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Menopause and HIV

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Together, we can change the course of the HIV epidemic...one woman at a time.

#onewomanatatime

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What Is Menopause?

Menopause: Point in time when ***menstrual periods have stopped***

- Often called “change of life”
- Normal part of life for women and other people who menstruate



What Is Menopause?

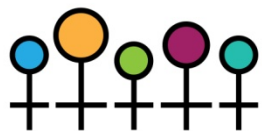
- *Perimenopause*: time of transition leading up to a person's final menstrual period
- Cisgender (cis) women usually experience menopause between ages of 38 and 58; average age is 51
- Some evidence that women living with HIV and particularly lifetime survivors may experience changes of menopause earlier; symptoms may be more intense
 - More research needed to support these reports

What Is Menopause?

- ***Changes of menopause begin*** when:
 - Ovaries (reproductive organs containing eggs) naturally begin to slow down making **estrogen** and **progesterone** (hormones associated with female sex)
- When you ***near menopause***:
 - Estrogen levels drop
 - Stop having regular cycles
 - Eventually can no longer get pregnant

What Is Menopause?

- You have passed through perimenopause and ***entered menopause*** when:
 - Body has completed these changes (one to ten years or more)
 - You have not had period for 12 months in a row
- Lack of research on menopause in transmasculine or nonbinary individuals and others who were assigned female at birth
 - Anyone who has or previously had ovaries can experience menopause

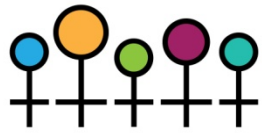


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Symptoms and Conditions

During perimenopause, hormone levels rise and fall unevenly. People may experience:

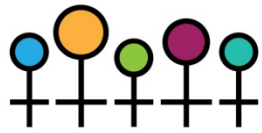
- Increasingly irregular periods
 - Change in frequency, duration, amount
- Hot flashes, night sweats
- Mood swings
- Depression
- Irritability
- Vaginal dryness
- Forgetfulness
- Trouble sleeping, fatigue
- Lack of sexual desire
- Skin changes including:
 - Thinner skin
 - Wrinkling
 - Acne



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Symptoms and Conditions

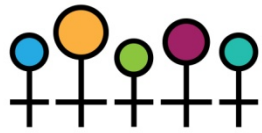
- Cis women living with HIV who experience sweats at night may be ***misdiagnosed*** with menopause-related hot flashes
 - Their sweats may be result of HIV
- Vaginal dryness can be mistaken for a yeast infection
- Keep track of menstrual cycles
 - Report any changes to healthcare provider
 - Can avoid incorrect diagnosis or hormonal treatments that may not be necessary



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Symptoms and Conditions

- People living with HIV ***may experience menstrual cycle changes*** even if not going through menopause
 - Speak to healthcare provider if you have any symptoms described above
 - Find out if related to HIV, menopause, or both
 - May be helpful to have hormone levels checked if <45
- ***Medical concerns*** that can develop after menopause:
 - Osteoporosis (bone loss)
 - Cardiovascular (heart) disease
 - Urinary incontinence (leaking, more frequent urination)

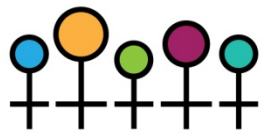


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Hormone Replacement Therapy (HRT)

Replacing estrogen the body no longer makes can relieve symptoms of menopause

- Women who have a uterus usually take estrogen with progesterone (**hormone replacement therapy, HRT**)
 - Used to be recommended, but long-term use now questioned; research shows increased cancer risk
 - May be appropriate for a short time
 - Patches, creams, vaginal rings may not carry same risk
- Women who had uterus removed can take estrogen by itself (**estrogen replacement therapy, ERT**)



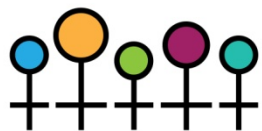
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Hormone Replacement Therapy (HRT)

- Talk to provider about HRT
 - Provider needs to know **all** drugs and treatments you take, including over-the-counter and street drugs, herbs, etc.
 - Provider also needs to know whether you smoke cigarettes
- ***HIV drugs can reduce effectiveness of hormones***
 - Includes contraceptive pills with estrogen and progesterone
- Estrogen can also cause lower levels of HIV drugs
 - Risk for rising viral load, HIV drug resistance
- Women taking HIV drugs have ***good results using pills and other hormonal contraceptives***

Alternative Treatments

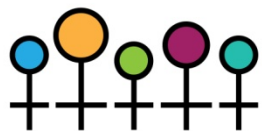
- Complementary/alternative therapies for symptoms:
 - Traditional Chinese Medicine (e.g., acupuncture, Chinese herbs)
 - Eating foods that contain plant-based estrogens (also called phytoestrogens; e.g., soy, flax seeds)
 - Herbal or botanical supplements (e.g., black cohosh, red clover, dong quai, kava, ginseng)
 - Antidepressant drugs and/or counseling
 - Mindfulness training
- Some may have unwanted side effects or interact with HIV drugs
 - Often not regulated by U.S. Food and Drug Administration (FDA)
 - Not required to prove effectiveness in the same way as standard therapies
- **Consult skilled practitioner and let regular provider know what you are doing**



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Keeping Healthy After Menopause

- Eat a healthy diet and maintain a healthy weight
- Have bone health checked; ask provider about specific treatment to prevent bone loss:
 - Calcium supplements
 - FDA recommends women over 50 take $\geq 1,200$ mg calcium/day
 - Calcium supplements may interfere with certain HIV drugs
 - Speak to your provider before taking them
 - Prescription drugs to prevent bone loss
- Have vitamin D level checked; take supplements as instructed by provider
- Quit or cut down on smoking



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Keeping Healthy after Menopause

- Quit drinking or use alcohol moderately
- Be physically active:
 - Aerobic or cardiovascular activity for 30 minutes, 5x/week (brisk walking, etc.) can prevent cardiovascular disease
 - Muscle-strengthening activity 2x/week can prevent bone loss
- Mammogram every 1-2 years
- Pelvic exam as often as recommended
 - With cervical cancer screening test (for those with a uterus)
- Get your cholesterol, triglycerides checked regularly
- Get screening test for colon cancer

Taking Care of Yourself

- Menopause may signal the end of a person's fertility, but ***it is not the end of femininity or sexuality***
 - Some people experience mild, tolerable symptoms
 - Others' symptoms are severe; impact quality of life
- Decisions about treatment options are up to each person
 - Discuss concerns, questions with provider to weigh risks and benefits

Share Our Infographics!

Menopause: The Bottom Line



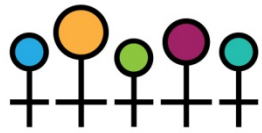
Education, conversations with peers and providers, mental health support, and early screening can help with managing this life transition!

To access our fact sheet on menopause and the whole series of infographics,
go to
bit.ly/MenopauseHIV
or
scan the QR code.



This project is supported by a grant from Merck.

Share these
infographics – part of
The Well
Project's [Women Like Us](#)
– [Aging](#)
[Positively](#) program – and
spread knowledge about
menopause and HIV.
Let's talk about it!



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Learn More!

- To learn more, and for links to articles featuring more details, please read the full fact sheet:
 - [Menopause and HIV](#)
- For more fact sheets and to connect to our community of women living with HIV, visit:
 - www.thewellproject.org
 - [@thewellprojecthiv.bsky.social](https://bsky.app/@thewellprojecthiv)
 - www.facebook.com/thewellproject
 - www.instagram.com/thewellprojecthiv/
 - www.threads.net/@thewellprojecthiv
 - www.youtube.com/thewellprojecthiv