

PERIMENOPAUSE

What is perimenopause?

Perimenopause is the time when a woman is changing from regular menstrual cycles to menopause.

This is a natural event and should not be thought of as an illness.

The irregular periods and other symptoms may last from 1-3 years before menopause.

Menopause is when a woman does not have a period for 12 months and usually occurs between the ages of 45-55. The changes that occur during this time are due to changes in a woman's hormones.

What are the symptoms of perimenopause?

90% of all women experience irregular periods. Periods can become closer together, further apart, spotting, lighter or heavier. Up to 85% of perimenopausal women experience hot flashes, night sweats,

and sleep disturbances. Some women also experience depression, poor concentration mood changes and impaired memory. Some women think these changes are age related changes, but in fact, may be due to changes in the reproductive hormones. Other symptoms that might be experienced are vaginal dryness, lack of sexual desire, vaginal irritation, weight gain, headaches, gas, bloating, constipation and breast tenderness.

What can be done to help relieve the symptoms of perimenopause?

Hormone replacement may be helpful for some patients. However, many of the latest studies question the health benefits and risks of hormone replacement therapy, including the risk of developing breast cancer, heart attacks, strokes and blood clots. Some of the alternative medicines are low doses of antidepressants. Some lifestyle changes that can be helpful include:

- Avoid caffeine, alcohol, and spicy foods
- Dress lightly in layers
- Get plenty of exercise
- Try relaxation techniques including yoga, tai chi or meditation
- Use water based lubricants during intercourse
- Practice slow, deep breathing whenever a hot flash starts to come

When to notify your health care provider?

- You are spotting in between periods
- Your periods last longer than usual periods