

# 12 facts about menopause

Women undergo two major biological stages in life, and each has profound effects on their bodies. The first is called menstruation and comes after the onset of puberty.

At this point, young women are physically mature enough to have a child. Around 40 to 50 years later, that same woman's fertile years will cease and she will no longer be able to reproduce. This stage is known as menopause.

The approach of menopause can be a confusing time for women. Learning about menopause can help women make sense of the process.

1. A woman has entered menopause when she has not had a menstrual period for one

year.

2. The average woman enters menopause in her late 40s to early 50s. The average age is 51, according to the North American Menopause Society.

3. Menopause does not happen suddenly. A woman goes through a period called perimenopause that can begin in her 30s or 40s, marked by falling levels of estrogen and progesterone.

4. Periods become less regular during perimenopause

until they stop entirely.

5. Women who smoke tend to reach menopause earlier than non-smokers.

6. It's not uncommon for a woman to think she has reached menopause, only to get a period again. Having a period means there is still a chance of getting pregnant. Perimenopausal women have one of the highest rates of unplanned pregnancies of any group. Women should continue to rely on contraceptives if they don't want to get pregnant.

7. Premenstrual syndrome (PMS) may get worse before menopause as hormone levels fluctuate.

8. Women prone to mood swings during PMS are more likely to suffer from mood swings during menopause.

9. Menopause symptoms range from mild to severe.

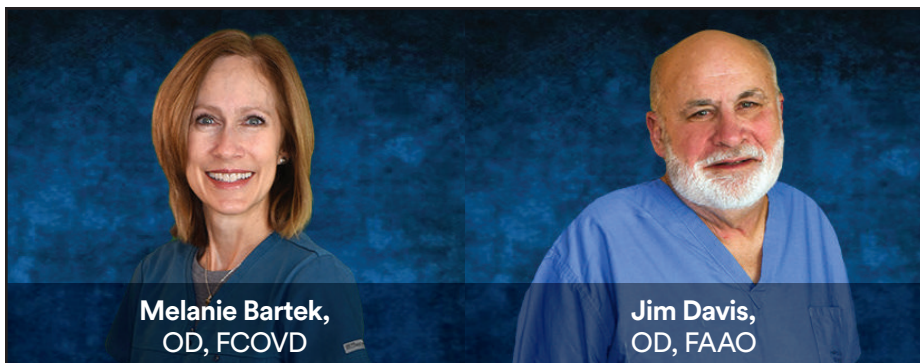
Most women will experience some symptoms. Hot flashes are the most common, affecting up to 75 percent of people. Night sweats are hot flashes that occur at night.

10. A decline in estrogen production can affect the amount of calcium in a woman's bones. This means there's an increased risk for osteoporosis during menopause.

11. Hormone changes can contribute to weight gain. Women should focus on eating a balanced diet and exercising regularly.

12. Women should speak to their doctors about the risk/reward of hormone replacement therapies for hot flashes and the prevention of bone loss.

Menopause is a natural stage in a woman's life. Getting the facts can make it easier to prepare for the coming changes.



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