Menopause is the cessation of menses: a phase when hormones of the fertility cycle wind down, the ovaries stop releasing eggs, and pregnancy is no longer possible. For some it is greatly anticipated; for others it is difficult and tumultuous.

The average age of menopause is 51, with the period leading into menopause beginning up to a decade earlier. Menopause is considered achieved one year after the last menses, but some women experience symptoms for years before menstruation stops and continue to have symptoms up to a decade after. Although menopause can be induced at any age by radiation, surgery, or medication, it is generally a normal life process for women. It is not a disease.

What causes menopause?
Although every woman eventually achieves menopause, researchers speculate on how it begins. Does the brain stop signalling the hormones to stimulate the follicle or does the follicle stop listening to the brain’s signals? Dr. John Lee, author of What Your Doctor Might Not Tell You About Premenopause, believes that it is both, and that both actions are influenced by genetic predisposition and environmental factors such as activity level and diet, childbearing pattern, exposure to xenohormones (pollutants), and heavy emotional stress.

Premature menopause, between the ages of 15 and 40, happens to one in 100 women. Only one-third of these women have a traceable cause such as immune dysfunction, infection, metabolic or systemic disease, smoking, reduced blood supply to the ovaries, chemotherapy, surgery, or radiation.

Surgical removal of the ovaries and uterus may also bring on menopause. An oophorectomy (removal of the ovaries) immediately brings on menopause and overwhelming symptoms, as production of all hormones drops. A hysterectomy (removal of the uterus), in which at least one ovary remains, induces a more natural, albeit earlier, menopause in some women.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Nutrient</th>
<th>Dosage</th>
<th>Action</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Multivitamins with minerals</td>
<td>As directed on label</td>
<td>Ensures adequate nutrient foundation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vitamin C with bioflavonoids</td>
<td>1,000 mg vitamin C and 150 to 300 mg bioflavonoids (hesperidin) daily</td>
<td>Decreases number of hot flashes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vitamin B₆ with B-complex</td>
<td>50 mg vitamin B₆ and two capsules B-complex daily</td>
<td>Supports nervous system, required for metabolism and immune function, reduces PMS symptoms</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vitamin E</td>
<td>400 IU daily</td>
<td>Reduces hot flashes and improves mood, use vaginal lubricants containing vitamin E</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Calcium with magnesium</td>
<td>1,000 mg calcium and 500 mg magnesium daily</td>
<td>Reduces leg cramps, prevents osteoporosis</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Indole-3-carbinol</td>
<td>150 to 300 mg daily</td>
<td>Eliminates excess cancer-causing estrogens, protects against breast cancer, improves estrogen-to-progesterone ratio</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ginkgo biloba standardized to 24 per cent</td>
<td>100 mg twice daily</td>
<td>Supports cognitive function, improves circulation to hands and feet</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chaste tree (Vitex)</td>
<td>175 mg (30 to 60 drops) daily or 30 to 40 mg per capsule</td>
<td>Supports proper hormone secretion, reduces PMS symptoms, controls hot flashes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Evening primrose oil, fish oil, or combination</td>
<td>500 mg three times daily</td>
<td>Relieves breast pain, may alleviate hot flashes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Red clover</td>
<td>300 to 500 mg dried extract standardized to 25 to 40 mg isoflavones</td>
<td>Relieves hot flashes and night sweats</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dong quai or Angelica sinensis</td>
<td>100 mg used in combination formulas for menopause</td>
<td>Balances estrogen activity, relieves hot flashes and vaginal dryness</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Black cohosh</td>
<td>80 mg twice daily</td>
<td>Reduces depression, insomnia, vaginal dryness, and hot flashes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lignans from ground flax seed</td>
<td>25 g daily</td>
<td>Reduces hot flashes, treats breast cancer</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gamma oryzanol (ferulic acid)</td>
<td>75 mg twice daily</td>
<td>Relieves hot flashes, improves mood, enhances pituitary function, lowers total cholesterol and triglycerides</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>St. John’s wort</td>
<td>100 mg twice daily</td>
<td>Alleviates depression, but consult your doctor before use</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
holistic healing

Prescription for health
The recommendations in the accompanying Nutrients for Natural Menopause chart will help women go through menopause symptom-free, with plenty of energy, a healthy libido, and without the worry of increased risk of heart disease and osteoporosis. The Health Tips to Enhance Healing suggest ways to maintain good health during menopause. Standard hormone replacement therapy is not advised due to the potential cancer-causing risks involved.

Look at menopause as the dawn of a new era that will allow you to take time for yourself and do the things you’ve only dreamed about. With fewer obligations to family and career—new opportunities for growth, education, and travel are yours.

Health tips to enhance healing
- Follow a predominantly vegetarian diet and increase intake of high lignan foods, including ground flax seed.
- Increase intake of fermented soy products to reduce cholesterol and risk of heart disease. Postmenopausal women who eat 200 to 300 mg of isoflavones from soy foods have shown a significant reduction in breast cancer, hot flashes, and vaginal dryness.
- Have your thyroid checked for low thyroid function, which can cause severe night sweats.
- Avoid constipation to ensure proper hormone balance and reduce congestion on the female organs.
- Have a DEXA scan to determine bone density.
- Reduce stress, get plenty of sleep, and practice relaxation techniques such as visualization, biofeedback, qigong, yoga, and deep breathing exercises. Go for regular massages.
- Have sex twice a week to maintain optimal immune function and prevent vaginal atrophy.
- Stop smoking.
- Consider acupuncture, homeopathy, traditional Chinese medicine, and glandular treatment for your symptoms. Consult a qualified practitioner.

Symptoms of menopause
Menopause is different for every woman. Common menopausal symptoms include the following:
- hot flashes
- irregular uterine bleeding
- vaginal dryness
- decreased libido
- depression and mood swings
- headaches
- fatigue
- nausea
- night sweats
- sleep disturbance
- changes in cognitive function
- weight gain
- bone loss
- skin changes and acne
- hair growth on the body
- hair loss on the head
- heart palpitations
- urinary tract infections
- joint pain

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Lorna Vanderhaeghe, BSc, is the author of several books, including the best seller Healthy Immunity: Scientifically Proven Natural Conditions from A-Z (Wiley and Sons, 2001) and No More HRT: Menopause Treat the Cause (Fitzhenry and Whiteside, 2002). She is also senior editor of alive’s Encyclopedia of Natural Healing (2002) and associate editor of alive Journal. Look for her Web site at healthyimmunity.com.