



Understanding perimenopause

Before a woman reaches menopause, she first goes through perimenopause. It is a time of adjustment as the body shifts away from the reproductive years. Preparing for these changes allows you to plan how to manage symptoms and find support.



WHAT IS PERIMENOPAUSE?

Perimenopause is the period of time when a woman's body is gradually transitioning to menopause. It signals the end of the reproductive years and involves many physical and hormonal changes. When a woman's period has been absent for a full 12 months, she has reached the end of perimenopause and is in postmenopause.

Every woman's experience of perimenopause is different. Perimenopause can last for as little as four months to as long as ten years. The average length is about four to eight years. Many women begin perimenopause in their mid-forties though it can begin as late as their mid-fifties or as early as their mid-thirties.

SYMPTOMS

- Irregular or skipped periods
- Heavier or lighter periods
- Needing to urinate more frequently
- Hot flashes
- Vaginal dryness
- Difficulty sleeping
- Mood changes
- Changes in sexual desire
- PMS-like symptoms
- Trouble concentrating
- Headaches

Manage Symptoms

- Eat a healthy, balanced diet with plenty of fruits, vegetables, and whole grains.
- Exercise regularly and include weight training at least two days a week to protect bone health.
- Watch for hot flash triggers such as alcohol or coffee.
- Establish healthy sleep habits.
- Seek ways to reduce stress, such as meditation, tai chi, or yoga.

TREATMENT

If symptoms are severe, your doctor may recommend additional treatment such as:

- Antidepressants to stabilize mood
- Low-dose birth control for irregular or heavy periods
- Hormone therapy to manage symptoms
- OTC or prescription medicine to address vaginal dryness or painful sex



PREGNANT DURING PERIMENOPAUSE

Fertility naturally declines during perimenopause; however, it is still possible to conceive. The ovaries release fewer eggs, and fertility hormones gradually decrease, causing periods to become irregular. But, as long as you continue to have periods, it means you are still ovulating, and pregnancy is possible.