

Understanding Menopause

Acupuncture therapy has been helping many patients with menopausal symptoms

What is Menopause?

It is a gradual process that occurs as a woman's ovaries produce decreasing amounts of estrogen until menstruation and ovulation finally cease. It normally occurs between the ages of approximately 40 and 53. Menopause may also result from surgical removal of the ovaries.

Menopause can be divided into three stages:

- 1) **Perimenopause:** a period of several years during which estrogen and progesterone level steadily decline. Symptoms may include changes in the menstrual cycle (length and flow); intermittent ovulation, missed periods; hot flashes; and emotional/cognitive changes.
- 2) **Menopause:** menopause occurs when ovarian hormone production is too low to initiate a menstrual cycle and periods stop completely.
- 3) **Postmenopause:** Also known as true menopause, this phase is usually defined as 12 full months without a menstrual period. All estrogen production in the ovaries has ceased.

What are hot flashes?

Estrogens affect the nerves that control the diameter of the blood vessels as well as the activity of sweat glands. When estrogen is deficient, sudden and intense dilation of blood vessels in the skin can occur, particularly in the face and neck. Such hot flashes are often accompanied by drenching sweat and disrupt sleep, work, and daily activities. **Factors that may trigger hot flashes include high ambient temperature, hot drinks, spicy foods, alcohol, smoking and emotional stress.**

Understanding the menstrual cycle

The menstrual cycle refers to the sequence of events that occurs in the **endometrium**, the cell layers lining the uterus. This cycle normally lasts for approximately 28 days. Its purpose is to prepare the uterus for possible pregnancy. The menstrual cycle is governed by the **endocrine system**.

During the first two weeks, the pituitary gland release follicle stimulating hormone (FSH) to stimulate egg growth in the ovary. Ripening eggs produce estrogen, causing thickening of the uterine lining. About 14 days into the cycle, levels of luteinizing hormone (LH) increase, triggering the release of a ripened egg (follicle). If fertilization does not occur, decreasing estrogen and progesterone levels initiate menstruation and the cycle begins again.

Ovulation

Approximately 14 days into the menstrual cycle, a sudden rise in the blood level of gonadotrophic hormone LH triggers the release of a single mature ovum or egg from one of the ovaries. The egg travels down the uterine cavity. An unfertilized egg is discharged through the vagina.

Fertilization

The fusion of genetic material from a mature ovum and a mature sperm produces a fertilized egg (or Zygote). Fertilization normally occurs in the uterine tube. As the zygote begins to divide, it travels down the uterine tube towards the uterus, eventually forming an embryo that may successfully implant into the lining of the uterus (endometrium).

Menstruation

During menstruation, cells lining the uterus (endometrium) become detached from the uterine wall and fall off. Blood and tissue from the uterine lining are discharged through the vagina, a process which normally lasts around **5 days**. Menstruation marks the beginning of the menstrual cycle.

The role of estrogen

As menopause approaches, the levels of the female sex hormone **estrogen** gradually decline. There are several different estrogens, including the most potent form, **estradiol**. Estrogens and female sex cells (the ova or eggs) are produced in the ovaries from the onset of puberty through menopause. Estrogens are responsible for development and maintenance of female characteristics and sexual reproduction. They also play important roles in other parts of the body.

- Genital Tract : Stimulate a favorable environment for the survival of sperm during the menstrual cycle.
- Breasts : Stimulate the growth of non-glandular breast tissue.
- Heart: Improve circulation and prevent high blood pressure.
- Skeleton: Help retain calcium in the bones.

How does the body change during menopause?

One of the predominant changes that occurs with menopause is the gradual thinning and drying (atrophy) of the tissue in the genitourinary tract, including the vagina, vulva and urethra. Other physiological changes triggered by decreased estrogen include:

- **Reproductive system:** Organs decrease in size, production of eggs and hormones stops
- **Breasts:** Loss of firmness, change in size/shape
- **Pelvis:** Supporting ligaments may weaken and cause urinary incontinence
- **Skin and hair :** Often become thinner and drier; skin may lose some natural elasticity and be more prone to UV damage
- **Musculoskeletal:** Loss of bone density, which can lead to osteoporosis
- **Blood cholesterol:** Levels of LDL cholesterol rise as estrogen levels decline

Emotional and Cognitive effects of menopause

Changing hormonal levels can trigger changes in mood and cognitive function. These symptoms can occur briefly or for longer durations, sometimes over several years.

- Anxiety or panic attacks
- Mood swings and irritability
- Short-term memory problems
- Depression
- Difficulty concentrating
- Decreased sex drive

Treating menopause symptoms and risks

There are a variety of treatments available today for reducing menopause symptoms and addressing potential risks such as osteoporosis, higher cholesterol and Heart disease. Decisions are highly individualized and should be made only after discussion with a physician.

HRT(Hormone Replacement Therapy) menopausal symptoms often require no treatment. If side effects are severe, HRT may be recommended to reduce the intensity and incidence of hot flashes, alleviate insomnia, and decrease vaginal dryness and drying/thinning of the skin. HRT may also decrease the risks postmenopausal Heart disease and osteoporosis.

Non-prescription alternatives: Other approaches to both symptoms and long-term effects of menopause can include **increased exercise**, stress reduction programs, and nutritionally balanced diet that include foods rich in **calcium** and phytoestrogens, such as **soy**.

New therapies: New therapies such as SERMs (selective estrogen receptor modulators) are also available for the treatment of menopausal symptoms. SERMs inhibit the effects of estrogen on certain tissues while mimicking beneficial estrogen action in other parts of the body, including bone tissue and blood cholesterol.

Treating menopausal symptoms with Acupuncture Therapy

Acupuncture therapy is a natural alternative medicine used in treating menopausal symptoms. At **Acupuncture Body-Mind Care Clinic**, we have been helping many patients suffering from menopausal symptoms with successful results.

Acupuncture has been proven with successful cases because it focuses on the root of symptoms. **Maurice R.Ac.** breaks down all menopausal symptoms in order to pinpoint the causes of symptoms.

Acupuncture therapy with herbal remedy can help with symptoms associated with menopause such as :

- Anxiety or panic attacks
- Mood swings and irritability
- Short-term memory problems
- Depression
- Difficulty concentrating
- Decreased sex driver
- Hot flashes with cold hands and feet
- Night sweats