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to make these booklets.

Menopause:

What is it?

a booklet for women



NOTES:

Menopause: What is it?

Why learn about menopause?

Menopause (men-o-paws) is something that happens to *all* women as they grow older. It means there will be changes to your body. That is why menopause is sometimes called *the change* or *the change of life*.

Some women will be glad when it happens. But some may find it a bit scary. This booklet will tell you about menopause. If you know about menopause, you will be more ready when it happens.

Contents

What is menopause?	2
When does it happen?	2
How long does menopause take?	3
What happens in the body in menopause?	3
Some problems woman may have in menopause	4
Is there a health risk with menopause?	6
What can you do about menopause?	8
Other VRRRI booklets on menopause topics	10



What is menopause?

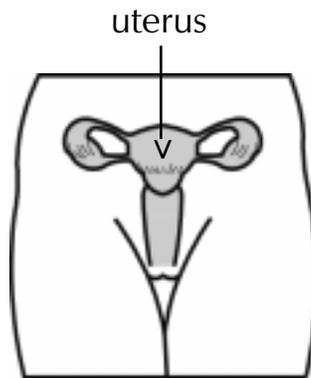
Menopause is the time when a woman's body changes until she stops her *periods* for ever. (A period is the word often used when you bleed from between your legs each month. It is also called *menstruation*.) After menopause, a woman can no longer get *pregnant* (have a baby). Some women may feel sad about that; others may feel happy; some may not think much about it at all.

When does menopause happen?

Most women start menopause when they are about 50 years old. Some may be only 30-40 years old and some may be about 60. Sometimes the age a woman starts menopause will be about the same age her mother started.

Some groups of women start menopause early.

- They may start menopause early if they smoke.
- They may start menopause early if they have had surgery to take out the uterus (this surgery is called a *hysterectomy*).
- They may start menopause early if they have had cancer and been treated with X-rays (called *radiation*) or strong meds (called *chemotherapy*).



NOTES:



Other VRRRI booklets on menopause topics:

Menopause: What the hard words mean

Menopause: What to do if you have problems

To get more copies of these booklets,
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How long does menopause take?

Menopause may last for several years. In those years, women are called

- *pre-menopausal* or
- *peri-menopausal*.

Menopause is complete when a woman has not had a period for at least one year. Then she is called

- *post-menopausal*.

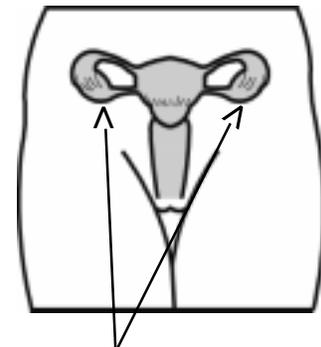
Pre means before, *peri* means around, and *post* means after.

What happens in the body in menopause?

The ovaries are the places in a woman's body where her eggs are stored. They are also where hormones are made and stored.

In menopause, the ovaries slowly stop the work they do. This is normal.

When the ovaries are at work, one egg is let go each month from the ovary into the uterus. If the woman does not get pregnant, the egg is shed from her body, along with the lining of the uterus. This is when a woman has her period. When the ovaries no longer work, no more eggs are let go and the woman no longer has periods.



ovaries store eggs
and hormones

Another job that the ovaries have is to make *hormones*. These control how parts of a woman's body work. When the ovaries stop their work, hormone levels go down slowly. These hormone changes are normal and happen as women get older.

Menopause is different for each woman. It may bother some women more than others. Some women may just find that their periods happen more often or less often than before. Other women may have a harder time with menopause. A woman's family medical history, her own health, and even how she feels about old age may all affect menopause.

Here are some problems women *may* have in menopause:

Hot flashes

Most women have hot flashes in menopause. These may start some years before any other menopause changes.

When a woman has a hot flash, she suddenly feels very, very hot, often in her chest, neck or face. Her skin may turn red. She may sweat a lot and then she may feel cold after. A hot flash may last for just a few minutes or for over half an hour. It may happen many times in the day or night, but it is more common at night. It will wake her up.



- Eat well.
- Take herbal pills.
- Take *HRT (Hormone Replacement Therapy)*. You need to see a doctor to get this.



For more information on each of these ways to feel better in menopause, see the booklet *Menopause: What to do if you have problems*.

This booklet is to tell you a little about menopause. **It does not take the place of a visit to your medical doctor.** Please talk to your doctor or nurse when you need to know more about your own health.



Here are some reasons why some women have heart disease:

- They have high blood pressure.
- They smoke.
- They are too heavy.
- They have fat in their blood vessels (*high cholesterol*).
- Other people in their family have heart problems.



What can you do about menopause?

It is important to remember that menopause is normal. It happens to every woman as she gets older. It is not a sickness and not something to worry about. If you know about menopause, you will feel more ready when it happens.

It is also important to remember that menopause is not the same for every woman.

There are many things that women can do about menopause. Many women try more than just one thing.

Here are some ways which may help you feel well when you reach menopause:

- Get moving —walk, run, ride a bicycle, dance, or find some other way to move that you enjoy.



Periods that are not regular (that happen at times when you are not ready)

It is very common for women in menopause to have periods that are not regular. There may be several weeks between one period and the next, or there may be just a few days. The period may last just a day or two, or go on for many days. Periods may be heavy, so the woman must change her pad or tampon often. Sometimes periods may be very light.

Talk to a doctor if your periods change, to make sure it is because of menopause and not some other health problem.

When sleep is difficult

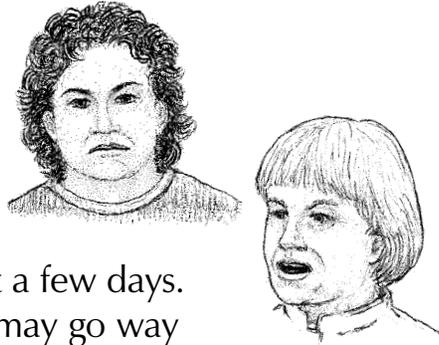
Many people (men and women) find it hard to fall asleep or to stay asleep in the night. It may be because they are getting older and need less sleep. Sometimes it is because they worry about things, sit still too much in the day, or nap in the day. They may need a better mattress on their bed. They may drink too much coffee or alcohol. Or they may take meds which keep them awake.

At menopause, many women also have more problems with sleep. Often this is because of hot flashes.



Mood swings

Some women in menopause may feel very sad or worried or cranky. This may last over a long time, not just a few days. Sometimes their moods may go way up and way down.



They may feel sad or cross because hot flashes keep them from the sleep they need. Sometimes their mood is sad because they can no longer get pregnant; or they worry about old age. For some, it is the time their children leave home and this can make women feel lonely.

On the other hand, many women feel very well and happy and have lots of energy.

Is there a health risk with menopause?

Sometimes, when hormone levels change, there may be health problems with the bones and heart. Not every woman will be at risk, but some will if they *also* have other health problems at the same time or when they were younger.

Bone problems (Osteoporosis)

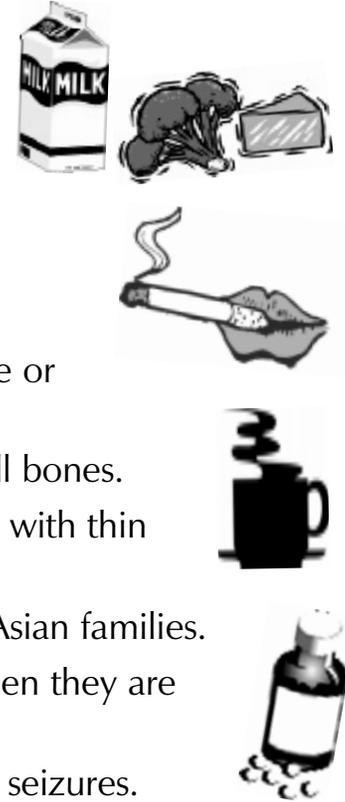
Osteoporosis is the name doctors give when bones become thin and weak. Hormones in the ovaries help the body to take in calcium. You get calcium from foods such as milk or cheese. Calcium helps make bones and teeth strong.



At menopause, the body may not take in as much calcium as it needs. This may make the bones thinner and then they can break easily even from just a short fall.

Here are some reasons why some women have more problems with thin bones:

- They do not get as much calcium as they need.
- They do not walk or run or move around as much as they should.
- They smoke.
- They drink too much coffee or alcohol.
- They are thin, or have small bones.
- They have family members with thin bones.
- They come from white or Asian families.
- They reach menopause when they are less than 45 years old.
- They need to take meds for seizures.



Heart problems (heart disease)

A very few women may be at risk of heart problems after menopause. This is usually when they are 70-80 years old and they also have other medical problems.

