



Menopause Essentials™

Stay strong. Feel great.
Take charge.



Menopause Foundation
of Canada

Menopause Essentials™ is your trusted guide to understanding and navigating every stage of menopause. Identify where you are in the journey, learn what to expect, and connect to expert information to support your health, work and wellbeing. Whether you're managing symptoms, seeking clarity, or just getting started, it's time to take charge—on your terms.

Celebrating Women in the Prime of Life.

Menopause is a natural stage of life, but that doesn't mean it's always easy. For some, it can be a time of confusion, challenge or unexpected change. Everyone's experience is different. The good news? Knowledge is power. Understanding what's happening in your body and knowing your options to stay healthy can help you feel stronger, more in control and better supported as you navigate this transition. You're not alone. Together, we're challenging outdated ideas about menopause and embracing it as a time to thrive.

Did you know? Research shows women often feel happier and more content after menopause than before.

This guide is for general information only and is not medical advice. It should not replace professional care, diagnosis or treatment. Always talk to your healthcare provider about any questions or concerns you have about your health.



The Stages of Menopause

Perimenopause

The Transition Begins

Lasts 2-10 years before menopause (Typically starts in your 40s, but symptoms may appear in your 30s)

Perimenopause is the transition leading up to menopause. In early perimenopause, periods may come more often and symptoms can feel unpredictable. In late perimenopause, periods begin to be skipped and common menopause symptoms, like hot flashes, usually become more noticeable.

Estrogen and progesterone levels rise and fall unpredictably, often causing symptoms that can affect your health and daily life. It is important to know that menopause symptoms can occur even before period changes, and that period changes can happen without experiencing other symptoms. Note: Heavy or irregular bleeding should be checked by a physician to rule out potential issues such as precancerous or cancerous changes.

Menopause

A Major Milestone

Average age 51. Most women reach menopause between the ages of 45 and 55 (Menopause is considered premature if it occurs under age 40, early if it occurs at age 40-45, late if it occurs at 55 or older.)

Menopause can happen instantly to women of any age as a result of certain medicines, such as chemotherapy, and surgeries.

Menopause is one day that marks the end of menstruation, reached when you've gone one full year without a period.

Post-Menopause

The Years Ahead

This stage lasts the rest of your life

After reaching menopause, women are postmenopausal - *in menopause* - for the rest of their lives, which can be 1/3 of their lifetime or more! Estrogen levels drop significantly, and while most women no longer have symptoms after four to seven years, others may experience them for much longer. Forty per cent of women, for example, experience hot flashes into their 60s; and for many women genitourinary issues get worse over time unless treated. Whether or not a person has symptoms, the drop in estrogen increases the risk of long-term health issues like heart disease, osteoporosis, metabolic syndrome and genitourinary problems.

How Do I Know When I'm in Perimenopause or Menopause?

Women are considered to be in perimenopause based on their symptoms. Generally, no testing is required. If you're 45 or older, menopause is confirmed when you haven't had a period for 12 months. If you've had a hysterectomy, an endometrial ablation, or use a hormonal IUD, diagnosis relies on tracking your symptoms, not looking at period changes. Women 45 and under require lab testing as well as other investigations to determine if they are in early menopause (40- 45) or premature menopause (under 40).



Common Symptoms

Women have estrogen receptors all over their bodies - in their bones, their heart, their brain, their skin. As estrogen declines during menopause, almost every organ can be impacted. That's why there are more than 30 symptoms of menopause that people may experience. Symptoms may last for a decade or longer. The number of symptoms and the severity of those symptoms differ from person to person.



PHYSICAL

- Hot Flashes and/or Night Sweats
- Period Changes
- Body and Joint Aches
- Fatigue
- Headaches and/or Migraines
- Skin and Hair Changes
- Heart Palpitations
- Weight Gain/Changes in Body Fat Distribution
- Dry Eyes
- Frozen Shoulder
- Dry Mouth and/or Dental Complications
- Changes in Body Odour



MOOD & MENTAL HEALTH

- Anxiety
- Depression
- Low Mood
- Feeling Not Yourself, Low Confidence
- Mood Swings
- Low Motivation or Energy
- Crying Spells
- Panic Attacks
- Irritability
- Anger



GENITOURINARY & SEXUAL HEALTH

- Vaginal/Vulva Dryness, Itching, Burning
- Painful Sex
- Urinary Incontinence/Leaking Urine
- Urinary Urgency
- Urinary Tract Infections (UTIs)
- Low Libido/Sexual Desire
- Sexual Arousal Issues



COGNITION & SLEEP

- Brain Fog
- Sleep Disturbance
- Forgetfulness
- Concentration Issues
- Short-term Memory Challenges
- Poor Word Finding
- Slower Processing Speed

Not every change is menopause related. Certain symptoms may signal other health conditions, such as a thyroid issue or iron deficiency, so it's important to check with your healthcare provider to rule out other potential issues.



How Menopause Can Impact Your Life

Menopause is more than a biological milestone. It can touch every part of your life from physical and mental health to work, relationships, and long-term wellness. For some, the impact is mild. For others, it's disruptive in ways they never expected.

Understanding how menopause may show up in your life is the first step to taking charge of how to protect your health, stay strong and thrive.



PHYSICAL HEALTH

Hot flashes, night sweats, joint pain, fatigue, heart palpitations—these are just some of the physical symptoms that can come with menopause. While experiences vary, many women are surprised by how much menopause affects their day-to-day comfort. Knowing what's normal and what's treatable can help you manage symptoms and maintain your energy and strength.



MENTAL HEALTH

Mood swings, anxiety, irritability, and brain fog aren't just "in your head"—they are part of the hormonal changes happening in your body. These symptoms can be confusing and frustrating, but you're not alone. Support, strategies, and in some cases treatment, can make a real difference in how you feel.



QUALITY OF LIFE

When your sleep is disrupted, your energy is low, or you're not feeling like yourself, it's harder to enjoy life. Menopause can affect everything from your daily routines to your confidence. The good news? There are lifestyle changes, therapies and treatments that can help you feel better and reclaim your rhythm.



WORK

Menopause can show up on the job in unexpected ways—whether it’s trouble concentrating, fatigue, or coping with unpredictable symptoms during the workday. Many women don’t realize what they’re experiencing is connected to menopause. Talking openly and finding the right support can help you stay on track professionally.



LONG-TERM HEALTH RISKS

Menopause is an important health transition. The drop in estrogen can raise the risk of conditions like heart disease, osteoporosis, genitourinary issues and type 2 diabetes. Understanding these risks means you can take action—through screenings, lifestyle changes and conversations with your healthcare provider—to protect your health for the years ahead.



RELATIONSHIPS (PARTNER, FRIENDS AND FAMILY)

Menopause can affect how you connect with the people you love. Whether it’s changes in intimacy, feeling less social, or struggling to explain what you’re going through—relationships may shift. Being open about your experience and learning to ask for support can help you stay close to those who matter most.

More research is needed to understand the diverse experiences of menopause, especially those of Indigenous people, Black people and other non-Caucasian populations.

Trans and non-binary people who experience menopause also face unique challenges that require further study with a goal to provide equal access to qualified menopause care.





A Note Before You Explore Lifestyle and Treatment Options

Every woman's menopause journey is unique and what works well for one person might not be the right fit for another.

This section is designed to inform and support you, but it's not medical advice. Treatments can have side effects, risks and benefits that vary depending on your personal health history, symptoms and goals. That's why it's important to approach this information with curiosity and care—and to speak with a qualified healthcare provider if you're considering a new treatment or aren't sure what's right for you.

Think of this as a starting point, not a prescription. With knowledge, support, and a bit of trial and error, you can find the approach that helps you thrive through menopause.



Lifestyle Changes: Small Steps, Big Impact

Taking care of your body and mind is key to navigating menopause. Small, positive changes can make a big difference.



Stay active

Aim for 150 minutes of movement each week to boost mood and support heart health. Don't forget to stretch regularly.



Eat a balanced diet

Choose whole foods, lean proteins, healthy fats, and fibre-rich vegetables to support health and energy.



Try to maintain a healthy weight

A healthy weight helps manage symptoms and reduces your risk of long-term health conditions.



Strengthen your bones

Add strength training and weight-bearing activities to protect against bone loss.



Stop smoking

Quitting lowers your risk of heart disease and osteoporosis.



Cut back on alcohol

Alcohol can worsen hot flashes, disrupt sleep and affect mood. Try drinking less or skipping it altogether.



Manage stress

Get outdoors and enjoy the sunshine and time in nature, try breathing exercises or movement to calm your nervous system.



Prioritize sleep

Aim for 7 to 9 hours a night. A cool, dark room and regular bedtime can help.



Consider mindfulness

Practices like yoga, meditation, or journaling can improve mood and reduce anxiety.

Manage Long Term Health Risks

Menopause is a key time to focus on long-term health. Taking proactive steps now can help you stay strong and healthy for years to come.

- ✔ **Heart Health:** Stay active, eat heart healthy foods, and check your blood pressure regularly. Women 40+ should start screening for type 2 diabetes and monitor cholesterol levels.
- ✔ **Cancer Screenings:** Get regular screenings—mammograms starting at 40, colon cancer FIT testing at 50, and cervical cancer screening according to your provincial recommendations.
- ✔ **Bone Health:** Support your bones with 1,200 mg of calcium and 1,000 IU of vitamin D daily after age 50. Bone density testing should be based on personal risk but done no later than age 70.
- ✔ **Genitourinary Health:** For lasting relief, local vaginal estrogen treats the root cause. Dryness and discomfort can be managed with vaginal moisturizers and lubricants, but they do not restore normal function (Pocket Guide, pg. 12).



Prescription Options

Hormone Therapy

Menopause Hormone Therapy (MHT) is the gold standard treatment to help manage symptoms like hot flashes and night sweats, prevent bone loss, and treat genitourinary issues. In some people MHT may also improve mood, sleep and sexual function.

- MHT includes estrogen and a progestogen, or another endometrial protective medication, for people with a uterus; or estrogen alone for those without a uterus.
- There are many different formulations. For systemic hormone therapy (the medication goes through the entire body) there are oral pills, patches or gels at a variety of doses. For vaginal treatment, creams or vaginal inserts are available.
- Vaginal estrogen is safe and effective for treating symptoms like vaginal dryness, burning, itching, sexual discomfort, leakage and recurrent urinary tract infections. No progestogen is needed if taken locally through the vagina. Some women require both systemic hormone therapy and local vaginal estrogen.
- Testosterone is an option for women with low libido.
- An important note for women experiencing early menopause (before the age of 45) or Premature Ovarian Insufficiency (before the age of 40) – Unless contraindicated, hormone therapy is recommended until the natural age of menopause (51) to manage menopause symptoms, to protect the heart and the bones, and to reduce the risk of all causes of death.

Non-Hormonal Options

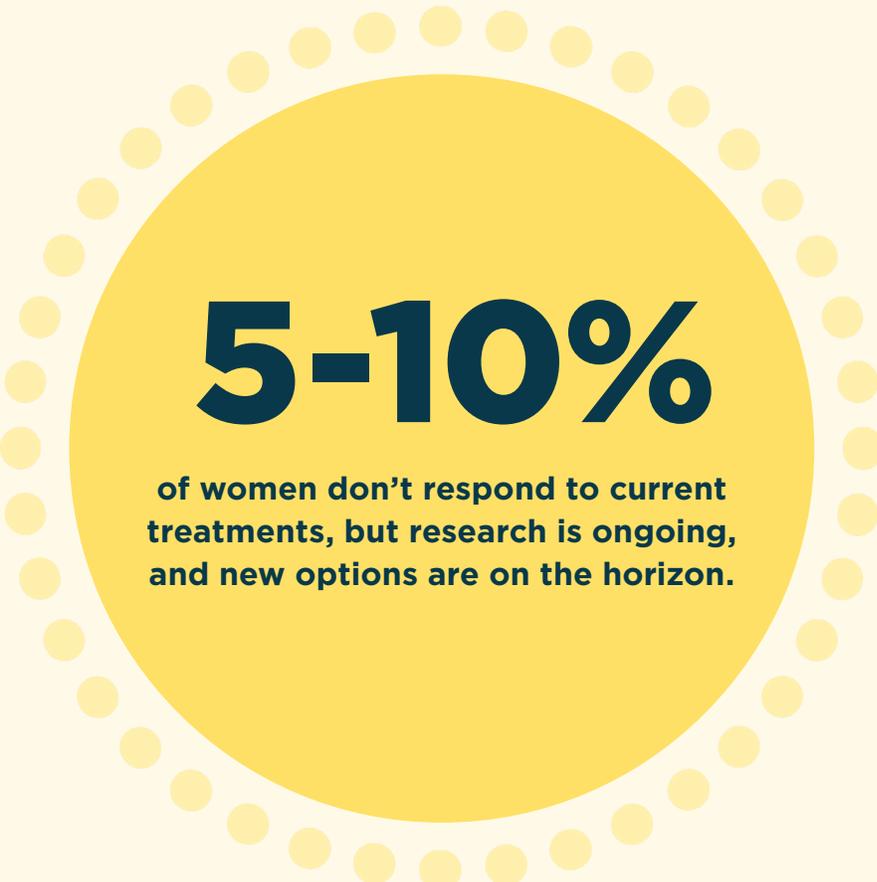
For women who are unable to take hormone therapy or prefer not to, there are non-hormonal prescription options to consider.

- Neurokinin B antagonist – Non-hormonal medication that targets the centre of the brain where vasomotor symptoms originate to treat hot flashes and night sweats.
- SSRIs (selective serotonin reuptake inhibitors) – May help to manage mood swings, anxiety, and sometimes hot flashes.
- SNRIs (serotonin and norepinephrine reuptake inhibitors) – Can help with mood regulation and hot flashes.
- Gabapentin – Can reduce hot flashes and night sweats.
- Flibanserin – Can help with decreased sexual interest, especially during perimenopause.

Non-Prescription Options

There are many non-prescription approaches that some people find helpful in managing menopause symptoms and improving overall well-being.

- Cognitive Behavioural Therapy (CBT) – A structured form of talk therapy that can help manage symptoms like mood swings, anxiety, and sleep problems. Proven to reduce the impact of hot flashes and improve quality of life.
- Complementary Health Support – Seeing a licensed naturopath, pelvic floor physiotherapist, acupuncturist or other provider may offer symptom relief and improve well-being.
- Clinical Hypnosis – Guided relaxation techniques led by a trained therapist that may help reduce the frequency and intensity of hot flashes and improve sleep.
- Soy Foods or Isoflavones – These plant-based sources of weak estrogen (phytoestrogens) may help with mild hot flashes or night sweats, though the research is limited. Found in foods like tofu, edamame and soy milk.
- Herbal Products – Remedies like black cohosh, evening primrose oil or red clover are commonly marketed for menopause symptoms. Evidence is mixed, and quality can vary, so consult your provider before use.



5-10%

of women don't respond to current treatments, but research is ongoing, and new options are on the horizon.

A New Chapter Begins!

Menopause is an important health transition and a new stage of life with many possibilities. Research shows women often feel happier and more content after menopause than before.

This is your time to grow, enjoy life and feel your best!

Resources

Explore the information and tools available at MenopauseFoundationCanada.ca/resources

MenopauseFoundationCanada.ca/MenopauseEssentials

lists links for evidence-based websites on menopause, including:

- The Society of Obstetricians and Gynaecologists of Canada
- Canadian Menopause Society
- International Menopause Society
- The Menopause Society
- MQ6 For Women
- Gynaecology Quality Improvement Collaboration

Resources used to develop Menopause Essentials™ include:

- The Society of Obstetricians and Gynaecologists of Canada: www.sogc.org/en/en/content/events/HUB-Pages/Menopause.aspx
- Canadian Menopause Society: www.canadianmenopausesociety.org/women/
- International Menopause Society: www.imsociety.org/for-women/?v=5435c69ed3bc
- The Menopause Society: www.menopause.org