“Nowadays I only have to look at a cake and I put 3 pounds on.”

It can be easier to gain weight when you're perimenopausal or menopausal, but it doesn't have to be this way. If you can, get regular exercise, eat a healthy diet and aim for good quality sleep every night. If you're struggling with your weight, talk to your GP for help and advice.

Where are you on your menopause journey?

Now you've read about what perimenopause and menopause are, and had a look through the symptoms you may experience, you may be interested to know that there's a tool that healthcare professionals commonly use to find out about perimenopause/menopause symptoms and how much they are affecting a person's day-to-day life. It's called the Greene Climacteric Scale, or GCS for short.

Your healthcare professional can use it to see which symptoms are affecting you the most, and how severely. This can be very useful when considering which treatments you may benefit from.

Here's an example of what the GCS looks like:

Menopause Symptoms: Scoresheet

Severity of the problem is scored as follows:

0 - None 1 - Mild 2 - Moderate 3 - Severe

	Score		Score
Heart beating quickly and strongly	<input type="checkbox"/>	Feeling dizzy or faint	<input type="checkbox"/>
Feeling tense or nervous	<input type="checkbox"/>	Pressure or tightness in head or body	<input type="checkbox"/>
Difficulty in sleeping	<input type="checkbox"/>	Parts of body feeling numb or tingling	<input type="checkbox"/>
Excitable	<input type="checkbox"/>	Headaches	<input type="checkbox"/>
Attacks of panic	<input type="checkbox"/>	Muscle or joint pains	<input type="checkbox"/>
Difficulty in concentrating	<input type="checkbox"/>	Loss of feeling in hands or feet	<input type="checkbox"/>
Feeling tired or lacking in energy	<input type="checkbox"/>	Breathing difficulties	<input type="checkbox"/>
Loss of interest in most things	<input type="checkbox"/>	Hot flushes	<input type="checkbox"/>
Feeling unhappy or depressed	<input type="checkbox"/>	Sweating at night	<input type="checkbox"/>
Crying spells	<input type="checkbox"/>	Loss of interest in sex	<input type="checkbox"/>
Irritability	<input type="checkbox"/>		

Adapted from Greene, 1998.

What next?

If, while reading this booklet, you've recognised some of the symptoms, and feel you may be experiencing them, it's worth making an appointment to see your GP to talk about them.

What can I expect from my GP appointment?

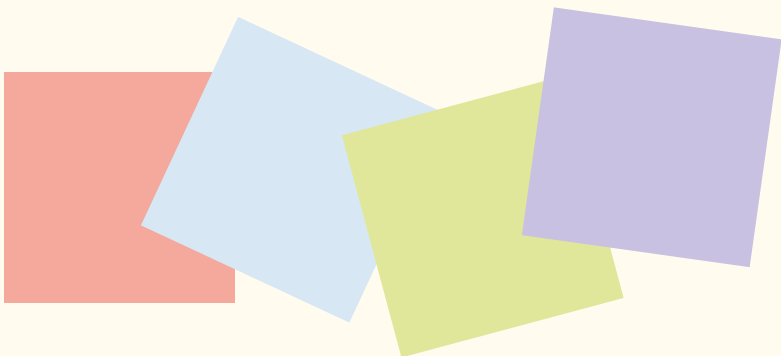
The doctor may ask how things are at work, at home, and how you are sleeping. They will be looking for an idea of what symptoms you may have and how they are affecting you.

For example, if you say you are having trouble sleeping, the doctor may ask why that is. Is it your body temperature, are you anxious or do you keep needing to go for a pee? Do your sleep patterns change depending on the time of the month?

This type of questioning helps them to find out a lot about your symptoms and how bad they are.

Is there anything I can do to prepare for my appointment?

Before your appointment, it's worth spending some time making some notes about which symptoms you've been getting, how long you've had them for (don't worry if you can't remember exactly, just write as many details as you can) and how they are affecting your daily life.




How can I talk to loved ones about what I'm going through?

Some of us find it very easy to talk about topics like the perimenopause and menopause, but for others it's simply not something they would normally share – and it can depend on which symptoms you are experiencing.

If you feel comfortable talking about your symptoms to family and friends, that's great – it's important for your loved ones to know how you're feeling so that they can support you.

You may find it useful to start by mentioning your symptoms and then leading onto the fact that they could be perimenopause or menopause-related, for example:



“You know I’ve been getting scatty lately, leaving my phone at home...”

“I’ve been feeling some pain down below recently...”

“You may have noticed I’ve had a bit of a short fuse lately...”

If it's still not a topic you feel you can talk about, you could leave this booklet somewhere where you know that your loved ones are likely to see it, and even underline sections that express how you are feeling.

Further information

As with all health matters, there is a lot of information available online about the perimenopause and menopause. Here are some websites that we recommend as reliable and trustworthy sources of information:



www.languageofmenopause.co.uk

– check out the website that supports this leaflet for more information on menopause and the help available. Scan the QR code to visit the site.

Please note that Besins Healthcare is not responsible for the content of the following websites.

- 🌟 **www.nhs.uk/conditions/menopause** – what the menopause is, what the symptoms can be, what you can do to help yourself, which treatments are available and where to get help and support.
- 🌟 **www.womens-health-concern.org** – a confidential, independent service to advise, inform and reassure women about their gynaecological, sexual and post reproductive health.
- 🌟 **www.menopausematters.co.uk** – an award-winning, independent website providing up-to-date, accurate information about the menopause, menopausal symptoms and treatment options.
- 🌟 **www.daisynetwork.org** – a charity for women who experience early menopause. The Daisy Network provides a support network of people to talk to and allows members to share information about their personal experiences.
- 🌟 **www.themenopausecharity.org** – a charity on a mission to help you understand the mental and physical changes that occur during perimenopause and menopause and to provide you with the tools and treatments needed to manage them.

Whatever you're experiencing, remember you're not alone; there's information and help out there waiting to support you.



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