

# Is it the menopause?

Perimenopause refers to the period before the menopause where the oestrogen levels in your body decline, but while you are still releasing eggs and having periods. Read on to learn more.



## When does menopause occur?

The perimenopause stage usually starts in your **early 40s** although it can be earlier than this. When it's younger than this, it is referred to as an '*early menopause*'. The perimenopause period lasts on average around **four to seven years**.

The average age for the menopause in the UK is 51, with the menopause generally occurring between the ages of 45 and 55 years old.

## Common signs of menopause

Often the first sign of the menopause is a change in the regularity and frequency of your periods. Periods may become lighter or heavier than before. As well as this the most common signs to look out for are:

- **Hot flushes** – these are generally quick moments where the skin becomes red and warm and you feel flushed. This usually affects your head, chest and neck.
- **Night sweats** – waking in the night and finding yourself wet with sweat and feeling overly warm.
- **Low mood, mood changes and anxiety** – people often report feeling stressed and anxious as well as experiencing mood swings.
- **Weight gain** – it is common for people during the menopause to gain weight, being overweight can exacerbate the symptoms of the menopause.
- **Insomnia** – struggling to fall asleep at night-time.
- **Loss of libido (sex drive)** – lack of interest or sexual desire.
- **Headaches and small migraines** – due to the changes in your body's physiology.
- **Vaginal dryness** – can be an uncomfortable feeling day-to-day as well as during intercourse.
- **Aches, pains and stiff joints** – this can include an increased risk of osteoporosis.
- **Palpitations** – being very aware of and feeling your heartbeat.
- **Hair loss and brittle nails** – hair can become thinner and more fragile, as can nails

## Experiencing menopause

Not every woman will experience every symptom, in fact **25% of women have no symptoms** at all.

Some women are worse affected than others with 25% of those with symptoms stating that it negatively affects their life.

The first step if you are experiencing menopause symptoms that are affecting your quality of life is to go to your GP.

Your GP can talk you through the different HRT (Hormone Replacement Therapy) options and suggest other ways to help you manage your symptoms and ease your concerns.