


MENOPAUSE EDUCATIONAL GUIDE

Closing the menopause knowledge gap





The information provided in this educational material is for general informational purposes only and is not intended to be a substitute for professional medical advice, diagnosis, or treatment.

If you have any concerns or questions about your health, please consult with your family doctor or other qualified healthcare provider. They can provide you with personalized medical advice and determine the appropriate treatment options for your individual situation.

Sun Life recommends that you always seek the guidance of a medical professional before making any decisions about your health and well-being.

Historically, women's health has been a taboo subject, and menopause is no different. Because of stigma and lack of information, many women are uncomfortable talking about it, and this can mean they delay or avoid seeking health care. When they do, many find that their health-care providers dismiss their concerns or do not have the knowledge to provide them with appropriate care. But the reality is that three out of four women will experience menopausal symptoms that interfere with their daily lives.¹ It's important for women to understand the menopause transition and be empowered to seek support for this natural phase of life.

This education guide was reviewed by a Sun Life Medical Director, who's a practicing physician; and by the Menopause Foundation of Canada. It's aim is to support women going through the menopause transition. It's also a helpful reference for women of all ages, partners, colleagues, other family members and friends. The more we all understand menopause, and what women may be experiencing, the more we can break the silence and stigma – and ensure women get the support they need.

In this education guide, we'll help you:

1. Answer the following questions:

- What is menopause?
- What are the symptoms?
- How could it impact women's lives?

2. Understand the resources available to you:

- Health solutions available in benefits plans
- Other helpful information



What is menopause?

Menopause occurs when a woman* has gone 12 consecutive months without having a menstrual period. It is a natural stage of life for women, and the menopause transition is a time when a women’s body is experiencing fluctuating levels of estrogen and progesterone.

Menopause is a continuum that includes three stages: perimenopause, menopause and postmenopause.



Perimenopause

This stage usually happens in a woman’s mid-40s (but can start earlier) and can last up to 10 years. During this time, women may experience menopause symptoms but still have menstrual cycles.



Menopause

The menopause stage only lasts one day. It marks the day after a woman hasn’t had a menstrual period for 12 consecutive months.



Postmenopause

Every day after the menopause stage is considered postmenopause. Many symptoms will tend to decrease, but women will be postmenopausal for the rest of their lives.



Early menopause

Early menopause, also known as premature ovarian insufficiency (POI) or premature menopause, is a condition where a woman experiences menopause before the age of 40. This is considered earlier than the typical age of menopause, which is usually between 45 and 55 years old.

Early menopause can have several causes, including:

- Genetic factors
- Autoimmune disorders
- Chemotherapy or radiation treatment
- Surgical removal of the ovaries

It’s important for women experiencing early menopause to work closely with their health-care provider to monitor their condition and receive appropriate care.

What are the symptoms?

There are more than 30 symptoms related to perimenopause and postmenopause that affect women both physically and psychologically. Some of these, like hot flashes, are well known, others aren't. Here's a list of some of the symptoms:



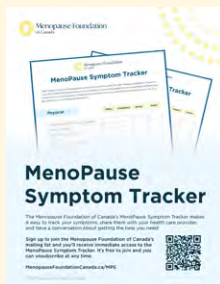
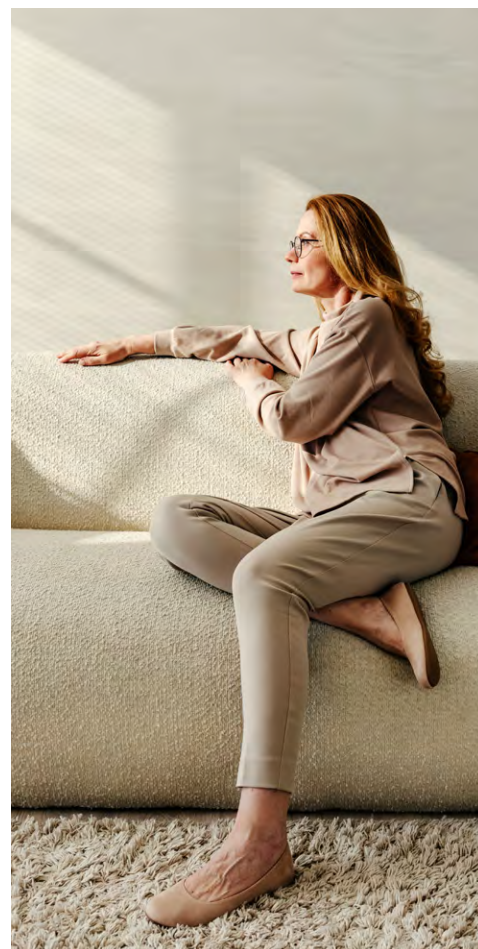
Physical symptoms

- Hot flashes and night sweats
- Period changes
- Lack of energy
- Vaginal dryness
- Sexual problems
- Muscle and joint pain
- Heart palpitations
- Migraines



Psychological symptoms

- Low mood
- Anxiety
- Brain fog and memory issues
- Lack of concentration
- Sleep disturbance
- Depression



If you think you're in perimenopause, you can download the free **MenoPause™ Symptom Tracker** available from the Menopause Foundation of Canada. Once you've filled it out, take it to your doctor, or other health-care provider. It's a helpful reference to start a conversation about your symptoms and discuss health solutions that can help manage their effects. It's important to know that not every symptom may be related to menopause. Your health-care provider may need to investigate other potential underlying causes.

Don't have a doctor? Use [Sun Life Provider Search](#) to find a family doctor in your area.



Health risks related to menopause

Menopause also increases the risk of chronic health conditions due to lack of estrogen, such as:

- Heart disease
- Osteoporosis
- Genitourinary and sexual issues
- Osteoarthritis
- Body composition (loss of lean mass)
- Skin changes (loss of collagen)
- Balance changes

What are some of the long-term impacts of these conditions on women's health?



Heart disease

Your body changes during menopause, and many women find that hormonal changes coincide with weight gain and/or a shifting of weight to the midsection.

Healthy eating, including ensuring you are getting enough protein, along with strength training can help with weight management, building muscle and increasing bone density, which plays an important role in preventing osteoporosis.



Osteoporosis

Estrogen helps maintain bone density. During menopause, women experience a drop in estrogen levels, which accelerates bone loss. In the years following menopause, the risk of fractures increases significantly, especially in the hips, spine and wrists.

Tips: You can reduce the risks of osteoporosis by exercising. Exercises like walking and resistance training can help strengthen your bones. And, calcium is a mineral that helps to maintain bone strength and lessen your risk of developing osteoporosis. Make it a part of a balanced diet.



Genitourinary and sexual issues

Many genitourinary and sexual issues can occur during menopause. These include:

- Vaginal dryness and irritation
- Urinary tract infections
- Urinary incontinence
- Decreased libido
- Painful intercourse

It may feel uncomfortable talking about these issues, but it's important to be proactive by communicating with your doctor. There are effective ways to manage menopausal genitourinary and sexual changes, including through the use of vaginal estrogen, vaginal moisturizers, and vaginal lubricants. You don't have to suffer in silence.



Diabetes

Does menopause increase diabetes risk? That hasn't been an easy question for researchers to answer. It's hard to separate the effects of menopause from the effects of age and weight. But it does look like hormones have something to do with it.² Women in their 50s should get tested for diabetes **if they have symptoms** and prioritize healthy habits such as exercising, limiting alcohol and eating well.

Knowledge is power

Learn more about these health conditions on the [Society of Obstetricians and Gynaecologists of Canada](https://www.societyofobstetriciansandgynaecologists.ca/) website.

Health solutions available in benefits plans



Your employer may have solutions available in your benefits plan.

You can check your coverage on [mysunlife.ca](https://www.mysunlife.ca) or the **my Sun Life mobile app**:

1. Sign in to [mysunlife.ca](https://www.mysunlife.ca) or the **my Sun Life mobile app**.
2. Choose Coverage Information.
3. Choose Medical coverage, Drug coverage, or one of the other options.

Learn About Treatment Options

It is important for women to learn about evidence-based care and treatment options available to manage their menopause journey. Lifestyle changes, prevention strategies, and hormonal and non-hormonal treatment options can be helpful.



Menopause Hormone Therapy (MHT) is considered the gold standard treatment for hot flashes and night sweats, and for treating genitourinary issues. Hormone therapy can prevent bone loss and is recommended for use in people who enter early menopause and have no contraindications. There is also a growing body of evidence to support that MHT may help improve mood, sleep, sexual function and reduce your risk of type 2 diabetes. There are many factors to take into consideration before choosing this option:

- your age,
- your personal medical history,
- your family medical history,
- contraindications to various treatment options, and
- your personal health goals.

Talk to your family doctor or other health-care provider to see if MHT is the right solution for you. Remember, there are many lifestyle changes that should be the foundation of your health. Also, if you aren't a good candidate for this option, there are many non-hormonal options that may be appropriate for you.



Pharmacy support. (Outside of Quebec) Through [Lumino Health™ Pharmacy](#)³, provided by Pillway⁴ you get access to professional advice from a trusted pharmacy support team.

(Within Quebec) You have access to an online platform with pharmacy services provided by Pharmacie Abd-El-Monem, Inc. The pharmacist owner, Abd-El-Monem Osman, is solely responsible for the operation of the pharmacy and all services offered by the pharmacy.



Mental health support. Coverage for mental health practitioners like registered psychologists and social workers. Some of them may provide Cognitive Behavioural Therapy (CBT) which, while it doesn't alleviate physical symptoms, it can help with your mental approach to cope with the symptoms of menopause and the many other life stressors often impacting women during this stage of life.



Virtual care. It's a virtual walk-in service that quickly assesses medical issues. Some also have targeted programs for mental health.



Paramedical practitioners. This includes coverage for practitioners who may specialise in menopause like:

- physiotherapists, who provide pelvic floor therapy, and
- naturopaths, who may help treat menopause symptoms.



Health and Personal Spending Accounts. Health Spending Accounts give you an amount to spend for health-related expenses like medical costs not covered by provincial health plans or by your regular benefits plan. It's a non-taxable benefit, excluding Quebec. Personal Spending Accounts are used for wellness costs like fitness and health products and services. It's a taxable benefit.

Don't forget that every woman is different and has unique needs. What's worked for a family member or a friend may not work for you. It's important to talk to a health-care professional to determine which health solutions and treatments are best suited to you.

At Sun Life, our purpose is to help Canadians live healthier lives. We encourage women to be empowered to advocate for their health. We hope you've found this guide helpful. We encourage you to share it with the women in your lives who may need support during this natural stage of life.

Helpful resources:

- Visit the [Menopause Foundation of Canada](#)'s website to learn more about menopause symptoms and how to advocate for yourself to get the support you need.
- Learn more about osteoporosis from [Osteoporosis Canada](#).
- Visit the [Heart and Stroke Foundation of Canada](#) website to learn more about risks and prevention.

Additional resources:

Visit these websites to get more information.

- [The Menopause Society](#)
- [Society of Obstetricians and Gynecologists of Canada](#)
- [Canadian Menopause Society](#)

*This guide is primarily focused on the health of people who identify as women and were born with a uterus. This includes people who experience physical and hormonal changes associated with biological female reproduction throughout their lifetime. However, some or all of this guide could apply to non-binary, transgender or two-spirited people.

1 The Menopause Foundation of Canada

2 The Menopause Society

3 Pharmacy services are provided by Pillway.

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