the menopause basics

IT'S TIME TO KICK THE TABOO TO THE CURB.

WE'RE ON THIS JOURNEY TOGETHER.

YOUR GUIDE TO THE BASICS OF MENOPAUSE AND WHAT IT'S ABOUT

BY

pausemenot

YOUR GO-TO SOURCE FOR ALL THINGS MENOPAUSE

IT'S TIME TO CELEBRATE!

Our bodies are beautiful.
They've been through a lot.
They will go through a lot.
Let's celebrate our bodies.

At some point in your life, I'm guessing you've heard the word menopause. Well, there's more to the menopausal story than simply stopping your monthlies.

Maybe your mother whispered it in passing. Maybe you heard it mentioned during a commercial. Maybe you saw it on a sign at your gyno's office. You've probably said to yourself, if you thought about menopause at all, "I guess I'm no longer going to have a period once menopause hits. Score!" Am I right?

Well, that's just part of the journey ...

WELCOME TO THE JOURNEY

We're not afraid to challenge the "norms" because menopause is just that—completely normal and natural. So, let's get to the point and stop dancing around the bush (pun intended) and break this taboo. We're all in this together. I mean 1.2 billion menopausal women by 2030 adds a whole new dimension to girl power!

According to the National Institute of Aging, "menopause is a point in time 12 months after a woman's last period. The years leading up to that point, when women may have changes in their monthly cycles, hot flashes, or other symptoms, are called the menopausal transition, or perimenopause."

Healthline says that "menopause occurs when a woman hasn't menstruated in 12 consecutive months and can no longer become pregnant naturally. It usually begins between the ages of 45 and 55, but can develop before or after this age range." So, what is it all about?

For some reason, nobody likes to talk about menopause. How taboo! Yet, keeping menopause a mystery happens to women all over the world. And with 25 million women entering menopause every year around the globe, that is a lot of women who are kept in the dark without an outlet to gain information or to share concerns and struggles.

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01 WHAT IS THE MENOPAUSAL TRANSITION?

Although we would love to sugarcoat menopause and cover it in sprinkles, education is empowering. So, grab a cup of coffee (or your favorite cocktail/mocktail) and sit down while we cover some helpful facts to normalize what we are going through (or are bound to go through).

How will you tell when you're approaching the menopausal transition? It might start with your visit from Aunt Flo. That's right, most women first notice the frequency of their period becoming less consistent (yay!) as the flow becomes heavier and longer (ugh!). This usually occurs at some point in the mid-to-late 40s. On average (based on stats), by the age of 51, most U.S. women have entered menopause. It might happen earlier than your mid-40s or later than 51.

Don't Be Alarmed.

WHY DOES MENOPAUSE OCCUR?

Menopause is a natural process that occurs when the ovaries age and produce less reproductive hormones. These changes can be overwhelming, isolating, confusing, scary. And, the right, helpful information can be hard to find.

So, why does this crazy yet normal thing happen to our beautiful bodies?

Well, the body begins to undergo several changes in response to lower levels of:

- Estrogen
- Progesterone
- Testosterone
- Follicle-stimulating hormone (FSH)
- Luteinizing hormone (LH)

One of the most notable changes is the loss of active ovarian follicles. For those of us who aren't medical experts (*raises hand*), the ovarian follicles are structures that produce and release eggs from the ovary wall, allowing menstruation and fertility.

The release of the egg on a monthly basis means that Aunt Flo will be knocking on your vaginal door any minute. When you lose these active ovarian follicles, your period stops. See ya later, Aunt Flo and all of the baggage you brought with you (e.g., tampons, pads, cups, and liners). **Thanks but no thanks for all of the monthly visits.**

02

WHAT ARE THE STAGES OF MENOPAUSE?

Did you know that women can go through several stages of menopause? If you didn't, you—and the other 2 million women in the US entering menopause this year—are not alone! We are letting the cat out of the menopausal bag so that you are ready to tackle the A word (aging) and win.

To get to the point of no longer having periods, you have to go on quite the little menopause journey (or not so little, as it can take between 2-14 years).

Simply put, menopause is a natural transition period in a woman's life when her ovaries no longer produce eggs, her body produces less estrogen and progesterone, and menstruation becomes less frequent, eventually stopping altogether.

See Ya Later, Aunt Flo!

THE STAGES OF MENOPAUSE

Your body is going to take you on an journey through three different stages as you move through menopause.

Here are the various stops along the way:

1. **Perimenopause** — when a woman's body begins the menopause transition
2. **Menopause** — when a woman has experienced 12 consecutive months without a menstrual period
3. **Postmenopause** — when menopausal symptoms begin to subside (typically 24 to 36 months after your last period)

ONE QUICK NOTE!

Another term that some people use is premenopause. The differentiating factor between it and perimenopause is that women in premenopause experience perimenopausal symptoms while still having regular periods. Because of the similarities, I'm following the pros and focusing on the three main stages of menopause.

In your lifetime, you'll go from having periods regularly (or almost regularly) to having irregular periods (perimenopause) to hoping for no periods for an entire year (menopause) to living the rest of your life with no periods (postmenopause). Phew!

BREAKING DOWN THE STAGES

PERIMENOPAUSE

Perimenopause—meaning “around menopause”—is the first stop on your journey to being period free. Woo hoo! Although billions of women around the world go through the stages of menopause together, no two women experience it the same, including the age of onset. You may notice perimenopausal symptoms in your 40s or experience them at the average onset age of 51. However, some women notice changes as early as their mid-30s. So, the “around” menopause definition is very accurate indeed.

MENOPAUSE

The next stop in the journey is the big M. That’s right, menopause. According to the National Institute of Aging, “menopause is a point in time 12 months after a woman's last period. The years leading up to that point, when women may have changes in their monthly cycles, hot flashes, or other symptoms, are called the menopausal transition, or perimenopause.” According to Healthline, “menopause occurs when a woman hasn’t menstruated in 12 consecutive months and can no longer become pregnant naturally. It usually begins between the ages of 45 and 55, but can develop before or after this age range.”

POSTMENOPAUSE

You made it to the last stop of the journey: postmenopause. Amazing! This part of the journey begins when you hit the year mark from your final period. In other words, no period for one year = postmenopause. Once that happens, you’ll be referred to as postmenopausal for the rest of your life. Yes! You made it!

“

MENOPAUSE IS THICKER THAN WATER.

**WHEN WE TALK ABOUT IT,
WE LEARN AND RELAX.**

**IT'S A LIFE TRANSITION,
NOT A DISEASE.**

— anonymous —

03 WHAT ARE THE SYMPTOMS OF MENOPAUSE?

One month your period comes and goes. No problem. The next month, Aunt Flo never arrives and you check your calendar at least 10 times wondering if you've tracked your period correctly. You make yourself some lunch and that's when you feel like submerging your body in a freezing cold ice bath. The oh-my-gosh-I-feel-like-I'm-on-fire feeling soon disappears and you go about your day.

After crawling into bed, you find yourself tossing and turning. You think to yourself, "What in the heck is going on with me?" Well, you might just be embarking on one of the biggest journeys of your lifetime.

Hello, Menopause!

> **Amazing women don't have hot flashes. They have power surges.**

Usually when getting ready for a trip, you decide on a date, buy cute outfits, plan your itinerary, and pack your bags. You know the day you depart and the day you come home. Everything, most likely, is planned to a T.

Unlike the most amazing BFF trip ever, the menopause journey has no clear starting or ending point and an estimated time of arrival that could span years. Because it's so unpredictable—and mind you, no two menopause journeys are the same—making sure you get a solid understanding of the menopause basics is key: what it is and what the stages include.

Knowing even just the basics of the common symptoms related to menopause will help you wrap your mind around the journey your beautiful body is about to take. Think of this article as a checklist of sorts to see if you are experiencing any of the symptoms. Feel free to use this as you prepare to know what's in store for your future journey.

THE SYMPTOMS OF MENOPAUSE

Your body is going to take you on an adventure through three different stages as you move through menopause: perimenopause, menopause, and postmenopause.

ONE QUICK NOTE!

Let's all remind ourselves right now that menopause is a natural biological process. Although it ends fertility, women can stay healthy, vital, and sexual. We promise.

Yes! You might experience symptoms—symptoms that are subtle or come on gradually. Now that we've cleared the air, it's time to brush up on what you might expect … kind of like a "What To Expect When You're Expecting," but the menopause version.

Women have different signs and symptoms when it comes to the magnificent menopausal transition. There's no telling when it will hit, how it will arrive, and what you will experience. Stay in tune with your body and take note if you're feeling a bit off or are feeling some of the symptoms. What you feel and experience during menopause will be unique to you.

So, practice self-compassion and patience. Take it one step at a time and you'll get through it. And don't be afraid to use your resources if necessary as you prepare to say goodbye to "that time of the month" for good.

5 MOST COMMON SYMPTOMS

01

IRREGULAR PERIODS

As ovulation becomes more unpredictable, the length of time between periods may be longer or shorter, your flow might be heavier or lighter, and you might even skip periods.

02

HOT FLASHES

A hot flash is a sudden feeling of heat in your body. They last between 30 seconds and 10 minutes. Hot flashes can happen several times an hour, a few times a day, or just once or twice a week.

03

VAGINAL HEALTH/BLADDER CONTROL ISSUES

Thanks to lower estrogen levels, the vagina might become drier. The dryness can be accompanied by irritation, thinning walls of the vagina, bladder infections, itching, and painful sex.

04

SLEEP PROBLEMS

Many of the reasons for sleep deprivation are due to the following reasons: hot flashes, emotional health changes, bladder changes, increased need to urinate at night, and hormonal changes.

05

MOOD CHANGES

Mood swings, irritability, lack of motivation, or increased risk of depression and anxiety may happen, especially during perimenopause as estrogen levels are on the decline.

REMINDER:

Whether you choose the self-informed healthcare route, see a naturopath or holistic doctor, or visit with your OB-GYN or other physician, getting information about and taking advantage of the many menopause treatments available to women is critical to enjoying the journey.

HOW TO TREAT THE SYMPTOMS

HOT FLASHES

- Try to avoid alcohol, caffeine, stress, spicy food, and smoking.
- Use fans to help keep you cool.
- Practice deep breathing
- Exercise regularly (or at least try to).
- Take supplements, but speak to your doctor before doing so.

VAGINAL HEALTH

- Use vaginal creams and moisturizers.
- Adjust eating patterns.
- Reduce stress. Vaginal dryness can stem from emotional causes. The mind-body connection is real, so focus on self-care.
- Communicate with your partner to resolve any sexual tension or pain.

SLEEP PROBLEMS

- Avoid the battle. Don't lie in bed wrestling with it all night long.
- Exercise on a regular basis.
- Create a healthy bedtime routine.
- Talk to family and friends to relieve stress.
- Take supplements.
- Explore therapy options.

MOOD CHANGES

- Exercise regularly.
- Mix in some healthy foods every once in a while and you'll notice the difference in your mood.
- Try to get enough sleep. Yes, you might be dealing with hot flashes/night sweats.
- Find ways to lessen your stress.

I'm not saying I'm Wonder Woman. I'm just saying no one has seen Wonder Woman and me in the same room.

— anonymous —

A MESSAGE FROM PAUSEMENOT:
YOU'VE GOT THIS.

04

HOW DO I KNOW WHICH STAGE I'M IN?

Some changes in adulthood can be gradual while others hit us out of the blue. Just when we think we're done with all of the developmental milestones—college, choosing a career, parenting newborns, etc.—middle age seems to arrive out of the blue and we're all like, "Well, look who was late to the developmental party." Yes! Menopause is the last party guest to arrive … and it looks like she—and her unpredictable behavior—brought some suitcases and is staying for quite a while.

Your symptoms might be subtle or come on gradually. They might show up around the same time or happen sporadically. So, how will you know which stage of menopause you're in?

The Big M is Coming!

WE'RE GOING TO LET YOU IN ON A LITTLE SECRET ...

You need to track yourself.

Let's all face it. Remembering things is getting harder and harder, right? I mean, I was walking all over my house this morning trying to find my coffee cup. I had no idea where I left it. With lots of to dos and reminders that fill your head on a daily basis, we can fall prey to overlooking and forgetting things and disregarding changes happening in this life phase can be easy. Tracking your physical and emotional symptoms in a daily log, similar to a food journal, can give you much-needed insights and clarity about your health.

You might overlook the fact that you're feeling extra bloaty. Maybe it's just the cheese you ate. You might forget how irritable you've been over the past few weeks or months. After all, you were only irritable for like a hot second when you found a sock sitting next to the hamper instead of in the hamper. Anyone would get testy about that, right? Meanwhile, your spouse is like, "Hold the phone! A hot second? Try a hot month." And speaking of hot, you might disregard the raging inferno that overtook your entire body a few weeks ago or when you felt like you were smack dab in a rainforest in the middle of the night last week. Maybe it was because you were standing over a hot stove or had too many covers on.

The symptoms creep up and could paint a picture of what's really going on with you healthwise—a picture that can be screaming: "You are going through the stages of menopause."

SO, YOU START TO TRACK YOURSELF.

When was your last period? A few months ago. Have you been feeling bloated lately? Yes. Have you been extra irritable over the past few months? Yes. Oh, and that fiery feeling that made you want to jump into an ice bath? Yep! It happened a few times.

As you track your changes, you will start to realize that the symptoms you are experiencing are pointing to one destination: menopause.

Tracking your periods, hot flashes, irritability, weight, sleeping habits, and sexual desire will help you do the following:

- Create a baseline that will help you know what to expect on your menopausal journey.
- Help you see patterns and piece together symptoms.
- Understand what might be causing the symptoms.
- Teach yourself how to better manage the symptoms.
- Figure out ways to set yourself up for success so that you can overcome the symptoms.
- Establish awareness so that you can be in control of your body.

The easiest way to tell whether or not you're going through menopause is to track. Watch your menstrual cycle for 12 months. Mark down your start and end dates. Are you noticing a difference? Are your periods becoming more irregular? Has it been 2 months, 6 months, 12 months since your last period?

Yes, your doctor can check your follicle stimulating hormone (FSH). The levels will jump when your ovaries start closing up shop. The tissue in and around the vagina will begin to thin out as estrogen levels decrease. Your doctor can check for this via a Pap test (however, this is rarely done).

So, what stage of menopause are you in?

Great question. Menopause is a natural transition period in a woman's life when her ovaries no longer produce eggs, her body produces less estrogen and progesterone, and menstruation becomes less frequent, eventually stopping altogether (see ya later, Aunt Flo!). To get to the point of no longer having periods, you have to go on quite the little menopause adventure (or not so little, as it can take between 2-14 years).

PERIMENOPAUSE STAGE

During this stage, estrogen levels in your body will rise and fall unevenly. In addition to the five most common symptoms shared on page 15—irregular periods, hot flashes, sleep issues, mood changes, and vaginal problems—here are additional symptoms that most women experience during perimenopause (AKA menopausal transition):

- **Bone Loss:** Protect your bones. Your declining estrogen levels will make it so that you lose bone more quickly than you replace it. In other words, your bones will become more fragile, increasing your risk of osteoporosis.
- **Sexual Changes:** With everything your body is going through and/or preparing to go through, you might realize a difference in your sexual arousal and desires, including a decreased sex drive. It’s totally normal.
- **Weight Gain & Reluctant Weight Loss:** According to the Mayo Clinic, "The hormonal changes of menopause might make you more likely to gain weight around your abdomen than around your hips and thighs. But, hormonal changes alone don't necessarily cause menopause weight gain. Instead, the weight gain is usually related to aging, as well as lifestyle and genetic factors."
- **Night Sweats:** Did you know that two thirds of women experience this annoying furnace effect during menopause? They vary from woman to woman. Hot flashes can be very mild or strong enough to wake you up (called night sweats). Most hot flashes/night sweats last between 30 seconds and 10 minutes.
- **Memory Fog:** According to WebMD, "It's common for women going through menopause to complain of what researchers sometimes call 'brain fog'—forgetfulness and difficulty concentrating and thinking clearly."

MENOPAUSE STAGE

Before entering this stage in our journey, let's make a quick pit stop and remind ourselves that menopause is a natural biological process. The symptoms that women experience vary, so what you're going through and experiencing will likely be much different than what your BFF is experiencing. The good news? You can still embrace and empower each other. Aside from the menstruation changes, other menopause symptoms may include (imagine Kelly Clarkson belting out "What Doesn't Kill You Makes You Stronger" here):

- Insomnia
- Vaginal dryness
- Weight gain
- Depression
- Anxiety
- Difficulty concentrating
- Memory problems
- Reduced libido or sex drive
- Dry skin, mouth, and eyes
- Increased urination
- Sore or tender breasts
- Headaches
- Racing heart
- Urinary tract infections (UTIs)
- Reduced muscle mass
- Painful or stiff joints
- Reduced bone mass
- Less full breasts
- Hair thinning or loss
- Increased hair growth on other areas of the body, such as the face, neck, chest, and upper back

POSTMENOPAUSE STAGE

Achieving postmenopause comes with its positive and negative effects. On one hand, you don't have to worry about dealing with Aunt Flo ever again. Yes, you read that correctly. You will never have "that time of the month" feeling and everything associated with it like cramps, headaches, mood swings, etc. Bye-bye, PMS! It was not nice knowing ya!
Also, since you're not having a period, you no longer have to worry about unplanned pregnancy (although protecting yourself from STDs is still incredibly important).

Now, let's shift gears for a minute. Remember how I mentioned the negatives? Well, most of us don't fully appreciate the natural hormone estrogen until it's gone. With a decrease in estrogen, your body's major systems can become affected as follows:

- **Heart/Cardiovascular System** — A decrease in estrogen levels might be a factor in the increase in heart disease among post-menopausal women.
- **Skeletal System** — This is directly related to bone loss which was mentioned above. A decrease in estrogen means that your bones are more prone to become weak and brittle.
- **Urinary System** — Low estrogen levels means that the urethra lining might become thin, resulting in weaker pelvic muscles, resulting in bladder leakage and urinary tract infections.
- **Metabolism Changes** — Women often see a decrease in their metabolism during menopause due to reduced estrogen levels.
- **Sexual Drive Changes** — Estrogen is one of the primary sex hormones. When the levels change, so does your sex drive.

The most important thing to note is that you should no longer have vaginal bleeding once you hit this stop of the journey. So, if you do have vaginal bleeding after more than one year of no menstrual periods due to menopause, then you'll want to notify your doctor ASAP.

05 DO I GO BACK TO NORMAL AFTER MENOPAUSE?

Have you gone an entire year without a period? Well, then come on over here and get a massive virtual hug from me. You've made it! You did it! I knew you would come out on top! Let's consider this your body's last hoorah when it comes to hormonal changes. You've been through puberty. Check. You've been through menopause. Check. You are about to embark on life after menopause in the stage called postmenopause. Hooray!

As we all know by now, menopause is a gradual process. Given that there are three stages of menopause—perimenopause, menopause, and postmenopause—the whole journey could take anywhere from 2-14 years. You might experience a few menopausal symptoms occasionally.

This is the New Normal.

WHAT IS THE NEW NORMAL?

Achieving postmenopause comes with its positive and negative effects.

THE BONUSES:

The major positive is that you don't have to worry about dealing with Aunt Flo ever again. You know that lovely time of month when you are so over anything and everything? Well, you can say "Bye, Felicia" to PMS, as well as the cramps, headaches, and mood swings that come with it.

Also, since you're not having a period, you no longer have to worry about unplanned pregnancy (although protecting yourself from STDs is still incredibly important).

THE BUMMERS:

Your estrogen level will decrease. To be honest, most of us don't fully appreciate the natural hormone estrogen until it's gone.

According to the medical professionals at Johns Hopkins, "In addition to regulating the menstrual cycle, estrogen affects the reproductive tract, the urinary tract, the heart and blood vessels, bones, breasts, skin, hair, mucous membranes, pelvic muscles, and the brain. Secondary sexual characteristics, such as pubic and armpit hair, also start to grow when estrogen levels rise. Many organ systems, including the musculoskeletal and cardiovascular systems, and the brain are affected by estrogen."

With a decrease in estrogen, your body might become affected as follows:

- Cardiovascular Disease — A decrease in estrogen levels might be a factor in the increase in heart disease among post-menopausal women.
- Osteoporosis — A decrease in estrogen means that your bones are more prone to become weak and brittle.
- Urinary Issues — Low estrogen levels means that the urethra lining might become thin, resulting in weaker pelvic muscles, resulting in bladder leakage and urinary tract infections.
- Cancer Risks — The risk of breast and ovarian cancer rises after menopause due to hormonal changes related to menopause.
- Metabolism Changes — Women often see a decrease in their metabolism during menopause due to reduced estrogen levels.
- Sexual Drive Changes — Estrogen is one of the primary sex hormones. When the levels change, so does your sex drive.

THE REMINDERS:

The most important thing to note is that you should no longer have vaginal bleeding once you hit this stop of the journey. So, if you do have vaginal bleeding after more than one year of no menstrual periods due to menopause, then you'll want to notify your doctor ASAP.

After all of the years of going through puberty, worrying about leaking, and losing a good chunk of your estrogen, you made it through menopause. The worst menopause symptoms (hot flashes, night sweats, mood swings) are bound to fade as your body gets accustomed to the changing hormone levels.

So, go ahead and enjoy your postmenopausal years.

06 HOW DO I CONNECT WITH OTHER MIDLIFE WOMEN?

Are you feeling a bit out of sorts? Don't worry. You're not alone. There are hundreds of thousands of other midlife, menopausal women going through similar symptoms.

So, let's connect!

Visit www.pausemenot.com to join the #PauseMeNot community, click here to join our Facebook Group, and chat with us on social media using the #pausemenot hashtag.

Just think ... after all is said and done, your PMS will go away once and for all, but the new friends you made that helped you make it through this stage of life? They'll be yours forever! What's not to love about that?! Cheers to us!

We're In This Together.

YOU MIGHT BE THINKING ...

"Wow! Menopause could take me on quite the physical and emotional journey. Scary!" But, don't worry! When life gives you lemons, think of all the delicious, sweet lemonade you'll be able to enjoy. At PauseMeNot, our motto is "don't let your limitations limit you."

Though many treatments exist for the variety of symptoms women may experience in this stage of life (and we recommend checking with a healthcare professional to create a plan that works for you), mindset is the most powerful and first step any woman should take.

Adopting a #PauseMeNot attitude is key to laying a foundation of empowerment during menopause—a foundation that includes education, action, connection, and giving back so you can make positive choices for you and your body and so you can, in turn, empower other women to do the same.

So, don't put those dancing shoes, rock climbing gear, sky diving aspirations, or bucket lists away. Your most adventure-filled, fun, connected, #pausemenot-style life is just beginning!

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sources and references:
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DYNAMIC HEALTH
HEALTHLINE
HOPKINS MEDICINE
INTERMOUNTAIN HEALTHCARE
MAYO CLINIC
NATIONAL INSTITUTE OF AGING
NATIONAL INSTITUTE OF HEALTH
WEBMD

WHAT IS pausemenot?

Jyl Johnson Pattee

Learning that most women enter the stages of menopause between the ages of 45 and 55 with the average age being 51, PauseMeNot founder, Jyl Johnson Pattee, set out in her mid-forties to find a one-stop-shop where she could gather information, get educated, connect with women in a similar life situation, and purchase the best of the best products to minimize the effects of menopause's many symptoms. She found that few sites existed and none that offered an all-in-one experience. Worse, she experienced the taboo when talking to or asking friends questions about menopause—an issue that impacts 25 million women globally each year—6,000 each day in the US alone.

So, Jyl is on a mission to break the taboo by starting a candid conversation about menopause. PauseMeNot focuses on empowering women with the information, education, connection, and products they need to make the most of midlife by living with a "don't let your limitations limit you" attitude while moving through menopause. Both a community and a movement, PauseMeNot aims to become B Corp certified by giving a percentage of its revenue to charities that support menopause-aged women and involving women in underserved populations on its leadership team, advisory board, and contributor lineup.

According to Jyl, "Women feel a lot of pressure to look, feel, and act like they're 29 as they move through the aging process. But, when we have information available to make positive choices, like learning to love and take care of our bodies through all stages of life, we can continue to make a meaningful difference in our homes and communities as well as around the globe. After all, empowered women empower the world."

FOR MORE INFORMATION ABOUT MENOPAUSE, VISIT:

PAUSEMENOT.COM

WE'RE IN THIS TOGETHER.