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1-800-994-9662

TDD: 1-888-220-5446

Menopause and Menopause Treatments

Q: What is menopause?

A: Menopause is the time in a woman's life when her period stops and she can no longer become pregnant. It is a normal change in a woman's body. A woman will know she has reached menopause when she has not had a period for 12 months in a row (and there are no other causes, such as pregnancy or illness, for this change). This happens for most women after age 45.

Menopause is sometimes called, "the change of life." In the years leading up to menopause, a woman's ovaries slowly make less and less of the hormones estrogen and progesterone. You might not be aware of the changes happening in your body. Or, you might have symptoms as you near menopause. Many women wonder if these symptoms are normal, and many are confused about how to treat their symptoms.

You will feel better by learning all you can about menopause and talking with your doctor about your health and your symptoms. If your symptoms are causing you discomfort or concern, your doctor can teach you about treatment options and help you to make wise choices.

Q: What are the symptoms of menopause?

A: Menopause affects every woman differently. Your only symptom may be

your period stopping. You may have other symptoms, too. Many symptoms at this time of life happen because you are getting older. But some are due to menopause. It's not always possible to tell if symptoms are related to aging, menopause, or both. Some changes you might notice as you near menopause include:

- Change in pattern of periods (They can be shorter or longer, lighter or heavier, or there may be more or less time between periods.)
- Hot flashes (sometimes called hot flushes), night sweats (sometimes followed by a chill)
- Trouble sleeping through the night (with or without night sweats)
- Vaginal dryness
- Mood swings, feeling crabby, or crying spells
- Trouble focusing, "fuzzy thinking," or forgetfulness
- Hair loss or thinning on your head or more hair growth on your face

Q: Does menopause cause bone loss?

A: Both men and women lose bone as they grow older. But dropping estrogen levels around the time of menopause also leads to bone loss in women. Estrogen helps to build and maintain bone. After menopause, bone loss speeds up for several years as estrogen levels rapidly decrease. Bone loss can cause bones to weaken. Weak bones can break more easily. When bones weaken a lot, the condition is called osteoporosis (OSS-tee-oh-puh-ROH-suhss).

