

# Menopause and Menstrual Health: Definitions and Symptoms

**Menstrual health** is a state of complete physical, mental, and social wellbeing and not merely the absence of disease or infirmity, in relation to the menstrual cycle.

Symptoms can include:

- heavy menstrual bleeding
- period pain/or cramps, also known as dysmenorrhea
- irregular periods
- mood changes
- tiredness

Menstrual health conditions which can cause these symptoms include:

- Premenstrual Syndrome (PMS)
- Polycystic Ovary Syndrome (PCOS)
- Premenstrual Dysphoric Disorder (PMDD)
- Endometriosis
- Fibroids
- Adenomyosis

**Menopause** is defined as the last menstrual period. This happens due to lower hormone levels between the ages of 45 and 55, but for some, it can be earlier or later. Family history, surgery, and medical conditions can affect the age at which menopause occurs. Menopause is reached when there has not been a period for 12 consecutive months. It is not only those who identify as women who will experience menopause.

**Menstrual cycle** is the monthly process in which an egg develops, and the womb's lining is prepared for possible pregnancy. If the egg is not fertilised, it is reabsorbed back into the body, and the womb's lining is shed. This is known as a period or menstruation. The cycle is controlled by hormones. On average, a cycle lasts for 28 days, but it is different for everyone. The monthly cycle can range from 24 to 38 days.

A **period** is part of the menstrual cycle when women, girls, and people who menstruate bleed from their vagina and lasts between 4 and 8 days. For most people, this happens every 28 days or so, but it is common for periods to start sooner or later than this.

**Period Products** absorb or collect the blood that is released during your period.

More information and resources for menstrual health and related conditions is available on NHS Inform.

[View menstrual health resources.](#)

**Perimenopause** is the time from the start of menopausal symptoms until after a woman has experienced her last period. Periods will become less frequent over a few months or years before they stop altogether. They might be more irregular and become heavier or lighter. For some women, they can stop suddenly.

**Early menopause** is menopause before the age of 45.

**Premature menopause** is menopause before the age of 40. Premature menopause is also sometimes known as premature ovarian insufficiency (POI).

**Post menopause** is the time after menopause when a woman has not experienced a period for over a year. Post menopause, women will no longer have periods. Still, some do continue to experience symptoms of menopause and may require ongoing support.

**Medical menopause** is a medically induced menopause, when medical treatments, like chemotherapy or surgery, cause a person's ovaries to stop functioning before menopause would typically occur. It happens much faster than natural menopause and often causes more severe symptoms.

You can find further information on the National Wellbeing Hub website: [www.nationalwellbeinghub.scot](http://www.nationalwellbeinghub.scot)

**Menopause transition** has 3 stages:

- Perimenopause
- Menopause
- Post menopause

Symptoms of menopause can include:

- Mood changes including anxiety and depression
- Difficulty concentrating, memory problems, and loss of confidence
- Hot flushes
- Night sweats
- Sleep disruption
- Fatigue
- Headaches
- Irregular periods or heavy bleeding
- Sexual difficulties and vaginal dryness
- Recurring urinary tract infections (UTIs)
- Palpitations
- Bone and joint problems and pains

Symptoms continue on average for 2–4 years, but some women will continue experiencing symptoms for longer. The average duration of symptoms is 7 years. Around 10% of women will continue to have lifelong symptoms. Symptoms can vary from mild to severe and, for around a third of women, can significantly impact their quality of life. Not everyone will have noticeable symptoms that adversely affect their day-to-day life.

More information about the menopause is available on NHS inform. [View menopause resources.](#)