

PATIENT RESOURCES

Menopause & Mental Health

Menopause is when a woman's body changes and she stops having periods. It doesn't happen all at once; it's a slow change that can take several years. During this time, you might start having signs of menopause and your periods might not come on a regular schedule. Most women in the U.S. go through menopause around the age of 52.

The signs of menopause can start quickly and be easy to notice, or they can come on slowly and not be so strong at first. These signs can show up a lot once they start, or just every now and then. Different women will notice different changes. Some signs, like feeling cranky, can feel a lot like what some women feel before they get their period. Others may be new to you. For example:

- ✿ Your menstrual periods may not come as regularly as before. They also might last longer or be shorter. You might skip some months. Periods might stop for a few months and then start up again.
- ✿ Your periods might be heavier or lighter than before.
- ✿ You might have hot flashes and problems sleeping.
- ✿ You might experience mood swings or be irritable.
- ✿ You might experience vaginal dryness. Sex may be uncomfortable or painful.
- ✿ You may have less interest in sex. It may take longer for you to get aroused.

When you go through menopause, you might start feeling different emotions or mood changes like:

- ✿ Getting annoyed easily
- ✿ Feeling sad
- ✿ Not wanting to do things you used to like
- ✿ Feeling more angry
- ✿ Having trouble paying attention
- ✿ Feeling stressed
- ✿ Finding it hard to focus
- ✿ Worrying a lot
- ✿ Feeling really down

These feelings can come up even if you've never had them before. And if you've had troubles with feeling down or really worried in the past, menopause can sometimes make these feelings come back or feel worse.

There are some things you can do to lessen the impact of these symptoms, including:

Diet Changes:

- ✿ Reduce caffeine, alcohol and stop smoking
- ✿ Keep a food diary for hot flush triggers
- ✿ Make sure there is enough Vitamin D and calcium in your diet and eat a diet rich in fiber and whole grain foods.

Lifestyle Changes

- ✿ Avoid hot drinks before bedtime and keep alcohol to a minimum as it can trigger hot flashes
- ✿ Manage night sweats by keeping a glass of cool water nearby and the room slightly cool.
- ✿ Wear layers so when a hot flash happens, they can be taken off

- ✿ Exercise - yoga has been proven to improve sleep and walking and running improve overall wellbeing

Talk to Your Health Care Provider

- ✿ They can screen for mental health concerns and address them with a combination of diet, lifestyle changes, and medicines.
- ✿ They can offer treatments such as hormone therapy and non-hormonal options, and explain the benefits and risks of both.
- ✿ They can refer you for cognitive behavior therapy with a specialized counselor who can help you with mood and anxiety concerns.

Menopause can be a significant transition in a woman's life and can impact mental health in various ways. It's crucial to have open, honest conversations with healthcare providers about the physical and emotional changes that occur during this time. Here are some tips on how to talk to healthcare providers about menopause and mental health:

Tips for Talking to Your Healthcare Provider:

- ✿ **Be Open and Honest:** Begin the conversation by being frank about the symptoms you are experiencing. This includes changes in your mood, anxiety levels, and any depressive thoughts.
- ✿ **Keep a Symptom Diary:** Track your symptoms, their frequency, and their severity. Note any patterns that emerge in relation to your menstrual cycle or other life stressors.
- ✿ **Educate Yourself:** Have a basic understanding of menopause and its possible effects on mental health. This will help you ask informed questions and understand your healthcare provider's responses.
- ✿ **Discuss Your Medical History:** Share your personal and family medical history, especially if it includes depression, anxiety, or other mental health issues.
- ✿ **Inquire About All Treatment Options:** Ask about various treatment modalities including hormone replacement therapy, lifestyle changes, counseling, and alternative therapies.
- ✿ **Bring Up Sleep Issues:** Since sleep disturbances can contribute to mood changes and mental health issues, discuss any changes in your sleep patterns.
- ✿ **Consider Your Overall Wellbeing:** Mental health is just one aspect of your health. Discuss how menopause may impact your physical health, sexual health, and overall quality of life.
- ✿ **Be Specific:** Instead of saying you feel "off" or "not yourself," be as specific as possible about what you're experiencing, such as bouts of crying, overwhelming fatigue, or irritability.
- ✿ **Discuss the Impact on Daily Life:** Explain how your symptoms are affecting your work, relationships, and daily activities.

- ✿ **Prepare for the Conversation:** It can be overwhelming to remember everything during an appointment, so write down your symptoms, concerns, and questions beforehand.

Questions to Ask Your Doctor About Depression or Anxiety Related to Menopause:

- › *Is there a link between menopause and my mental health symptoms?*
 - ✿ Understand how hormonal changes might be affecting your mood and anxiety levels.
- › *What are the treatment options for managing depression and anxiety during menopause?*
 - ✿ This can include hormone replacement therapy, antidepressants, anti-anxiety medications, psychotherapy, or lifestyle interventions.
- › *Could my other medications be affecting my mood during menopause?*
 - ✿ Some medications can have interactions or side effects that impact mood, which could be exacerbated during menopause.
- › *Are there lifestyle changes I can make that could help with my symptoms?*
 - ✿ Often, changes in diet, exercise, sleep, and stress management can significantly impact mental health.
- › *How can I tell if what I'm experiencing is a normal part of menopause or something more serious like depression or an anxiety disorder?*
 - ✿ It's important to discern between typical menopausal symptoms and mental health conditions that may require specific treatments.

Remember, seeking support and having an ongoing dialogue with your healthcare provider is key to effectively managing both menopause and mental health challenges. It's a collaborative journey, and your provider is there to help guide you through it with personalized care.

This resource is supported by an educational grant from Pfizer and Astellas Pharma, US.

This resource is offered for educational purposes only. Patients are encouraged to discuss the resources with their healthcare providers and actively participate in the decision-making process.

menopause:

MENTAL HEALTH AS A VITAL SIGN