



# A POSITIVE OUTLOOK IS GOOD HEALTH.

Feel confident at every stage of life. By being aware of what lies ahead, you're better prepared to handle the outcome. Aging well means learning how to cope with change gracefully.

## MENOPAUSE

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Every woman has a different attitude toward menopause. Regardless of your experience, menopause is a normal part of life. It's important to remember that menopause can be a positive experience. Recognizing the symptoms and knowing your care options can help make menopause a more comfortable passage.

### What is menopause?

Menopause is the time when a woman stops menstruating and can no longer become pregnant. It generally occurs in women between the ages of 45 and 55. Menopause is confirmed when you haven't

had a period for 12 months in a row. The "change of life" that comes with menopause doesn't happen all at once. Perimenopause, a phase when your ovaries begin producing less of the female hormones estrogen and progesterone, typically begins two to four years before your last period.

### What to expect

Signs and symptoms of menopause often start long before your period has completely stopped and may include insomnia, weight gain and/or increased abdominal fat, vaginal dryness, irregular periods

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and spotting blood between periods, thinning hair, loss of breast fullness, urinary incontinence, mood swings, and fatigue. Some women experience bouts of forgetfulness or difficulty concentrating, and some face irritability, anxiety, and even depression. Remember that depression, anxiety, or a change in your sex drive may have causes other than menopause, including family and social dynamics.

As you enter menopause itself (after your period has stopped), you may experience hot flashes. A hot flash is a sudden rush of heat to your upper body and face. Try keeping your home and workplace cool; dressing in layers; wearing light, natural fibers; and taking a cold drink of water or juice at the start of a flash.

### Possible complications and what you can do

The hormonal shifts that come with menopause, including lower levels of estrogen, can increase your risk of weight gain, cardiovascular disease, and osteoporosis. But you can do a great deal to reduce your risk of these issues. To keep your heart healthy, be sure to stop smoking, take steps to reduce high blood pressure, get regular aerobic exercise, and eat a diet low in saturated fats and plentiful in whole grains, fruits, and vegetables. To reduce your risk of osteoporosis (caused by a loss of bone density),

make sure to get adequate levels of calcium and vitamin D. To keep bones strong, it's also very important to exercise regularly. Strength training and weight-bearing activities like walking and jogging are especially good for bones. To avoid weight gain, you may need to take in fewer calories (as many as 200 to 400 fewer calories per day) and exercise more.

### Is hormone replacement therapy safe?

In the recent past, hormone replacement therapy was commonly used to reduce symptoms of menopause such as hot flashes and to reduce the risk of osteoporosis and heart disease. However, in 2002, the National Institutes of Health called an early halt to its study of hormone therapy because researchers found that it *increased* the risk of heart attack, stroke, blood clots, breast cancer, dementia, and gallbladder disease. That said, although for most women the risks of long-term hormone therapy far outweigh the benefits, in some cases short-term hormone therapy may be recommended for symptom management. Talk to your doctor about what's right for you.

### Learn more.

Visit [kp.org/womenshealth](http://kp.org/womenshealth) for facts every woman should know.

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