



Original Link: <http://www.menopause.org/for-women/menopause-glossary>

Menopause Glossary

[Home](#) > [For Women](#) > [Menopause Glossary](#)

NAMS has compiled for you a comprehensive list of definitions for terminology related to menopause, perimenopause, and postmenopause, along with a selection of terms relating to other women's health issues. Select a letter below to take you near the menopause information you're looking for. Or, if you prefer, just scroll through the list to discover terms of interest.

[A](#) | [B](#) | [C](#) | [D](#) | [E](#) | [F](#) | [G](#) | [H](#) | [I](#) | [K](#) | [L](#) | [M](#) | [N](#) | [O](#) | [P](#) | [R](#) | [S](#) | [T](#) | [U](#) | [V](#) | [W](#) | [Y](#) | [Z](#)

A

Abdomen. The part of the body below the ribs and above the pelvis.

Abnormal uterine bleeding (AUB). Bleeding that is abnormal in frequency, severity, or duration. Not the same as normal irregular periods during perimenopause or bleeding from menopause hormone therapy including estrogen and progestogen. Possible causes are hormone imbalance, pregnancy, fibroid tumors, uterine lining abnormalities, cancer, and other conditions of the vagina or cervix. See also Dysfunctional uterine bleeding.

Alendronate. An oral, nonhormonal, prescription drug (marketed as Fosamax) government approved for prevention and treatment of postmenopausal osteoporosis. It increases bone density in the spine and hip and decreases the risk of spine and nonspine fractures. See also Bisphosphonate, Osteoporosis.

Alternative medicine. See Complementary and alternative medicine.

Alzheimer's disease. A progressive disease in which nerve cells in the brain degenerate and brain matter shrinks, resulting in impaired thinking, behavior, and memory.

Amenorrhea. The absence of a woman's monthly period not related to menopause.

Androgen. A group of hormones that promote the development and maintenance of male secondary sex characteristics and structures. They are produced in smaller quantities in women and are important in the synthesis of estrogen. They also play a role in sexual function, muscle mass and strength, bone density, distribution of fat tissue, energy, and psychological well-being. With women, the major androgens are produced in the ovaries and adrenal glands and include testosterone, androstenedione, and dehydroepiandrosterone (DHEA). Also available as prescription and nonprescription therapies, but not government approved for use in women.

Antidepressant drug. Prescription therapy government approved to treat depression and anxiety. An example is a selective serotonin reuptake inhibitor (SSRI).

Antihypertensive drug. Prescription therapy government approved to treat high blood pressure. An example is hydrochlorothiazide.

Anti-inflammatory drug. A type of prescription and nonprescription therapy used to relieve inflammation, swelling, stiffness, and joint pain. Works by affecting prostaglandins and can therefore be useful in treating cramping associated with menstrual cycles. An example is ibuprofen.

Anxiety. A feeling of apprehension, fear, nervousness, or dread accompanied by restlessness or tension.

Aromatase inhibitor. A class of prescription drugs government approved for the prevention and treatment of breast cancer. Works by blocking the formation of estrogen in the body's tissues. An example is anastrozole marketed as (Arimidex).

Arthritis. A disease of inflammation in the joints that may be associated with pain, stiffness, swelling, and redness as well as deformities of those affected joints.

Asymptomatic. Causes no symptoms.

Atherosclerosis. Also called hardening of the arteries. A disease characterized by a narrowing of the arteries caused by cholesterol-rich plaques on the inside of the artery wall. Atherosclerosis is a common cause of heart disease. It can affect the arteries of the brain as well as the arteries of the extremities.

AUB. See Abnormal uterine bleeding.

B

[Back to Index](#)

Benign. Noncancerous.

Bilateral oophorectomy. The surgical removal of both ovaries (and usually, fallopian tubes).

Biofeedback. The technique of making unconscious or involuntary bodily processes (as heartbeats or brain waves) perceptible to the senses (in order to manipulate them by conscious mental control).

Bioidentical hormones. Hormones that are chemically identical to the hormones produced by a woman's ovaries. Bioidentical hormone therapy can mean a medication that provides one or more of these hormones as the active ingredient. There are bioidentical hormone therapies that are government approved/regulated/quality controlled and others (eg, custom-compounded) that are not; and, although it has been suggested that the latter are safer, they all carry the same risk. See also Custom-compounded hormones.

Biopsy. A minor surgical procedure during which a small tissue specimen is removed and examined microscopically for the presence of disease (often cancer).

Birth control. A way for men and women to prevent pregnancy. Methods for women include birth control pills, condoms, vaginal spermicides, intrauterine devices (IUDs), and more.

Bisphosphonate. A class of prescription nonhormonal, bone-specific drugs government approved for the prevention and treatment of postmenopausal osteoporosis. Works by decreasing

the activity of bone-dissolving cells, preserving bone density and bone strength as well as reducing fracture risk. See also Alendronate, Ibandronate, Risedronate.

Black cohosh. An herb, typically used in nonprescription supplement form. Among its uses is relieving mild hot flashes, although most studies show no better relief than a placebo (inactive substance).

Bladder. A saclike organ in the pelvic region where urine is stored before it leaves the body.

Bladder prolapse. A condition in which the bladder moves downward from its normal position. It is usually caused by a weakness in the pelvic floor after childbirth. See also Prolapse.

Body mass index (BMI). A number calculated from a person's weight and height that provides for most people a reliable indicator of body size. Used to screen for size categories that may lead to chronic health problems.

Bone density or Bone mineral density (BMD). The amount of bone tissue in a segment of bone. Measuring BMD is the best way to evaluate bone strength and predict fracture risk. Results are reported as T-scores and Z-scores. See also DXA scan.

Breast cancer. A disease in which abnormal cells in the breast divide and multiply in an uncontrolled fashion. The cells can invade nearby tissue and can spread through the bloodstream and lymphatic system (lymph nodes) to other parts of the body.

Breast ultrasound. A noninvasive, safe technique that uses sound waves to create images of structures deep within the body. Often used as a follow-up to a mammogram or breast exam, it can determine if an abnormality is a cyst or solid tissue.

C

[Back to Index](#)

Calcitonin. A hormone produced by cells in the thyroid gland (located in the neck) that controls the level of calcium in the blood and helps bones absorb calcium. Also a nonoral prescription drug government approved for the treatment of postmenopausal osteoporosis, although not as potent as other osteoporosis drugs. An example is salmon calcitonin.

Calcium. A mineral that ensures proper functioning of cells in the body including the heart, nerves, muscles, and bones. Calcium is found in the skeleton and teeth, in the cells, and in the blood. Adequate calcium intake is essential for healthy bones with beneficial effects on hypertension, colorectal cancer, obesity, and kidney stones as well. Calcium is best absorbed through dietary sources, including dairy foods, some leafy green vegetables, oily fish, calcium-fortified foods, tofu, and nuts. Nonprescription supplements are also available. An example is calcium carbonate (marketed as Tums, among others).

CAM. See Complementary and alternative medicine.

Cancer. A general term for more than 100 diseases in which there is an uncontrolled, abnormal growth of cells. Cancer cells can spread through the bloodstream and lymphatic system to other parts of the body (metastases).

Cardiovascular disease (CVD). An umbrella term used to describe many conditions related to the circulatory system, both inside and outside the heart. Includes heart disease, coronary artery disease (CAD), and coronary heart disease (CHD) as well as peripheral vascular disease. See also Coronary artery disease, Heart disease.

Cataract. A clouding of the lens of the eye that obstructs the passage of light. Associated with aging.

CAT scan. Abbreviation for computerized axial tomography scan. A special kind of body imaging that is processed by a computer and displayed on a screen for viewing.

Cervix. The lower, narrow end of the uterus (or womb). A Pap smear tests for cancer of the cervix and for changes that would progress to cancer with time (dysplasia).

Chemotherapy. The use of chemical agents in the treatment or control of disease (such as cancer). The drugs have a toxic effect on cells and may cause damage to the ovaries, resulting in early menopause for many women.

Chondroitin sulfate. Part of a large protein molecule that gives cartilage elasticity. Used as a nonprescription supplement for arresting (or possibly reversing) the degenerative process of osteoarthritis with its common partner agent, glucosamine. See also Glucosamine.

Chronic condition. A condition that lasts or keeps coming back over a long period of time.

Clinical trial. An organized research program conducted with patients to evaluate a medical treatment, drug, or device.

Clonidine. A prescription drug government approved to lower high blood pressure. Sometimes prescribed off-label to treat mild hot flashes.

Cognitive function. Conscious intellectual activity (thinking, reasoning, remembering).

Colonoscopy. A test to view inside the colon that also allows for the biopsy and removal of precancerous polyps. See also Sigmoidoscopy.

Complementary and alternative medicine (CAM). A broad range of healing philosophies and approaches not typically used in conventional medicine. A therapy is called “complementary” when it is used in addition to conventional medicine, whereas it is called “alternative” when it is used instead of conventional treatment. See also Black cohosh, Dong quai, Isoflavones, Phytoestrogens, Red clover, and St. John’s wort.

Congestive heart failure. A condition in which the heart is unable to maintain an adequate circulation of blood in the body.

Contraception. Any method used to prevent pregnancy during sexual activity. Perimenopausal women who wish to avoid pregnancy are advised to use reliable contraception until 1 year has passed without a menstrual period.

Coronary artery disease (CAD). Sometimes called coronary heart disease (CHD). The most common form of heart disease, CAD refers to damaged or diseased blood vessels that supply blood to the heart. See also Cardiovascular disease, Heart disease.

Coronary heart disease (CHD). See Coronary artery disease.

Custom-compounded hormones. Hormone therapies that are mixed for individuals from a prescription into formulations such as topical creams, gels, lotions, tablets, and suppositories. These compounds are not regulated by the government. Efficacy and safety have not been proven in clinical trials. See also Bioidentical hormones.

Cystectomy. Surgical removal of an ovarian cyst, frequently performed with a minimally invasive technique called laparoscopy. See also Laparoscopy.

Cystitis. Inflammation of the urinary bladder. See also Urinary tract infection.

Cystocele. Protrusion of the urinary bladder through the vaginal wall. Can contribute to urinary symptoms such as incontinence.

D

[Back to Index](#)

D&C. Abbreviation for dilation and curettage. A surgical procedure that involves dilating (opening) the cervix and scraping, removing, and analyzing the uterine lining (endometrium) to determine the cause of abnormal uterine bleeding, among other conditions.

Depression. A disorder marked by a persistent sad, anxious, or empty mood, and feelings of hopelessness and helplessness that affects eating, sleeping, and activity. Major depression is not the same as the mood swings or feeling blue reported by some perimenopausal women.

Dehydroepiandrosterone (DHEA). One of the androgens circulating in the body that is a precursor of androstenedione, testosterone, and estrogen. Produced mainly in the adrenal glands, decrease in DHEA levels occurs with aging, not menopause. Available as nonprescription supplements.

Diabetes. A group of diseases in which the body cannot properly control the amount of sugar in the blood, resulting in high sugar levels that may cause a variety of complications ranging from cardiovascular disease to blindness and kidney failure. Diabetes occurs when the body does not produce enough insulin or does not use it properly (insulin resistance).

Digital mammogram. A mammogram that records the image of the breast directly into a computer and can be enlarged or highlighted. This technology is more expensive than film mammography and not as widely available. See also Mammogram.

Dong quai. An herb, typically used in nonprescription supplement form, for a variety of conditions that include relieving menstrual cramps and mild hot flashes. Research into its benefits is lacking. Women with fibroids or blood-clotting problems should not use it.

DXA. Abbreviation for dual-energy x-ray absorptiometry. The standard test for measurement of bone mineral density (BMD). DXA uses the principles of absorptiometry (the degree to which tissues absorb radiation) to determine spine, hip, or total body BMD. See also Bone density.

Dysfunctional uterine bleeding (DUB). Heavy or erratic menstrual bleeding that is usually caused by variations in ovarian hormone levels, not caused by a fibroid, lesion, or tumor. DUB is the most common type of abnormal uterine bleeding. See also Abnormal uterine bleeding.

Dysmenorrhea. Pelvic pain and cramping associated with a menstrual period.

Dyspareunia. Vaginal pain during intercourse.

Dysplasia. The growth of abnormal cells. Dysplasia is a precancerous condition that may or may not develop into cancer at a later time.

E

[Back to Index](#)

Endometrial ablation. A surgical procedure in which heat energy, in the form of lasers or electrical currents, is used to remove or thin down the endometrium (the lining of the uterus) for the treatment of abnormally heavy uterine bleeding.

Endometrial biopsy. A sample of endometrial tissue is removed through the opening of the cervix and examined microscopically for abnormal cells. See also Biopsy.

Endometrial cancer. Cancer of the inner lining (endometrium) of the uterus.

Endometrial hyperplasia. An overgrowth of tissue or a thickening of the uterine lining, probably caused by excess estrogen. It is a risk factor for cancer of the uterus.

Endometriosis. A condition in which the same kind of tissue that lines the inside wall of the uterus (endometrium) grows outside the uterus (eg, on the ovaries or bowel), often resulting in severe pelvic pain and infertility.

Endometrium. The tissue that lines the inside of the uterus.

EPT. See Estrogen plus progestogen therapy.

Erectile dysfunction. A male's inability to achieve and maintain an erection adequate for sexual intercourse.

ERT or Estrogen replacement therapy. Term once used to describe estrogen therapy (ET) for menopause, now disallowed by government regulators. See also Estrogen therapy (ET).

Estradiol. Also called 17beta-estradiol. The most potent of the naturally occurring estrogens and the primary estrogen produced by women in their reproductive years. Available in oral, skin patch, and vaginal prescription drugs that are government approved for treating moderate to severe hot flashes and vaginal atrophy, and preventing postmenopausal osteoporosis. See also Estrogen, Bioidentical hormones.

Estriol. The least potent of the estrogens produced in the body. Not available in government approved drug formulations. See also Estrogen, Bioidentical hormones.

Estrogen. A variety of hormonal chemical compounds produced by the ovaries, influencing the growth and health of female reproductive organs. They are active in many cells throughout the body by interacting with estrogen receptors. The three main naturally occurring estrogens in women are estradiol, estrone, and estriol. Estrogen levels fall after menopause. Several types of estrogen therapies are available for menopause indications. Also available in some contraceptives, but at much higher doses than those used for menopause treatment. See also Estrogen therapy (ET).

Estrogen patch. Or Estrogen skin patch or Estrogen transdermal delivery system. A form of estrogen therapy contained in a special patch that is adhered to the skin. The patch technology allows a gradual release of estrogen through the skin directly into the bloodstream where it circulates throughout the entire body (systemically), affecting many different tissues. See also Estrogen.

Estrogen plus progestogen therapy (EPT). Also known as combination hormone therapy. Estrogen is the hormone in this duo that provides the most relief for menopause-related symptoms. Progestogen is added to protect the uterus from estrogen stimulation and the increased risk of endometrial cancer. See also Hyperplasia, Progestogen.

Estrogen therapy (ET). General term describing a wide range of estrogen types that are available in various systemic and local formulations in oral, skin patch, and vaginal prescription drugs government approved for treating moderate to severe hot flashes and vaginal atrophy, and preventing postmenopausal osteoporosis. ET is prescribed without progestogen to women without a uterus. See also Estrogen, Progestogen.

ET. See Estrogen therapy.

Fallopian tubes. Narrow, muscular tubes attached to the upper part of the uterus that serve as tunnels for the egg to travel from the ovaries to the uterus. Conception, the fertilization of an egg by a sperm, normally occurs in the fallopian tube.

Fertile. Capable of reproducing.

Fertilization. The moment at which a sperm penetrates an egg and an embryo begins to develop into a baby.

Fibrinogen. A protein in the blood that helps it clot.

Fibroids. Common, benign (noncancerous) tumors (myomas) made up of muscle cells and connective tissue that develop within the wall of the uterus. Fibroids are a common cause of abnormal uterine bleeding in midlife and beyond. See also Abnormal uterine bleeding.

Follicle-stimulating hormone (FSH). A hormone produced by the pituitary gland (located at the base of the brain). In women, FSH stimulates the growth of ovarian follicles (the small cysts that hold the eggs) and the supporting cells responsible for the growth and nurturing of the egg. FSH also stimulates production of estrogen by the ovaries. When estrogen production is low (after menopause), FSH levels will be high.

Formication. Irritating sensations to the skin, ranging from severe itching to phantom symptoms of “ants crawling on their skin” experienced by some perimenopausal women.

Fracture. The breaking of bone, resulting either from trauma (such as a fall) or because bone has become weakened from a condition such as osteoporosis. See also Osteoporosis.

FRAX. The FRAX tool is risk-calculating computer software developed by the World Health Organization that evaluates the 10-year fracture risk in patients.

G

[Back to Index](#)

Gabapentin. A nonhormonal prescription drug (marketed as Neurontin) government approved for the treatment of seizures from epilepsy, sometimes prescribed off-label for treating hot flashes.

Glaucoma. A disease of the eye marked by increased pressure within the eyeball that can result in damage to the optic disk and gradual loss of vision.

Glucosamine. An amino sugar present in almost all human tissues that is believed to play a role in cartilage formation and repair. As a nonprescription supplement, alone and with chondroitin, it has been shown to be effective for treating symptoms of osteoarthritis. See also Osteoarthritis, Chondroitin sulfate.

Gonadotropin-releasing hormone (GnRH). A hormone released by the hypothalamus (a region in the brain) that helps suppress ovarian production of estrogen. Drugs similar to GnRH are sometimes prescribed to shrink fibroid tumors or control abnormal uterine bleeding.

Government approved. In the prescription drug approval process in the United States, a manufacturer sends study information on a product to the Food and Drug Administration (FDA), which considers its effectiveness, dosage, side effects, and possible risks. If FDA approval is given, the product may then be offered on the US market for the approved health indication(s). The FDA also monitors product purity and advertising. Health Canada provides this function in Canada.

Gynecologist. A doctor who specializes in the care and health of the female reproductive organs.

HDL cholesterol. High-density lipoprotein, referred to as "good" cholesterol. High HDL helps to lower the risk of heart disease.

Heart disease. Any disorder that affects the heart muscle or the blood vessels of the heart (eg, arrhythmia, coronary heart disease, coronary artery disease, dilated cardiomyopathy, heart attack, heart failure, hypertrophic cardiomyopathy, mitral regurgitation, and pulmonary stenosis). See also Cardiovascular disease, Coronary artery disease.

High-density lipoprotein. See HDL cholesterol.

Homeopathy. A system of medical practice that treats a disease by the administration of minute doses of a remedy that would in healthy persons produce symptoms similar to those of the disease.

Hormone. Specifically, a sex hormone (such as estrogen, progesterone, testosterone) produced by the ovaries (in women), testes (in men), or adrenal gland (in both women and men) that affects the growth or function of the reproductive organs or the development of secondary sex characteristics. Can also be used as medications when made in a laboratory to be identical to what the body makes, or somewhat different but with similar effects. Also includes non-sex hormones such as thyroid hormone.

Hormone replacement therapy (HR). See Hormone therapy.

Hormone therapy (HT). Prescription drugs used most often when treating menopause symptoms. Encompasses both ET and EPT. HT replaces the more dated term hormone replacement therapy (HRT). See Estrogen therapy and Estrogen plus progestogen therapy.

Hot flash. A condition resulting in a red, flushed face and neck, perspiration, an increased pulse rate, and a rapid heart beat, often followed by a cold chill. Sometimes called a hot flush, this is the most common menopause-related discomfort thought to be the result of changes in the hypothalamus, the part of the brain that regulates the body's temperature. If the hypothalamus mistakenly senses that a woman is too warm, it starts a chain of events to cool her down. Blood vessels near the surface of the skin begin to dilate (enlarge), increasing blood flow to the surface in an attempt to dissipate body heat. See also Vasomotor symptoms.

HRT or Hormone replacement therapy. Term once used to describe hormone therapy (HT) for menopause, now disallowed by government regulators. See also Hormone therapy (HT).

Hyperplasia. See Endometrial hyperplasia.

Hypertension. Abnormally high blood pressure.

Hysterectomy. Surgical removal of the uterus. Does not result in menopause, but ends menstrual periods and fertility. The term is often mistakenly used to describe removal of the uterus and both ovaries, which results in surgical menopause.

Hysteroscopy. A surgical procedure to examine the inside of the uterus by inserting a thin, lighted tube into the vagina and through the cervix (lower, narrow end of the uterus).

Ibandronate. A potent prescription bisphosphonate drug (marketed as Boniva), government approved in the US (but not Canada) for the prevention and treatment of postmenopausal osteoporosis. See also Bisphosphonate.

Impotence. See Erectile dysfunction.

Incontinence. Involuntary loss of bladder control (urinary incontinence) and/or bowel control (fecal incontinence).

Induced menopause. Menopause that occurs earlier than expected when both ovaries are surgically removed or permanently damaged by cancer treatments (pelvic radiation or chemotherapy).

Infertility. The condition of being incapable of, or unsuccessful in, reproducing (in women, becoming pregnant).

Inhibited sexual desire. See Reduced libido.

Insomnia. Difficulty falling asleep, staying asleep, or waking early.

Intrauterine device (IUD). Also called Intrauterine system (IUS). A device with either progestin or copper inserted in the uterus by a healthcare provider to prevent unwanted pregnancy. The progestin device can be used with estrogen for EPT. See also Estrogen plus progestogen therapy.

Isoflavones. Naturally occurring estrogen-like compounds found in soybeans, soy products, and red clover. Also available in nonprescription supplements.

IUD. See Intrauterine device.

K

[Back to Index](#)

Kegel exercises. Urogenital muscle exercises that are sometimes helpful for urinary incontinence.

L

Lactose intolerance. Exhibiting diarrhea, bloating, and gas when dairy products are consumed.

Laparoscopy. A surgical procedure to look inside the pelvic cavity by inserting a tubelike instrument through a small cut in the abdomen.

LDL cholesterol. Low-density lipoprotein, considered to be "bad" cholesterol. Elevated LDL cholesterol increases the risk of heart disease.

Leiomyoma. The technical term for a fibroid tumor. See also Fibroids.

Local therapy. Drug therapy that has an effect limited to the site of drug application. It is not systemic (does not circulates through the body, affecting many body systems). Examples include most vaginal estrogen drugs. See also Systemic therapy.

Low-density lipoprotein. See LDL cholesterol.

Lupus. An autoimmune inflammatory connective tissue disease that occurs chiefly in women,

characterized by fever, skin rash, and arthritis. Also known as systemic lupus erythematosus (SLE).

Luteinizing hormone (LH). Produced by the pituitary gland (located at the base of the brain). In women, causes the dominant follicle to release its egg from the ovary (ovulation).

M

[Back to Index](#)

Macular degeneration. An incurable eye disease that is the leading cause of blindness for individuals aged 55 and older in the United States, caused by the deterioration of the central portion of the retina.

Mammogram. Specialized x-rays of the breast used to detect abnormal growths or changes in the breast tissue.

Melatonin. A hormone that is secreted by the brain in response to darkness. Has been linked to the regulation of the body's 24-hour (circadian) rhythm. Available as a nonprescription supplement.

Memory & concentration changes There is no firm evidence that memory or other cognitive skills actually decline because of natural menopause. However, difficulty remembering and concentrating are common complaints during perimenopause and the years right after menopause.

Menarche. The first menstrual period.

Menopause. The final menstrual period, which can be confirmed after going 12 consecutive months without a period. This time marks the permanent end of menstruation and fertility. It is a normal, natural event associated with reduced functioning of the ovaries, resulting in lower levels of ovarian hormones (primarily estrogen).

Menopause transition. See Perimenopause.

Menses. The menstrual period.

Menstrual cycle. The time each month (typically every 4 weeks) when an egg develops in the ovary, the lining of the uterus thickens, and the egg is released into the uterus. If the egg is not fertilized by sperm, the lining of the uterus (with the egg tissue) is shed through menstruation and the cycle begins again. This cycle typically becomes irregular during perimenopause and ends completely at menopause. See also Menstruation.

Menstruation. A woman's "period"—the discharge of blood, secretions, and tissue debris from the uterus that recurs in nonpregnant women. See also Menstrual cycle.

Metabolic syndrome. The presence of 3 or more of the following factors: central obesity (increased waist circumference), elevated triglyceride levels, low HDL cholesterol, elevated blood pressure, elevated fasting glucose level. Women with metabolic syndrome are at increased risk for heart disease, stroke, and type 2 diabetes (adult onset diabetes).

Migraine. A condition typically marked by a moderate to severe throbbing pain that is worse on one side of the head and usually aggravated by physical activity. Other symptoms are nausea, vomiting, and sensitivity to light and noise.

Mind/body medicine. Self-care approaches to healing for the management of symptoms or illness. Components integrate relaxation techniques with nutrition, exercise, and cognitive skills.

MRI. Abbreviation for Magnetic resonance imaging. An imaging technique that allows the soft tissues of the body to be seen.

Myomectomy. An operation to remove fibroid tumors (myomas).

N

[Back to Index](#)

NAMS Menopause Practitioner. A licensed healthcare provider who has achieved a certification in the field of menopause from The North American Menopause Society by passing a competency examination.

Night sweats. Hot flashes that occur at night that can interfere with sleep, even if they are not strong enough to cause awakening. If heavy perspiration occurs, the condition is called night sweats. While it is a myth that menopause makes a woman irritable, inadequate sleep causes fatigue, which may lead to irritability. See also Hot flashes.

O

[Back to Index](#)

Obesity. Excessive accumulation of fat in the body defined as a body mass index over 30. Obesity is associated with adverse health consequences including type 2 diabetes, cardiovascular disease, stroke, hypertension, some cancers, osteoarthritis, and premature death. See also Body Mass Index.

Off-label. Refers to the use of a drug to treat a condition for which it has not been officially government approved. This practice is legal and common in medicine.

Oophorectomy. Surgical removal of an ovary. See also Bilateral oophorectomy.

Orgasm. Sexual climax.

Osteoarthritis (OA). The most common form of joint disease. Increases in frequency with the “wear and tear” of aging and particularly affects aging women. Considerable research is ongoing to clarify the relationship between hormones and arthritis. See also Rheumatoid arthritis.

Osteoporosis. Postmenopausal osteoporosis is a disease of older women in which the bone density of the skeleton has decreased to a point where bone has become fragile and at higher risk for fractures, often with little or no trauma. In most women, bone loss accelerates during the first few years after menopause, which is related to the decline in estrogen levels.

Ovarian cancer. An abnormal growth of tissue that develops into a malignant tumor in a woman's ovaries.

Ovarian cyst. A sac filled with fluid or a semisolid material that forms on or within one of the ovaries, usually noncancerous.

Ovary. The female gonad, one of a pair of reproductive glands in women located in the pelvis, one on each side of the uterus. In premenopausal women, the ovaries produce eggs (ova) and hormones such as estrogen, progesterone, or testosterone. During each monthly menstrual cycle, an egg is released from one ovary. The egg travels from the ovary through a fallopian tube to the uterus. The ovaries are the main source of female hormones before menopause.

Ovulation. The release of a mature egg cell from the ovary.

Pap test or Pap smear. A screening test in which a sample of cells is taken from a woman's cervix and examined under a microscope for precancerous conditions. Named after George N. Papanicolaou.

Parathyroid hormone (PTH). A substance made by the parathyroid gland (located in the neck) that helps the body store and use calcium. Available as a synthetic hormone (teriparatide) in a prescription injectable drug (marketed as Forteo) government approved for the treatment of postmenopausal osteoporosis when there is high risk for fracture. See also Osteoporosis, Teriperatide.

Pelvic cavity. The space inside the lower abdomen that holds the reproductive organs (eg, uterus, ovaries, fallopian tubes).

Pelvic examination. Clinical exam of the vulva (external genitalia), vagina, cervix, uterus, and ovaries. A speculum is inserted into the vagina and a Pap test is usually done during this exam. See also Pap test, Speculum.

Pelvic inflammatory disease (PID). An infection in the pelvis caused by bacteria, usually from a sexually transmitted disease. PID can affect the uterus, ovaries, and/or fallopian tubes, and may cause pain, fever, scarring of the pelvic organs, and infertility.

Pelvic ultrasound. A test that uses sound waves to produce an electronic image of the organs of the pelvis.

Pelvis. The lower part of the abdomen, located between the hip bones.

Perimenopause. A span of time typically lasting 6 years or more that begins with the onset of menstrual cycle changes and other menopause-related symptoms and extends through menopause (the last menstrual period) to 1 year after menopause. Perimenopause is experienced only with spontaneous (natural) menopause, not induced menopause. Also called the menopause transition. See also Induced menopause.

Phytoestrogens. Plant compounds (such as isoflavones) that have a chemical structure similar to that of estrogen and have weak estrogen-like biologic activity. Available in foods (such as soy) and as nonprescription supplements. See also Isoflavones, Red clover.

Placebo. An inactive substance used in controlled experiments testing the effectiveness of another substance (as a drug).

Postmenopause. The span of time after menopause (the final menstrual period).

Premature menopause. Menopause that occurs at or before the age of 40, which may be the result of genetics, autoimmune disorders, or medical procedures or treatments.

Premature ovarian failure (POF). A condition that occurs at an earlier age than 40 when the ovaries “fail,” causing menstrual periods to stop. POF differs from premature menopause in that ovarian activity may resume.

Premenopause. The span of time from puberty (onset of menstrual periods) to perimenopause.

Progesterone. A female hormone that is released by the ovaries after ovulation to prepare the lining of the uterus (endometrium) to receive and sustain the fertilized egg and thus permit pregnancy. If pregnancy does not occur, progesterone (and estrogen) levels fall, resulting in

menstruation. Available in prescription and nonprescription therapies (as a bioidentical hormone). See also Hormone therapy.

Progestin. A class of progestogen compounds synthesized to act like progesterone in the body. Available in oral prescription drugs and combined with estrogen in prescription skin patches. See also Progestogen, Hormone therapy.

Progestogen. A naturally occurring or synthetic progestational hormone. There are various progestogen options: progesterone (identical to the hormone produced by the ovaries) and several different progestins (compounds synthesized to act like progesterone). See also Progesterone, Progestin, Hormone therapy.

Prolapse. The falling down or slipping of a body part from its usual position (eg, with a uterus or bladder if the ligaments holding it in place become stretched). See also Bladder prolapse.

R

[Back to Index](#)

Raloxifene. A type of a class of drugs known as selective estrogen-receptor modulators (SERMs), this oral prescription drug (marketed as Evista) is government approved for the prevention and treatment of osteoporosis in postmenopausal women. Raloxifene is also being studied as a breast cancer prevention drug. See also Selective estrogen-receptor modulator.

Red clover. A member of the legume plant family rich in phytoestrogens. Available in nonprescription supplements used to reduce mild hot flashes. Studies, however, are inconclusive. See also Complementary and alternative medicine, Isoflavones, Phytoestrogens.

Reduced libido. Also called inhibited sexual desire; a decrease in interest in sexual activity.

Rheumatoid arthritis (RA). A joint disease caused by the immune system attacking healthy tissue, causing inflammation. This is different than the aging-related wear and tear that leads to osteoarthritis (OA). Often affects women at midlife and beyond. See also Osteoarthritis.

Risedronate. A prescription oral bisphosphonate drug (marketed as Actonel) government approved for the prevention and treatment of postmenopausal osteoporosis. See also Bisphosphonate, Osteoporosis.

S

[Back to Index](#)

Selective estrogen-receptor modulator (SERM). A compound that has a similar chemical structure to estrogen and has an estrogen-like effect on some tissues and an antiestrogen effect on others. Available as various prescription drug therapies. See Raloxifene, Tamoxifen.
Sexual health. The many factors that impact sexual function and reproduction—physical, mental, and emotional.

Sexually transmitted disease (STD). A disease passed from one person to another by unprotected sexual contact involving the mouth, anus, or vagina. Examples include HPV (human papilloma virus - the infection that causes cervical cancer and precancer), gonorrhea, and HIV (the infection that causes AIDS). Sometimes called sexually transmitted infection (STI).

Sigmoidoscopy. A test to view inside the rectum and lower colon. See also Colonoscopy.

Sonogram. An imaging procedure (called ultrasound) in which echoes from sound waves passing through tissue create pictures of structures deep within the body.

Soy. Soy foods (such as soy nuts and tofu) and nonprescription supplements sometimes used for health benefits such as relieving mild hot flashes, although research is not conclusive. See also Isoflavones, Phytoestrogens.

Speculum. A metal or plastic instrument inserted into the vagina to help examine the vagina, cervix, and uterus. See also Pelvic examination.

Spontaneous menopause. Menopause that is not caused by any medical treatment or surgery. It occurs, on average, at age 51. Also known as natural menopause. See also Menopause.

St. John's wort. A perennial plant typically used in nonprescription supplement form by some women to ease mild to moderate depression. Research documents its effectiveness for this use.

Statins. A group of prescription drugs government approved to lower cholesterol. See also HDL cholesterol, LDL cholesterol.

Stress incontinence. An involuntary loss of urine that occurs during activities such as coughing, sneezing, laughing, or exercising.

Supplements. Nonprescription remedies (including vitamins, herbs, calcium, topical progesterone cream, and others) not regulated in North America under the same guidelines as prescription medications by the FDA and Health Canada. Supplements cannot, therefore, achieve a "government-approved" status and do not have to provide package inserts on how to take a drug safely, identify its negative side effects, or avoid potentially dangerous interactions with other drugs. Marketers of supplements are not legally permitted to make health claims for non-disease conditions (eg, hot flashes) without research to prove the claims. See also Government approved.

Surgical menopause. Induced menopause that results from surgical removal of both of the ovaries (bilateral oophorectomy) for medical reasons. Surgical menopause can occur at any age before spontaneous menopause. See also Bilateral oophorectomy, Induced menopause.

Systemic therapy. Drug therapy that circulates through the body, affecting many body systems. Examples include oral and skin patch estrogen drugs. See also Local therapy.

I

[Back to Index](#)

T-score, Z-score. Values that report the results of evaluating bone strength and predicting fracture risk. The Z-score compares the bone density to similar-age women and is a rough index of the need for extra diagnostic studies, whereas the T-score compares bone density to young women and is a rough index of the need for treatment. See also Bone density, DXA scan.

Tamoxifen. A prescription selective estrogen-receptor modulator (SERM; marketed as Nolvadex) that is approved for the prevention and treatment of breast cancer in high-risk women. Although it has an anti-estrogen effect in the breast, it acts like an estrogen in the uterus and may cause the lining to thicken. See also Selective estrogen-receptor modulator.

Temporary menopause. Term used to describe the event of menstrual periods stopping temporarily due to lifestyle factors such as high levels of stress, excessive exercising and/or dieting, or due to medications used to treat fibroids, endometriosis, or PMS. Once a woman adopts a healthier lifestyle or stops her medication, her ovaries may resume normal production of hormones.

Teriperatide. An injectable prescription drug (marketed as Forteo) government approved to treat postmenopausal osteoporosis in women at high risk for fracture. Similar to naturally occurring parathyroid hormone (PTH). See also Parathyroid hormone, Osteoporosis.

Testosterone. The male androgen hormone that is essential for sperm production and responsible for inducing and maintaining male secondary sex characteristics. In women, testosterone (partially produced by the ovaries) may regulate sexual desire and may also help maintain bone and muscle health. See also Androgen.

Thyroid gland. A gland located beneath the voice box in the throat that produces thyroid hormone, which helps regulate growth and metabolism.

Transdermal therapy. Therapy delivered through the skin into the bloodstream, such as via a skin patch or a topical lotion, cream, or gel. See also Estrogen patch.

Tubal ligation. The tying, clamping, and/or cutting of the fallopian tubes to prevent pregnancy and induce sterility. See also Vasectomy.

U

[Back to Index](#)

Urge incontinence. Involuntary leakage of urine accompanied by a sense of urgency (cannot reach the bathroom on time), usually due to overactive bladder. May be helped by medication and/or pelvic floor therapy. See also Kegel exercises.

Urinary incontinence. Involuntary loss of urine caused by any number of conditions, including urinary tract infection, pelvic relaxation, and bladder contractions. See also Incontinence, Stress incontinence, Urge incontinence.

Urinary tract infection (UTI). An often uncomfortable condition that occurs when bacteria in the urinary tract cause infection and inflammation. Typical treatment is an antibiotic.

Urogynecologist. A gynecologist specially trained to treat problems of the female urogenital (urinary and reproductive) system, such as incontinence and pelvic relaxation problems.

Urologist. A doctor specially trained to treat problems of the urinary system.

Uterine bleeding. Any bleeding that originates in the uterus, including a menstrual period, but typically used to describe abnormal uterine bleeding. See also Abnormal uterine bleeding.

Uterus. The small, hollow, pear-shaped organ in a woman's pelvis where menstrual bleeding originates and in which a fetus develops. See also Hysterectomy, Womb.

V

[Back to Index](#)

Vagina. The tube that joins the cervix (the lower part of uterus) to the outside of the body. It is also known as the birth canal.

Vaginal atrophy. A condition in which estrogen loss causes tissues of the vulva (the external parts of the female genital organs) and the lining of the vagina to become thin, dry, and less elastic. Vaginal secretions diminish, resulting in decreased lubrication.

Vaginal dryness. Inadequate lubrication of the vagina that can be caused by low estrogen levels, medication, or lack of sexual arousal.

Vaginal estrogen. Prescription estrogen therapy that is applied vaginally (as cream, ring, suppository, or tablet) and is government approved to treat moderate to severe vaginal dryness and atrophy. Most vaginal estrogen therapies provide local, not systemic, treatment. An example is Vagifem vaginal tablet. See also Local therapy.

Vaginal lubricant. Nonprescription, water-based products that are applied to the vagina to decrease friction and reduce discomfort during intercourse. Common brands include Astroglide, K-Y Personal Lubricant, Lubrin, and Moist Again.

Vaginal moisturizer. Nonprescription products similar to vaginal lubricants, but offering longer duration of effect by replenishing and maintaining water content in the vagina, often preferred by women who have symptoms of irritation, itching, and burning that are not limited to intercourse. Vaginal moisturizers also help to keep a healthy pH (level of acidity) in the vagina, helping to guard against infection (but not sexually transmitted infections). Common brands include K-Y Long-Lasting Moisturizer and Replens.

Vaginitis. Inflamed vaginal tissues that result in vaginal discharge, burning, or irritation. Tissues may be prone to injury, tearing, and bleeding during sexual intercourse or a pelvic examination.

Vasectomy. Outpatient surgical procedure for males to induce sterility.

Vasomotor symptoms. Also known as hot flashes and night sweats, common symptoms during perimenopause and early postmenopause. In almost all women, menopause-related vasomotor symptoms subside over time without any intervention. See also Hot flashes, Night sweats.

Vitamin D. A nutrient that enables the body to absorb calcium, among other things. It is normally produced within the skin in response to sunlight, provided no sunscreen is worn. Also available in supplement form, usually recommended for those at risk of inadequate sun exposure.

Vulva. The external parts of the female genitalia (lips or labia) around the opening of the vagina.

Vulvodynia. Pain in the vulva, usually described as a burning, stinging, itching, irritating, or raw feeling.

W

[Back to Index](#)

Weight-bearing exercise. Exercise during which bones and muscles work against the force of gravity or bear the body's weight. Examples include brisk walking, jogging, dancing, and resistance training exercises. May slow bone loss in the early postmenopausal years and reduce fracture risk.

WHI. See Women's Health Initiative.

Womb. Another name for the uterus, the female organ in which a fetus develops.

Women's Health Initiative (WHI). Large research project established by the National Institutes of Health in 1991 to look into the most common causes of death, disability, and impaired quality of life in postmenopausal women. The findings most reported by the media refer to oral hormone therapy (Premarin or Prempro) initiated in older women (past perimenopause) to determine its relationship to cardiovascular disease, stroke, breast cancer, osteoporosis, colon cancer, and other conditions.

Women's health specialist. A doctor, nurse practitioner, physician assistant, or other allied health professional specializing in women's health issues.

Y

[Back to Index](#)

Yeast infection. An infection of the vagina caused by one of the many species of fungus called Candida.

Z-score, T-score. See T-score.

Sources: The North American Menopause Society (NAMS) *Menopause Practice: A Clinician's Guide*; NAMS *Menopause Guidebook*, 6th ed.; NAMS *Early Menopause Guidebook*, 6th ed.; *Merriam-Webster's Collegiate Dictionary*, 11th ed.