Understanding menopause and perimenopause

Patient education guide | Canadian-first edition

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General health information only. This guide does not diagnose a condition or replace an assessment by a qualified clinician.

Menopause is a normal life transition, but symptoms deserve care when they affect sleep, mood, relationships, work, sexual health or daily function.

The stages

- Perimenopause: cycles and symptoms may change before the final menstrual period.
- Menopause: a point in time reached retrospectively after 12 consecutive months without a period when another cause is not more likely.
- Postmenopause: the time after menopause, when bone, cardiovascular, urinary and sexual health remain important.

Common symptoms

- Hot flashes or night sweats; sleep disruption; mood or anxiety changes.
- Concentration or memory concerns; headaches; joint or muscle aches.
- Vaginal dryness, discomfort with sex, urinary urgency or recurrent infections.
- Changing cycles or bleeding, which may be common in perimenopause but still needs context.

Safety-net

- Heavy bleeding with dizziness, fainting or weakness.
- Bleeding after 12 months without a period, persistent between-period or after-sex bleeding.
- Chest pain, severe shortness of breath, fainting, new neurologic symptoms or immediate safety concerns.

Call 911 or go to an emergency department for a medical emergency. This guide cannot assess urgency for an individual.

Sources opened and checked 20 November 2026

Ontario Health / SOGC menopause quality standard: https://www.sogc.org/common/Uploaded%20files/HUB%20Pages/menopause/qs-menopause-en.pdf

SOGC Guideline 422a: https://sogc.org/common/Uploaded%20files/ACSC/ACSC2024/gui422aCPG2110E.pdf

SOGC Menopause Tool: https://sogc.org/en/en/content/events/HUB-Pages/Menopause-Tool.aspx

Canadian Menopause Society pocket guide: https://www.canadianmenopausesociety.org/sites/default/files/pdf/publications/Pocket%20Guide%20-%20udpated%202023%20Final.pdf

Osteoporosis Canada menopause and bone health: https://osteoporosis.ca/menopause-and-bone-health/

Government of Canada menopause guide: https://www.canada.ca/en/department-national-defence/services/benefits-military/health-support/women-diversity-health/health-guide/wdh-menopause-guide.html

Government of Canada clinician guide: https://www.canada.ca/en/department-national-defence/services/benefits-military/health-support/women-diversity-health/womens-health-care-clinicians/medical-management-menopause-symptoms.html

HealthLink BC post-menopause: https://www.healthlinkbc.ca/healthwise/post-menopause

The Menopause Society hormone therapy: https://menopause.org/patient-education/menopause-topics/hormone-therapy

The Menopause Society position statements: https://menopause.org/professional-resources/position-statements

NICE NG23 menopause guideline: https://www.nice.org.uk/guidance/ng23/resources/menopause-identification-and-management-pdf-1837330217413

NHS menopause and perimenopause treatment: https://www.nhs.uk/conditions/menopause-and-perimenopause/treatment/

Endotext: The Postmenopausal Women: https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/sites/books/NBK279050/