

What is Perimenopause?

There are actually several stages of menopause- pre-menopause, perimenopause, menopause and post-menopause. Perimenopause is where all the symptoms women dread occur. This stage can last up to 10 years before menopause sets in.

Women usually begin menstruating in their pre-teen and early teen years. Typically, in their mid to late forties (though it can also begin in the late thirties), perimenopause begins. This stage is the slow transition to the end of a woman's childbearing years, also known as menopause. During this time, the amount of estrogen and progesterone hormones produced by the body becomes erratic. The overall levels slowly begin to decline, with occasional spikes. This hormonal change is responsible for the variety of symptoms experienced. Birth control pills are often used to help alleviate the symptoms. The first noticeable symptom that perimenopause has begun is usually a change in the menstruation cycle. A woman may skip a month; have lighter than normal or heavier than normal periods and the number of days may be shorter or longer. It is important to remember that pregnancy can still occur during perimenopause, so birth control is necessary, especially because of the erratic occurrence of ovulation during this time. If this is the only symptom occurring, it is important to rule out other causes such as cysts and tumors.

Other symptoms common with perimenopause are hot flashes, night sweats, mood swings, urinary problems, vaginal dryness, and decreased libido. Eating a healthy and balanced diet, exercising regularly and controlling stress are natural ways to help alleviate these symptoms. Some cases are so severe and interfere with normal daily life require help from medications like birth control and other hormone treatments.

Another complication that arises with decreased levels of estrogen is bone loss. Women in the perimenopause and menopause phase are more susceptible to osteoporosis because they are not replacing bone as quickly as they lose it. It is important to monitor bone density during this time to determine if treatment is necessary to reduce the rate of bone loss. Another threat is the increased threat of heart disease. A reduction in estrogen also leads to changes in cholesterol levels. Unfortunately, it is an increase in the bad cholesterol, or LDL, which is bad for cardiovascular health.

Perimenopause is over and menopause is reached when a woman has gone a full year without menstruating. This means that ovulation has completely stopped and pregnancy is no longer a possibility. It is important for a woman to discuss her experiences with her doctor. Even though some of it may be embarrassing,

being open and honest is the best way to formulate a plan of attack for treating the symptoms. There are many techniques, natural and medical, to help control menopause. Consult a menopause expert like Dr. Yessenow with special credentials in this area.