Australian Government

Women's Business: perimenopause and menopause



This yarn is for women. It tells you about a time of change in your body. Doctors call it the "menopause transition".

What is the menopause transition?

The ovaries in your body produce eggs as well as hormones called oestrogen and progesterone. These hormones act like tiny chemical signals that travel through your bloodstream and tell different parts of your body what to do.

As you get older, your ovaries make less of these hormones. This causes things you can feel in your body and your mind. This is the menopause transition, sometimes known as "the change of life".

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.

Every woman's story is different

Every woman going through the menopause transition has their own story. Some find it hard. Some find it easy. Your story might be different from your mum, your auntie, your sister, or your friends and that's okay.

For trans, intersex, non-binary and gender diverse mob born with ovaries, the menopause transition can be different again. It can change with your body and any care you are getting (like gender affirming care).

The three stages

Perimenopause

Perimenopause is the time before your last period. It can start years before menopause.

It usually starts in your 40s, but it can be earlier or later. It usually lasts 4 to 6 years. For some, it is shorter (around 2 years). For others, it is longer (up to 10 years). During this time there is a chance you can still get pregnant.

During perimenopause, your hormone levels go up and down. This causes your periods to change (become irregular, heavier or lighter), and many people start feeling symptoms.

Many women say they feel confused and not like themselves during this time. This is normal. You are not alone.

Menopause

You know you have reached menopause when you have had no period for 12 months, with no other medical reason for it.

Your periods stop because your ovaries have stopped releasing eggs and making oestrogen and progesterone. Because your body is no longer releasing eggs, you'll no longer be able to make babies. This is a normal part of life and nothing to be ashamed about.

The average age women reach menopause is 51, but it can happen between the ages of 45 and 55 or even earlier or later.

Some people also reach menopause earlier for other reasons, such as cancer treatments, or surgery that removes both ovaries.

Postmenopause

Postmenopause starts after menopause. It lasts for the rest of your life. Many of the changes you felt before will start to ease.

What are the symptoms of the menopause transition?

About 1 in 2 women report mild to moderate symptoms. Around 1 in 4 women have symptoms that really affect daily life. And around 1 in 4 women have no symptoms. Everyone is different. Changes usually start in perimenopause.

You might notice these changes in your body:

- periods that change — closer together, further apart, heavier or lighter
- hot flushes (sudden heat that washes over you)
- sweating at night
- trouble sleeping and changes in sleep patterns
- sore joints and muscle pain
- dry or sore vagina — it can hurt during sex
- bladder problems (needing to wee often or urgency to wee)
- dry or itchy skin
- putting on weight around your belly.

Changes in your feelings and thinking might be:

- feeling worried, anxious or depressed
- less interest in sex
- forgetfulness or brain fog (it's hard to remember or think clearly)
- changes in your mood — such as low mood or mood changes.

Looking after yourself

There are lots of things you can do to try and feel better.

- Try to stop smoking and vaping.
- Drink less alcohol and coffee.
- Eat healthy food and try to keep a healthy weight.
- Get enough sleep.
- Stay physically active.
- Look after your mental health and wellbeing.
- Wear layers of clothes, so you can take some off when hot flushes hit.
- Record dates and reminders to help you feel on top of things.



Treatments that can help

Hormone medicines — like Menopausal Hormone Therapy (MHT), which is a prescription only treatment that puts back some of the hormones your body has stopped making. It can be safe and effective, and can help with hot flushes, night sweats and a dry or sore vagina.

Non-hormone medicines — they can help with hot flushes, night sweats or mood changes.

Cognitive Behaviour Therapy or CBT — can be offered when yarning with a counsellor or trained worker.

Pain medicines you can buy at the chemist — like paracetamol or ibuprofen.

Other treatments — like lubricants, creams and pessaries can help your dry or sore vagina.

Talk to your doctor or health worker about what might be right for you.

Getting help

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

They can:

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

Go to **health.gov.au/perimenopause/first-nations** for more information about:

- Symptoms and treatments.
- The menopause transition.
- Real stories from other First Nations women.

You are not alone. Your aunties, your mum, your sisters, and women all over the country have walked this path. Look after yourself, and ask for help when you need it.



Everyone experiences perimenopause and menopause differently.

Talk to your doctor or health worker for more information and support, or visit **health.gov.au/perimenopause/first-nations**

Featured artworks are 'Girinyalanha' by Wiradjuri artist, Karen Lee Mungarrja and 'Yoepakaziw Muyngu Koewsa' by Torres Strait Islander artist, Sharon Phineasa.