

## In the long term...

Once a woman has gone through menopause (**post-menopause**), the estrogen produced by her body remains low. In the long term, this lowered production can have harmful consequences on:

- the **heart**, as this hormonal drop increases cholesterol levels, which can in turn lead to cardiovascular diseases.
- **bones**, by lowering calcification and bone density. To learn more about this subject, see our pamphlet on osteoporosis.
- the **urinary system**, by causing urinary infections or incontinence (the mucous membrane covering the bladder thins and causes the involuntary flow of small amounts of urine).
- **body weight**, by causing the accumulation of fat and decrease of muscle mass.
- the **skin**, by causing drying and thinning (the lower estrogen causes a reduction in the production of collagen and elastin, which in turn leads to wrinkles).

## Treatment

While menopause is inevitable, it is possible to adopt lifestyle habits to minimize and treat its symptoms. There are two main treatment categories: **lifestyle modification** and **pharmacotherapy**.

## Lifestyle modifications

Here are some suggestions from the Society of Obstetricians and Gynaecologists of Canada:

Symptoms and complications	Lifestyle modification
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Weight gain and changing body shape</li><li>• Osteoporosis and cardiovascular diseases</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Eat food from vegetable sources and low in fats</li><li>• Be physically active for at least 30 minutes every day</li></ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Hot flashes</li><li>• Insomnia</li><li>• Depression</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Abandon or reduce the consumption of coffee and/or alcohol (if applicable) – they increase the feeling of heat</li><li>• Reduce sources of stress</li></ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Urinary incontinence upon exertion (when the woman sneezes, laughs, etc.)</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Do Kegel exercises (flex and relax muscles in the pelvis and rectal areas to strengthen the muscles of the pelvic floor)</li></ul>

## Pharmacotherapy

Sometimes lifestyle changes aren't enough to reduce symptoms or potential complications. The use of various medication (hormone replacement therapy [HRT], cardiovascular agents, osteoporosis medication) could then be considered.

These options need to be discussed with your physician to weight the advantages, risks and side effects of those treatments. Together, you can decide if it's the right solution for you.



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# Menopause



Taking care of your health:  
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## What is menopause?

Menopause is a term used for the end of menstruation. It's not an illness, but a natural process that occurs with age. It usually happens between the ages of 41 and 59.

## Hormones: a key factor

Menopause can be explained as a simple hormone change. In a woman's forties, her ovaries, which have produced an adequate amount of estrogen and progesterone, start to reduce their production. This lower hormone production causes a gradual decrease in the number of ova that are released and the menstruation periods associated with them. We call this period "pre-menopause." When a woman has not had her period for 12 months, that's generally a sign of menopause.

## How to recognize menopause

Do you know the main signs and **physical symptoms** of menopause?

- Hot flashes and night sweats
- Urinary infection or incontinence
- Insomnia, fatigue and exhaustion
- Heart palpitations
- Vaginal dryness and pain during intercourse
- Lowered libido

Does menopause only affect people physically? No!

It is possible that menopausal women will experience **psychological symptoms** like:

- Mood shifts and irritability
- Memory problems
- Depression
- Anxiety and nervousness

Always remember that menopause is different for every woman. Its duration, as well as its intensity and symptoms, can vary. Certain women will simply stop having their periods, while others will have symptoms that last sometimes for years.

## Why see a doctor?

From the onset of menopause, there's an increased risk of developing health problems, including:

### Osteoporosis

Normally, estrogen plays a role in slowing the loss of bone mass. With the reduction of estrogen production during menopause, the risk of osteoporosis is higher: bone density diminishes and bones become thinner and more fragile.

### Cardiovascular disease

The risk of cardiovascular disease also increases during menopause. Women tend to catch up to men in this respect; during this phase of their lives they are as much at risk as men of developing cardiovascular disease.

**It's very important to consult your doctor if you are showing any signs or symptoms of menopause.**

It's not only essential to treat certain symptoms that can inconvenience you, like hot flashes, but also for the prevention of some health problems.

