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Film: Menopause

Many women experience the menopause as a time of change. Which is why it is often called "the change of life". Life can bring new possibilities, but some of the changes might not be easy to cope with at first.

The menopause is the time when monthly periods, or menstruation, end. This monthly cycle makes pregnancy possible. When the menopause is over, a woman will have no more periods.

Various hormones and parts of the body are affected by the menopause

- The ovaries
- The fallopian tubes
- The uterus or womb
- The vagina
- The breasts and the bones.

Hormones regulate body functions like the monthly cycle and body temperature. Every month, an egg inside a follicle in the ovary ripens. A follicle is like a small sac around the egg. A ripe egg is released by the ovary and travels down the fallopian tube until it reaches the uterus. Each month, the lining inside the uterus has been building up to receive an egg.

If the egg has not been fertilised by a sperm on the way into the uterus, this lining will not be needed to start a pregnancy. The lining will gradually leave the uterus over a few days. This is the monthly period.

As the menopause approaches, the ovaries become less active. They produce less of the hormones that have been regulating the monthly period. At the same time, fewer eggs will ripen.

This makes periods irregular.

Periods could sometimes come more often, and sometimes there could be more than a month in between. The periods could be lighter or heavier than usual, or they could go on for longer. The body needs some time to get used to the changes in hormones. Only after there has been no period for at least 12 months in a row can you be sure that the menopause is over and you can no longer get pregnant.

For most women, this happens between 40 and 58 years of age. For a small number of women, it could happen sooner or later.

Doctors call the time after the last period post-menopause. The whole phase of hormone changes around this time is often called the menopause.

The menopause is a very individual experience. Many women have physical reactions like hot flashes or hot flushes, and sudden outbreaks of sweat. For some women, these will be hardly noticeable. But for other women, they can be very strong.

Hot flashes and sudden sweats are the most common complaints caused by the menopause. If they happen at night, they can disrupt sleep. A hot flash feels like a sudden wave of heat over the whole body at once. The vagina can get drier during or after the menopause, and this can make sex uncomfortable. It can also make vaginal infections more likely. The hormone changes around the menopause also have an effect the bones. Many women put on a bit of weight around the time of the menopause.

There are several ways to try to cope with menopausal problems. These include:

- Waiting
- hot flashes and sweats will stop by themselves for most women
- Lifestyle changes like getting more exercise
- Complementary or alternative therapies and Hormones or other drugs

Lubricants and moisturisers are also available to help with vaginal dryness.

Every woman has her own preferences. Some like to talk to a doctor to help them decide about their options.

For many women, the menopause is a start of a new phase of life. It will not be difficult for everyone. Many women also find more freedom, opportunities and a new orientation in their lives.

The German Institute for Quality and Efficiency in Health Care (IQWiG)

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You can find a list of the evidence and other scientific literature on which this information is based at **www.informedhealthonline.org**

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