



Navigating Your Menopause

Education, Insights and Practical Advice

This is the world's simplest and best guide for understanding your journey

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Foreword

by Dr. Karen Pike

It began slowly -- as these things do -- with simple questions about our changing bodies. Symptoms described. Moods analyzed. Questions asked. Soon hot flashes were being recounted in vivid detail.

"Is this menopause?" my friends ask, already knowing the answer.

Most women know the basics of menopause. If you're reading this book, you're one of them.

But most of you don't know the details. And you're not alone.

According to a 2024 report by the Cuyuna Regional Medical Center, only 54 percent of U.S. women correctly define menopause. That means 46 percent of you don't know what's happening to your body and probably no one is telling you!

It's likely these percentages are even more significant globally. Menopause knowledge varies tremendously by country and culture. For example, women in India are more likely to know about menopause than women in Japan.

Here's why that the knowledge gap is so great in the United States, according to [Cuyuna](#):

80% of graduating internal medicine residents say they do not feel competent to discuss or treat menopause, according to the AARP.

- Only 20% of U.S. Ob/Gyn residencies even offer menopause training in 2024. (A "residency" is the multiyear, supervised training that every physician does after medical school for his or her speciality.)
- 50% of U.S. Ob/Gyn residencies admit they need education more on menopause medicine.
- If you're disappointed and angry by those statistics, you should be. After all, menopause is experienced by (checks notes...) *every maturing woman*.

So if you're reading this book, you're ahead of the game.

But that doesn't mean you're getting what you need.

More 85 percent of perimenopausal and menopausal women experience symptoms they say impact their quality of life. Of those women, 60 percent of you will seek clinical help.

But here's the bad news: Of the 60 percent who seek advice or help, 75% of you subsequently have your symptoms go untreated (all stats from Cuyana).

It does not have to be this way. This book is for you to get empowered with knowledge so you can take charge of your menopause its precursor, perimenopause.

But remember: It's up to you to be your own advocate inside the medical system.

As a licensed physician, I'm happy to help friends navigate medical issues in the simplest, most unbiased way possible.

In addition to my clinical work, I'm also the credited medical consultant for "Grey's Anatomy," a role I've held since the television show's debut more than 20 years ago. It's no exaggeration to say I make it a priority to share medical knowledge with millions of people.

I studied as an undergraduate at Dartmouth College. I received my medical degree at Georgetown University and I did medical residency at Stanford University. I've been chief of staff of a major hospital system.

During my day job, I lead an emergency department in Silicon Valley. Our region is one of the most affluent and highly educated places in the world. Each year, my department sees thousands of mature women for every manner of sickness, injury or concern.

Even within this well-informed population, the statistics I shared earlier ring true: Many women I meet in the hospital setting do not know what menopause is.

Menopause is not supposed to be a mystery - It happens to all of us.

It is not meant to be complex - Our bodies change.

In these pages I'll tell you what it means.



To share knowledge about menopause, I first joined forces with my whip-smart twentysomething daughter, Audrey, to create an informational website called SimplyMenopause (www.simplymenopause.net).

We launched it as a quiet reference guide for friends and patients. We never expected what happened next.

Within days, SimplyMenopause began drawing thousands of visitors from around the world.

This was despite zero advertising and none of the flashy social-media influenced marketing.

Today, SimplyMenopause is the world's fastest growing independent online resource for menopause.

The average visitor spends 10 times longer on our pages than on the average medical website.

Clearly we are filling a void.

This book is based on the website information. It's meant to be read quickly and digested easily.

I want to put you in a place where you have confidence in understanding what is happening to your body and feel empowered to take charge.

Your menopause journey is about strength, resilience, humor and the beginning of a new chapter.

Regards,
Karen Pike MD

SECTION ONE

The Basics of Menopause



What Is Menopause?

Menopause. It's a word that can evoke a mix of emotions, from trepidation to liberation.

The word “menopause” has its roots in ancient Greek. It's a combination of two words:

- **“Men”** meaning “month” (which itself is related to the word “moon”)
- **“Pausis”** meaning “cessation” or “pause”

So, “menopause” literally translates to the “cessation of monthly cycles.”

This reflects the biological reality of menopause, which is the permanent end of menstruation and fertility in women. Simply put, it marks the end of a woman's reproductive years.

No matter how you feel about it, menopause is a significant transition in a woman's life, and understanding it is key to navigating this new terrain with confidence.

Menopause doesn't happen at once; it's a gradual process that unfolds in stages, and the timeline can vary quite a bit from woman to woman. The menopausal phase of life usually takes place over a number of years. It can be broken into 3 stages:

1. Perimenopause
2. Menopause
3. Postmenopause

Let's go through the stages.

Your Stages of Menopause

Perimenopause: The Prelude to Change

- “Perimenopause” also derives from Greek roots, building upon the “menopause” base we just discussed. It breaks down as “**Peri**” means “around” or “near.” Think of words like “perimeter” or “periscope.”
- Perimenopause is the transitional phase leading up to menopause. It’s a time when your ovaries gradually start producing less estrogen and progesterone, the hormones responsible for regulating your menstrual cycle. We’ll through what those are and what they mean for you in the next section of this ebook.
- This hormonal shift can lead to a variety of symptoms, such as irregular periods, hot flashes, and sleep disturbances.
- Perimenopause can last anywhere from a few months to 10 years, with the average being around 4 years.

Perimenopause can be a bit like a mystery novel – you know something unusual is happening, but you’re not quite sure what it is.

Your body starts dropping subtle clues, like irregular periods, the occasional hot flash, or a night sweat here and there.

You might find yourself feeling a bit more moody or having trouble sleeping.

Many women even experience a reduction in sexual desire (known as “libido”) and vaginal dryness. It’s like your body is whispering, “Hey, something’s changing,” but it’s not quite shouting it from the rooftops yet.

It’s important to remember that this phase can look and feel different for everyone.

Menopause: The Official Marker

- Menopause is officially declared when you've gone 12 consecutive months without a menstrual period.
- At this point, your ovaries have essentially retired from the egg-producing business, and your estrogen levels are significantly lower.
- The average age of entering menopause in the United States is 51 years, but it can occur earlier or later.

Postmenopause: Embracing the New Normal

- Postmenopause is the final stage. The transition is complete.
- Your hormone levels have stabilized at their lower levels, and you're no longer experiencing the fluctuating symptoms of perimenopause.
- Lower estrogen levels can have long-term health implications, such as an increased risk of osteoporosis and heart disease. It's crucial to continue prioritizing your health and well-being during this phase. We discuss this in detail throughout this ebook.

Your Hormonal Changes in Menopause

To truly understand menopause, it's important to grasp the role of hormones.

In short, our bodies are controlled by hormones. Think of them as messengers sending signals through your body and telling it how to behave.

They are produced by various glands and travel through the bloodstream to regulate a wide range of bodily functions, including:

- Growth and development
- Metabolism
- Reproduction
- Mood
- Sleep

In women, two key hormones, **estrogen** and **progesterone**, play particularly crucial roles in the menstrual cycle, pregnancy and throughout their reproductive lives.

Estrogen

Production: Primarily produced by the ovaries.

Roles:

- **Development of female sexual characteristics:** Responsible for the development of breasts, widening of hips, and other female physical traits during puberty.
- **Menstrual cycle regulation:** Stimulates the growth and thickening of the uterine lining (endometrium) in preparation for a potential pregnancy.
- **Ovulation:** Plays a role in triggering the release of an egg from the ovary.
- **Bone health:** Helps maintain bone density and strength.
- **Cholesterol levels:** Can have a positive impact on cholesterol levels.

Progesterone

Production: Primarily produced by the corpus luteum, a temporary gland that forms in the ovary after an egg is released.

Roles:

- **Menstrual cycle regulation:** Prepares the uterine lining for implantation of a fertilized egg after ovulation. If pregnancy doesn't occur, a drop in progesterone levels triggers menstruation.
- **Pregnancy:** Essential for maintaining a healthy pregnancy. It supports the development of the fetus and prevents premature contractions.
- **Breast health:** Contributes to the development of breast tissue during puberty and pregnancy

(Men also have both estrogen and progesterone in their bodies, although in significantly lower amounts than women. They too play important roles in men's health.)

As you approach menopause, your ovaries gradually produce less of these hormones.

And this leads to the cascade of changes.

- **Estrogen:** Noted above, this hormone is responsible for a wide range of functions, including regulating your menstrual cycle, maintaining bone density, and keeping your vaginal tissues healthy. As estrogen levels decline, you may experience symptoms such as hot flashes, vaginal dryness, and mood changes.
- **Progesterone:** This hormone specifically plays a crucial role in preparing your body for pregnancy and maintaining a healthy menstrual cycle. As progesterone levels decrease, you may experience irregular periods and mood swings.

There is also a hormone produced by the brain called Follicle Stimulating Hormone (FSH). As your ovaries decline in function, your FSH level will rise, in an attempt to stimulate egg production. Elevated FSH levels are often used by your physician as a marker of perimenopause and menopause.

How to Recognize Signs of Menopause

While menopause is a natural process, it's not always easy to recognize when you're approaching it.

Here are some common signs and symptoms:

- **Irregular periods:** Your periods may become shorter, longer, heavier, or lighter. You may also skip periods altogether.
- **Hot flashes:** These sudden sensations of intense heat can be accompanied by sweating and flushing.
- **Night sweats:** Hot flashes that occur at night can disrupt your sleep.
- **Mood swings:** You may experience increased irritability, anxiety, or depression.
- **Sleep disturbances:** Insomnia and frequent awakenings are common during perimenopause.
- **Vaginal dryness:** Lower estrogen levels can cause vaginal tissues to become thinner and drier.

If you're experiencing any of these symptoms, it's important to talk to your doctor. They can help you determine if you're approaching menopause and discuss strategies for managing your symptoms.

Menopause is a journey, not a destination. It's a time of transition and transformation, and it's important to remember that you're not alone.

Now let's get started! With the right information and support, you will navigate this new phase of life with confidence and embrace the opportunities that lie ahead.

The following chapters are a reference guide, providing evidence-based advice and practical strategies to help manage symptoms, maintain your health, and thrive.

Key Takeaways:

1. **Track Your Cycle and Symptoms:** Keep a journal or use a period-tracking app to monitor your menstrual cycle and any symptoms you might be experiencing. This can help you identify patterns and potential signs of perimenopause.
2. **Understand the Stages of Menopause:** Familiarize yourself with the three stages of menopause—perimenopause, menopause, and postmenopause—and how each stage can affect your body and well-being.
3. **Hormones Play a Key Role:** Understand that hormonal fluctuations, particularly the decline in estrogen and progesterone, are responsible for many of the changes you experience during menopause.
4. **Every Woman's Experience is Unique:** Recognize that menopause is not a one-size-fits-all experience. Your journey will be unique to you, and it's important to honor your individual needs and experiences.