



A guide to the menopause

What's the menopause?

As we get older our bodies keep changing. One of the things that changes is the balance of sex hormones. Just like puberty, this can impact the way we feel both mentally and physically. This period of change is different for everyone. While some may have a range of symptoms, others will sail through it without a second thought.

It's likely that many of us will pass through this natural transition - the menopause - while we're still working. And some of us will benefit from extra support to help make our working lives more comfortable.

We've developed this guide to help you better understand the menopause and highlight the type of support that may be available. Although it's primarily for those who'll experience the menopause, it could also be helpful for anyone who'd like to build a better understanding of how they can support friends or work colleagues.



Menopause: What happens when

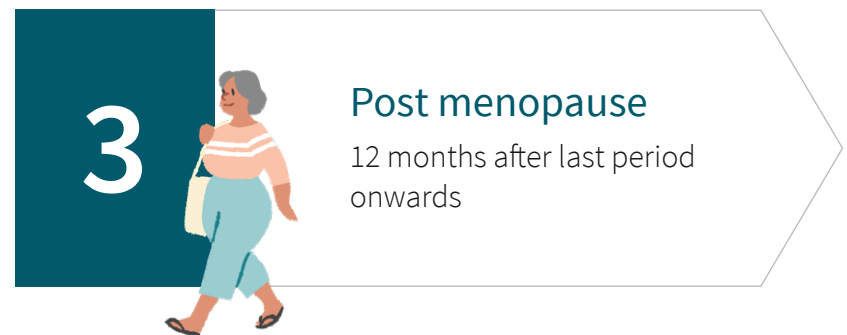
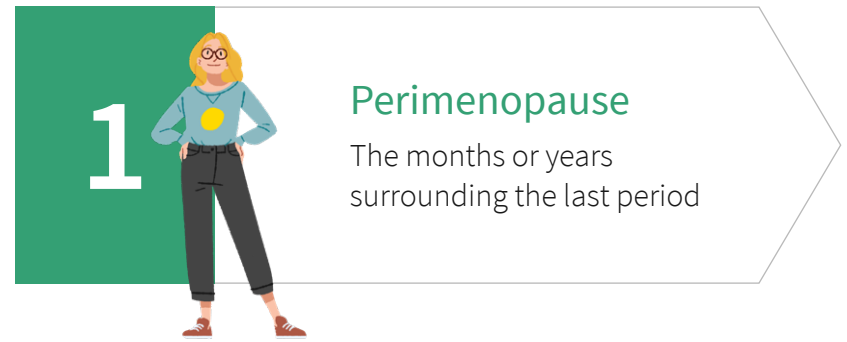
The simplest definition of menopause is the time when you stop having periods. But you may start to notice symptoms long before this.

Some time before your final period - maybe years before - you'll enter a phase known as 'perimenopause', meaning 'around menopause'. This usually starts in your 40's. But some people may notice changes, such as irregular periods, in their 30's. Perimenopause can last from a few months up to 10 years before menopause.

During this time, the ovaries stop making a hormone called oestrogen and no longer release an egg every month. On average, the menopause starts between ages 45 to 55, but around 1% experience it before hitting 40 - this is called early menopause. You can find out more about the signs and symptoms of menopause on the next page.

Once a person hasn't had a period for 12 months in a row, then it can be known for certain that the menopause has happened.

Source: <https://www.nhs.uk/conditions/menopause/>



Menopause symptoms

As the oestrogen levels decline, some people may find themselves experiencing changes to the way they look and feel. You shouldn't be surprised if you begin to notice changes like this - your hormones will be on a roller coaster ride, so it's perfectly normal.

Don't forget that people have their own unique experience of the menopause, which means you can't expect to have just the same symptoms as other people you know who've been there already.

We're all individuals after all

The most important thing is to remember that changes due to the menopause are perfectly normal and natural. But there is professional guidance out there if it's needed - we've also produced a brief guide on how you can go about [finding support](#) of this kind.

Common menopause symptoms

- ✓ Hot flushes
- ✓ Night sweats
- ✓ Tiredness
- ✓ Insomnia
- ✓ Mood changes
- ✓ Needing to go to the loo more
- ✓ Urinary tract infections
- ✓ Reduced muscle mass
- ✓ Palpitations
- ✓ Headaches
- ✓ Memory issues
- ✓ Joint issues
- ✓ Dry skin
- ✓ Reduced sex drive
- ✓ Vaginal dryness



Other conditions you might run into during the menopause

As well as the more common menopause symptoms, there are some other conditions that people sometimes encounter at this time, due to the huge change the body is going through. These may need specialist support to help prevent and manage them. We've listed a few examples here:

Urinary incontinence

This can happen if bladder control is affected by the lack of oestrogen.

Mental health conditions

It can be affected as hormone levels change. Some people will find it easier than others to adapt to the changes in their lives. Sometimes, this can lead to an increase in anxiety or depression.

Thinning hair and skin

This can occur as collagen levels fall. You might notice a few more wrinkles, too.

Osteoporosis

The menopause can increase the risk of developing this condition, which thins the bones.

Vaginal dryness

If this goes on for some time, blood flow to the vagina is reduced which can result in painful intercourse.

Where to get more help

It's important to recognise the symptoms and seek appropriate help. Your GP can advise on the menopause and suggest ways to manage the symptoms. If they feel that you'd benefit from more specialist support, they may refer you to a dedicated menopause clinic provided by the NHS.

You can find out more about the help available in our [Finding support for the menopause guide](#) in our Wellbeing Library.





Menopause in the workplace

How your employers could help

It's important to feel comfortable and confident at work, particularly during periods of change such as the menopause. The good news is that there are simple steps an employer can take that could make a big difference. Here's a few examples of the changes that could be made to help make time spent at work that bit easier.

- ✓ **Increased flexibility** around working pattern or shifts to help with tiredness and other symptoms. Home working could also be a good option.
- ✓ **Picking the most appropriate location in the workplace.** This could include having easily accessible toilets, washrooms or drinking water outlets.
- ✓ **Getting a desk fan** for you, or arranging for you to sit close to a window, to help alleviate any hot flushes.
- ✓ Agreeing **more rest breaks** - or the chance to sit out meetings - if needed.
- ✓ Arranging **relaxations in dress code** or uniform in favour of lighter, cooler clothing.

Tips to help manage the menopause in the workplace

It's reassuring to see that many companies are now offering specialist support for menopause in the workplace. And open and honest conversations are often actively encouraged in the workplace, which can only be a good thing.

So, if you feel you could use a bit more support, don't be reluctant to speak up. Even if your workplace hasn't set out a policy on supporting people during the menopause, there is usually plenty that can be done to help improve life at work. Just remember the following things:

There's help available

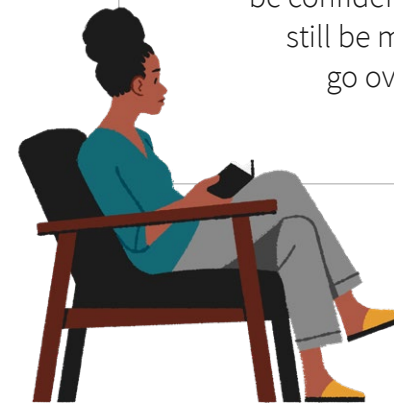
GPs and specialist apps are always an important first port of call for help on menopause issues. But the workplace can also be a valuable source of support. Line managers, HR personnel, or colleagues can be the starting point for possible changes to make life that bit easier for you during the working day.

There's no need to feel embarrassed about it

No one should feel embarrassed about talking about the menopause. It's a natural process that many of us will experience. You shouldn't be afraid to voice any concerns and to ask your manager or HR team for support. Whether it's a quick fix, such as a fan on your desk, or something more significant like a flexible working arrangement, a quick chat could make a huge difference. And, if you see a colleague struggling, don't be afraid to ask if you can help. You never know, simply swapping desks with them so that they're closer to a window could really help.

Ask for an assessment

A workplace assessment is one of the best ways to chat through and decide the things that may help. It's good to make sure a record is kept of what's been agreed. This can also be used to monitor the situation and capture any feedback. And, if the person changes roles, they can then be confident that their needs will still be met, without needing to go over everything again.





Try to stay positive

It's easy to say, but a positive attitude to life can help make the menopause less difficult for all concerned. It's important not to feel that you have to try to fight the changes that are happening to your body. The workplace can be part of the solution by offering the right kind of support.

Some useful links for more guidance

[The Aviva Wellbeing Library](#)

[Menopause in the workplace](#)

from specialist organisation 'Henpicked'

[Menopause: medical information from the NHS](#)

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