

## Section 6

### After the menopause

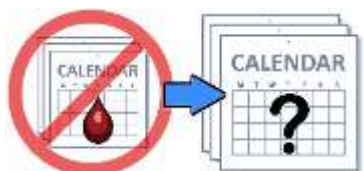


Postmenopause is the time after menopause, when a woman has not experienced a period for over a year.

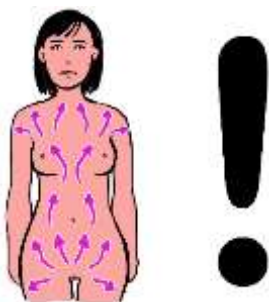


Postmenopause, you will no longer have periods but some women do continue to have symptoms of menopause.

### Postmenopause health



In postmenopause, symptoms of menopause may have got better or stopped. Some women continue to have symptoms for longer.



The change in your body's hormones means you have to keep looking after your health and wellbeing. Be sure to listen to your body.



You might be more likely to develop some health conditions postmenopause, like cardiovascular (heart) disease, osteoporosis (weak bones) and urinary tract infections (UTI's). So it is important to have a healthy diet and lifestyle, and to go for your regular cancer screenings like smear test and breast.

## Cardiovascular (heart) disease



Menopause causes lower levels of the hormone oestrogen in your body. This can cause problems and mean you are more likely to have heart disease or a stroke.



The British Heart Foundation (BHF) offer support for women who have problems with their heart health and who are going through the menopause.



It's also important to exercise regularly, to eat a balanced diet and stay a healthy weight.

## Osteoporosis



Lower levels of the hormone oestrogen in your body because of menopause can cause weak bones that may break more easily.

You can lower your chances of developing osteoporosis by:



- taking HRT. This helps to prevent your bones getting weaker



- exercising regularly



- eating a healthy diet that includes plenty of fruit, vegetables and sources of calcium, such as low-fat milk and yoghurt



- stopping smoking and cutting down on alcohol

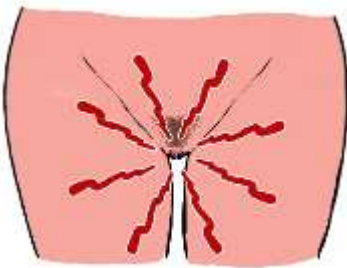


- taking calcium and vitamin D supplements.



If you have osteoporosis you can find out more about exercising safely by visiting the Royal Osteoporosis Society website: <https://theros.org.uk/>

## Urinary tract infections (UTI's)



Lower hormone levels because of menopause can cause your bladder and vaginal tissue to change. This can mean you are more likely to get urinary tract infections (UTI's).



You can prevent UTI's by:

- drinking lots of water to help flush bacteria out
- going to the toilet whenever you get the urge and allowing your bladder to empty as fully as possible.



Speak to your GP if you keep getting UTI's or they are very serious.



The GP will be able to prescribe vaginal oestrogen to help reduce the chances of the UTI's coming back. They will give you a prescription of antibiotics if needed.

## Urinary incontinence (wetting yourself)



When you go through the menopause, the tissues of your vagina lose elasticity. This means you may get sudden, strong urges to pee, followed by a loss of urine.



You can also experience the loss of urine with coughing, laughing or lifting. This can also cause urinary tract infections to occur more often.



You can improve symptoms of incontinence by:

- doing pelvic floor exercises
- using a vaginal oestrogen preparation.





## Sexual wellbeing and intimacy



All women experience menopause differently. Many women experience changes in their sex life as they go through the menopause. Menopause can affect sex drive or sexual desire.



Some women may experience problems during sex due to vaginal dryness and loss of elasticity. This can cause discomfort and bleeding during or after sex.



Speak to your GP if you are concerned about bleeding after sex. It can also be a sign of a health condition.



With all symptoms of menopause it is important to get advice. There is a lot that can be done to help. Do not be afraid to speak to someone at your local GP practice as there are treatments that can help your sex life.

## Weight gain



Some women will experience weight gain during or after menopause.



During the menopause, the change in hormones can mean the body stores more fat and burns less calories. HRT can help with this but exercise and being active are the best way for your body to burn calories. Not being stressed can help too.



Exercise, lowering stress, cutting down on caffeine and alcohol, stopping smoking and a healthy diet all help to stop weight gain and other symptoms.



It is important to make sure that weight gain is not caused by some other health condition. You should speak to your GP if you are worried about weight gain as you are going through menopause.

## HRT and weight gain



There is no evidence that HRT causes weight gain. However, a small number of women may hold fluid with HRT. It is normally mild and will get better in 4 to 6 weeks.

## Understanding the benefits and risks



HRT is still the best way to help with symptoms of menopause. It also helps to stop osteoporosis (weak bones). It may also protect against heart disease.



When deciding whether to have HRT it is important to understand the risks.



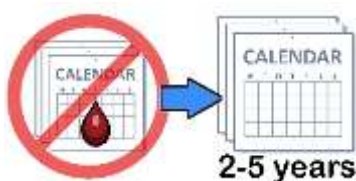
If you would like to start HRT, it is a good idea to have a talk with your GP or nurse. They can tell you about the risks and benefits so you can decide what is right for you.





Every woman experiences the menopause differently. There is no way of knowing how long HRT will need to be taken. Some women may need to keep taking HRT to help with symptoms for a long time.

## When to stop taking HRT



Most women are able to stop taking HRT after their menopausal symptoms finish. This is usually two to five years after they start. In some cases this can be longer.



You may find that your menopausal symptoms come back after you stop HRT, but these should pass within a few months. Speak to your GP if:

- you have symptoms that last for several months after you stop HRT
- you have very serious symptoms.



After you have stopped HRT, you may still need help to manage vaginal dryness and to prevent osteoporosis.



Cream, lubricants and other medicines are available for vaginal dryness and discomfort. You should not suffer from vaginal dryness and discomfort without treatment.

## Alternatives to HRT



If you decide that you do not wish to take HRT, there are a number of alternative treatments.



You should talk about this with your GP. They will tell you what other treatments are available and what would be best for you.