What does the change of life mean for me?

Understanding perimenopause & menopause — Women's Business



About this brochure

This brochure is here to help women understand the change of life — what perimenopause and menopause means for them and their bodies.

We acknowledge all of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women who have shared their knowledge and stories in yarning circles to help create this brochure.

We acknowledge Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples as the Traditional Custodians of the land and waters throughout Australia and recognise their continuing connection to Country, culture and community. We pay our respects to all First Nations people, communities and cultures and their Elders past and present.



What is the change of life?

The change of life, or menopause, is the time in your life when your periods stop coming.

It is a normal part of life.

Every woman goes through it.
It is not a sickness.



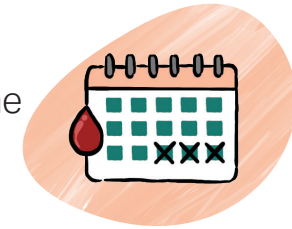


There are three parts to the change of life:

- **Perimenopause:** the time before your last period.
- **Menopause:** when you have your last period.
- **Postmenopause:** the time after, for the rest of your life.

Perimenopause: the years before menopause

- Your body starts to change. Your periods may come less or more, be lighter or heavier



- You can still get pregnant (talk to your doctor or health worker about contraception)



- You might get symptoms





- This usually starts in your 40s and can last for months or even years

Menopause

- Menopause is when your periods have stopped for 12 months in a row

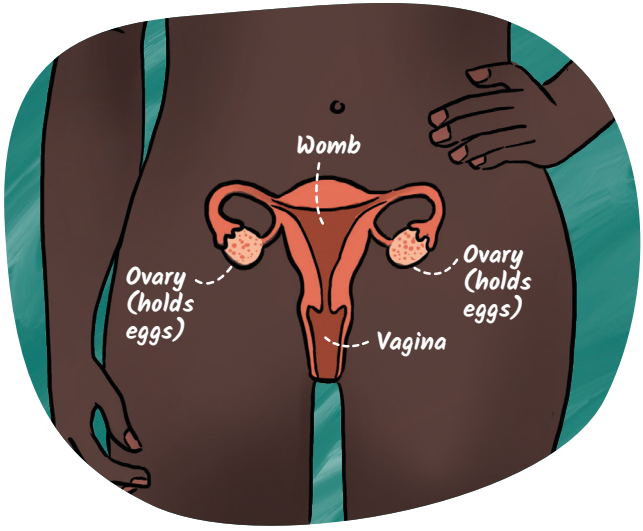


- Most women get to menopause between the ages of 45 and 55 but it can be earlier or later



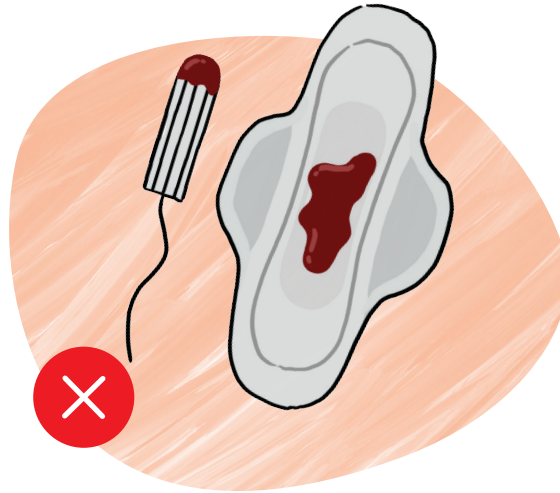
Why do I go through menopause?

You were born with ovaries that release tiny eggs and hormones that make your body able to have a baby.



Menopause is when your ovaries make less hormones and no longer release eggs.

When this happens, two things change:



- Your periods will stop for good



- You will no longer be able to get pregnant

How do I know the change of life is starting?

Your body and feelings may change around the time of perimenopause and menopause.

These changes are called symptoms. They are normal.





Not every woman has the same symptoms.

It's important to talk to your health worker about your symptoms, especially if they are worrying you.

Symptoms you might feel in your body:



Periods change — they may come less or more, be lighter or heavier

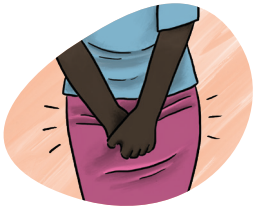
'Hot flushes' — suddenly feeling hot in your face and body





'Night sweats' — sweating while you sleep

Dry or sore private parts (which can make sex uncomfortable)



Sore joints and muscle pain





Feeling tired, trouble sleeping

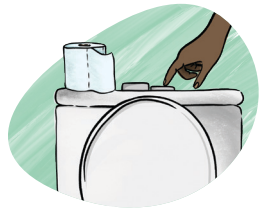
Dry or itchy skin





Weight gain (especially around your belly)

Needing to wee more often or urgently



Other changes you may feel and think:

Feeling grumpy or angry



Less interest in sex



Feeling worried, low or unhappy



Trouble remembering things

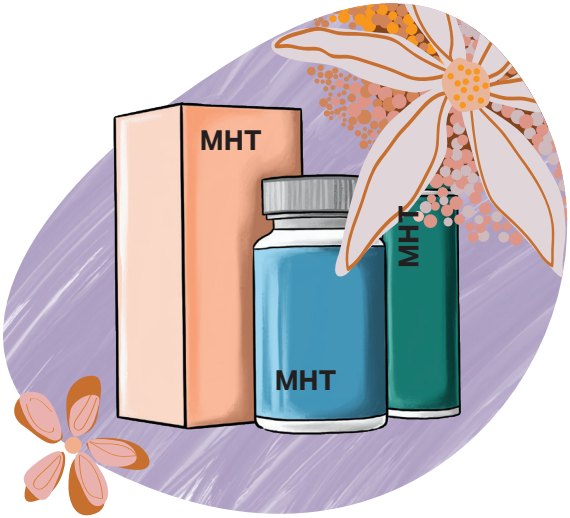


Is there anything to help my symptoms?

Medicine can help

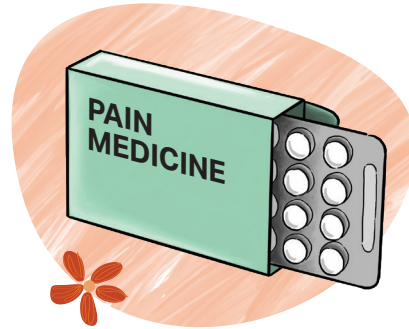
There are medicines that can help make hot flushes go away, help you sleep, help your dry vagina and help your mood.

A common treatment is Menopausal Hormone Therapy, or MHT. It puts back some of the hormones your body has stopped making and can help with some symptoms.



MHT is not for everyone. Your doctor or nurse will help you decide what is right for you.

Pain medicines you buy at the chemist, like Panadol, can also help with aches and pains.



Other treatments

There are also things like lubricants, creams and pessaries that can help your dry or sore vagina.



Talk therapy can help too

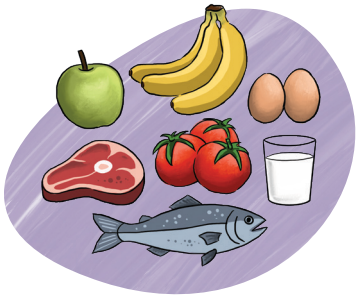
If you're feeling low, worried or unhappy, talking to a counsellor or trained worker can help. This is called Cognitive Behavioural Therapy or CBT.



What else can I do?

Small changes
every day can help.

Eat well and drink water:



Eat healthy foods like veggies, fruit, fish, meat, dairy



Try to keep a healthy weight



Drink plenty of water every day

Move your body:



Be active every day to help you stay strong

Stay cool:

Wear loose, light layers of clothing



Use a fan or air-conditioning when you can



Rest and yarn:

Try to get enough sleep



Talk to other women about how you feel



Spend time with family and friends



Avoid

- Try to cut down on alcohol
- Try not to smoke or vape. These make symptoms worse

How do I talk about what I'm going through?

Sex and closeness with your husband or partner

The change of life can make you feel different about sex and being close to your husband or partner. This is normal. It happens to a lot of women.



You might notice:

- Your vagina feels sore and dry, so sex may hurt
- You don't want sex as much as you used to
- You feel different about your body
- You and your partner feel a bit far apart

Ways to stay close

Little things can help you and your husband or partner stay close.

- Talk to them. It's okay to say sex is uncomfortable
- Try cuddling, holding hands or kissing
- Talk to your doctor or health worker if sex hurts, or if you're worried





Yarning to friends and other people in community

- Talking to a friend you trust and who has been through it too can help you feel less alone
- Share only what feels OK with you
- It's OK to keep this private if that feels better to you

What happens after menopause?

After menopause you have a higher risk of:

- Osteoporosis (weak bones)
- Heart disease
- Type 2 diabetes (too much sugar in your blood)

It's important to look after yourself. Eat well, move more, and go to your regular health checks.



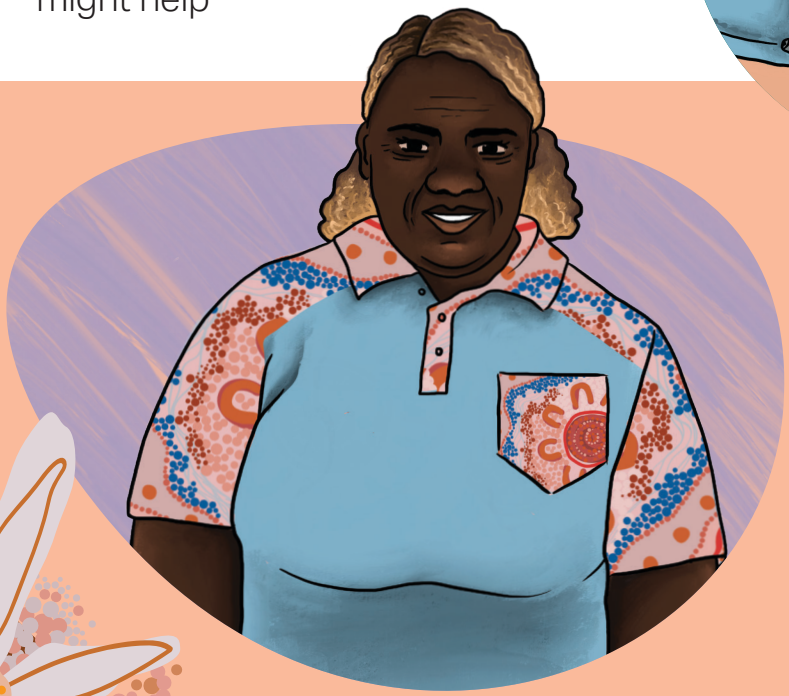
Where can I go for help?

You don't have to go through menopause alone.

If you have symptoms that are worrying you or making things hard, talk to your doctor, nurse or health worker. They can:

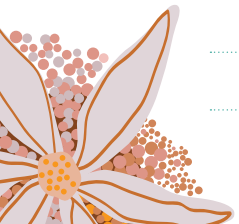
- Check what is going on
- Make sure nothing else is wrong
- Talk with you about what might help





My change of life

Here you can write how you're feeling about menopause and any symptoms you're having. Writing this down can help when talking to your doctor, nurse or health worker.



Everyone experiences the change of life differently.



Find out more about menopause and perimenopause at **health.gov.au/perimenopause/first-nations**

Australian Government