

This information was sourced from [www.prematuremenopause](http://www.prematuremenopause)

## **Premature Menopause**

In the U.S., the average age of onset for "natural" menopause is 51. However, because of genetics, illness, or medical procedures, some women go through menopause before the age of 40. Menopause that occurs before this age, whether natural or induced, is known as "premature" menopause.

In addition to dealing with hot flashes, mood swings and other symptoms that accompany menopause, many women undergoing premature menopause have to cope with additional physical and emotional concerns. For example, since menopause signals the end of a woman's fertile years, a woman who wishes to get pregnant is likely to have trouble.

### **What Are the Symptoms of Premature Menopause?**

Symptoms of premature menopause are often the same as those experienced by women undergoing natural menopause and may include:

- Irregular or missed periods.
- Periods that are heavier or lighter than usual.
- Hot flashes (a sudden feeling of warmth that spreads over the upper body).

These symptoms are a sign that the ovaries are producing less estrogen.

Along with the above symptoms, some women may experience:

- Vaginal dryness (the vagina may also become thinner and less flexible)
- Bladder irritability and worsening of loss of bladder control (incontinence)
- Emotional changes (irritability, mood swings, mild depression)
- Dry skin, eyes, or mouth
- Sleeplessness
- Decreased sex drive

In addition to the symptoms listed above, if you are under the age of 40 and experience any of the following conditions, you should see your doctor to determine whether you are undergoing premature menopause:

- You have undergone chemotherapy or radiation.
- You or a family member has an autoimmune disorder such as hypothyroidism, Graves' disease or lupus.
- You have unsuccessfully tried to become pregnant for more than a year.
- Your mother or sister experienced premature menopause.

### **How Is Premature Menopause Diagnosed?**

First, your doctor will most likely perform a physical exam and draw blood to rule out other conditions, such as pregnancy and thyroid disease. He or she may also order a test to measure your estradiol levels. Low levels of estradiol, a form of estrogen, can indicate that your ovaries are starting to fail. When estradiol levels are below 36, it may signal that you are in menopause.

However, the most important test used to diagnose premature menopause is a blood test that measures follicle stimulating hormone (FSH). FSH causes your ovaries to produce estrogen. When your ovaries slow down their production of estrogen, your levels of FSH increase. When your FSH levels rise above 30 or 40 mIU/mL, it usually indicates that you are in menopause.

### **What Types of Health Issues Affect Women Undergoing Premature Menopause?**

Like all menopausal women, women in premature menopause experience lowered estrogen levels as the ovaries stop most of their production of this hormone. Low levels of estrogen can lead to changes in a woman's overall health and may increase her risk for certain medical conditions, such as osteoporosis. Other health risks associated with the loss of estrogen include increased risk for colon and ovarian cancer, periodontal (gum) disease and tooth loss and cataract formation.

However, compared with women who go through natural menopause, women undergoing premature menopause spend a greater portion of their lives without the protective benefits of their own estrogen. This puts them at an even greater risk for the above mentioned menopause-related health problems.

### **How Is Premature Menopause Treated?**

The symptoms and health risks of premature menopause as well as the emotional issues that may result from it can be managed with the methods similar to those used for natural menopause. Women dealing with infertility that is brought on by premature menopause may want to discuss their options with their doctor or with a reproductive specialist.

### **Can Premature Menopause Be Reversed?**

No. Premature menopause is the result of an underlying process. Once the process has started, it's unlikely to be reversed.

#### Hot Flash Sign for Menopause

Experts make a startling admission: Nobody knows the exact cause of hot flashes.

All the same, hot flashes are very much what they appear to be. That is, it's all about being too hot. A woman who controls her core body temperature is on

the way to controlling her hot flashes. With that in mind -- and with volumes of research behind them -- the experts offer this advise:

- **Keep cool.** Use a fan, dress in layers, consume cool and cold foods and beverages. Avoid hot foods and drinks that raise one's body temperature.
- **Exercise.** The more a woman sits around, the worse her hot flashes can be.
- **Lose weight.** Heavier women tend to have worse hot flashes. It makes sense that losing weight would help -- but there's no strong evidence this is so. Still, dropping a few pounds never hurts if you're overweight.
- **Stop smoking.** Smokers have more hot flashes than nonsmokers.
- **Breathe.** Start deep, slow, controlled breathing as soon as you feel a hot flash coming on. It really helps.

And here's another thing that helps: Time. Eventually, the experts say, almost all women get over hot flashes -- even without any treatment at all.