

MENOPAUSE

Menopause is the phase of a woman's life where she ceases having menstrual periods. At menopause, the ovaries reduce their production of Estrogen, a female hormone which is responsible for the monthly onset of the menstrual period. As menopause nears, you may skip periods, and the amount of bleeding with a period may become lighter or heavier. It is still important to notify your physician of any unusual changes in your menstrual cycle:

- Bleeding heavier with clots
- Bleeding after intercourse
- Bleeding more frequently than every 3 weeks
- Bleeding which lasts longer than a week

Symptoms of menopause commonly include the following:

- Hot flushes or sweats
- Insomnia, or inability to fall asleep
- Vaginal wall thinning and dryness making intercourse uncomfortable
- The urge to urinate more frequently, and increased bladder infections
- Feeling nervous, irritable, or tired

An important issue to address with your physician is the loss of bone strength that occurs after menopause, known as *osteoporosis*. This condition may lead to fractures of the hip, spine, and wrist, and can be disabling. The good news is that osteoporosis can, in many cases, be detected in early stages and treated. Ask your physician if you are a candidate for screening with a Bone Density Examination.

Hormone replacement therapy may be recommended by your physician at menopause. This replacement of the female hormones is often used to control the symptoms of hot flushes and vaginal dryness, as well as insomnia. Hormones can be given as pills, patches for the skin, and topical creams. Estrogen has also been shown to slow the development of osteoporosis. Like any medication, there may be risks associated with hormone replacement, and these need to be discussed with your doctor.

Menopause, a natural event, should be an enjoyable time of your life, not to be dreaded. To keep feeling your best, exercise regularly, eat right, get regular health check ups with your doctor, and consider whether hormone replacement therapy is right for you. For more information, please see the following website:

<http://www.menopause.org/consumers/consliterature.htm>