

## What is Menopause?

Menopause marks the end of your childbearing years, typically occurring between ages 40-58. The average age of menopause in the United States is 51. For most women, the onset of menopause is not sudden. It tends to be a gradual process occurring over time.

Perimenopause, the transition to menopause, lasts four years on average. Menopause begins when your ovaries stop producing estrogen and progesterone. You are considered in menopause when you've experienced 12 months in a row without a period.

Some women may only notice few signs when making the transition into menopause. But most experience some of the following symptoms. No two women are alike, so how bad these symptoms are and how long they last can vary a lot from one woman to another.

- Hot flashes and night sweats (hot flashes during sleep).
- Vaginal dryness (due to lack of estrogen), which can make sex painful.
- Mood changes, such as depression or anxiety.
- Memory issues, difficulty reasoning and other cognitive changes.
- Trouble sleeping.

## Menopause & Sleep Difficulties

In menopause and struggling with sleep problems? You're not the only woman out there in this situation.

Nearly half of women in menopause report having sleep difficulties. That's because hot flashes, night sweats, mood symptoms, medical conditions and lifestyle can make sleep tough and unrestful for women in menopause. The brain chemicals needed for sleep also change during menopause.

Insomnia is common among women in menopause. Falling asleep is difficult and they wake up often or too early. And, even if they do sleep, it's not restful. Snoring can even develop during menopause!

It's important to your overall health that you get enough good-quality sleep. Sleep reduces your risk of cardiovascular and other disease; helps you stay at a healthy weight and effects your mood. Deep sleep is potentially the best way to metabolize excess stress hormones.

When you don't get enough sleep, it can lead to poorer health and well-being. Lack of sleep increases your risk of having an accident, makes it harder for you to concentrate and make good decisions, and can put you in a bad mood.

## Fight Fatigue

There are things you can do to make sure you get good-quality sleep during menopause.

### Sleep Hygiene

Put practices or routines in place that tell your body it's time for bed. Sleep hygiene is a fancy term for creating rituals or practices that signal to your body it's time to go to sleep. Brushing your teeth and washing your face are two sleep hygiene routines almost everyone does nightly. Others include:

- Going to bed and waking up at the same time every day.
- Making sure your room is cool and dark.
- Using your bedroom only for sleep and sex.
- Enjoying a warm bath or shower before bedtime.
- Drinking a cup of non-caffeinated herbal tea or a warm glass of milk.

### Physical Activity

Getting regular exercise not only helps you maintain a healthy weight and cuts down on your risk for disease. It's also a mood booster that helps you get a good night's sleep. According to some studies, exercise can reduce the severity of menopausal symptoms. Aim for at least 30 minutes of exercise on most days.

### Complementary Health Practices

These health practices rely on the mind to influence the body. Some use these to help with menopausal symptoms.

#### Mind-body practices

Stress can make menopause symptoms worse. The following activities can help people manage stress and potentially get better sleep.

- Acupuncture.
- Yoga.
- Tai chi.
- Qigong.
- Relaxation exercises.
- Deep breathing help people manage stress and may minimize sleep disruptions.

While studies show no conclusive link between mind-body practices and the easing of menopause symptoms, these activities are typically safe, and some women say they help.

#### Herbs and supplements

- 2-percent progesterone cream. Rub  $\frac{1}{4}$  to  $\frac{1}{2}$  teaspoon into your skin daily.

- Valerian and chamomile. These herbs are associated with improved sleep and increased relaxation. They're available as teas and in supplement form.
- Melatonin. It's a natural hormone that's part of your sleep cycle. You can take it as a supplement or drink 2 oz. of tart cherry juice concentrate daily close to bedtime.
- 5-hydroxytryptophan (5-HTP). 5-HTP supplements increase levels of serotonin, a neurotransmitter that regulates mood and sleep.

There is no conclusive scientific evidence as to the safety and effectiveness of herbs and supplements. They can have negative side effects in some people and may interact with some medications. Talk to your doctor before using any herbs or supplements.

### Other Strategies

- Skip sleeping pills, particularly on an ongoing basis. They can be addictive and lose effectiveness over time.
- Steer clear of alcohol and caffeine later in the day.
- Don't watch TV – especially the news – or use any electronic devices (computer, tablet, cell phone) right before bedtime.
- Avoid eating large meals or snacks as bedtime nears.
- Add Epsom salt to your pre-bedtime bath. It helps relax your nerves and muscles.
- Don't take daytime naps or keep them to about 30 minutes if you do.