

Menopausal Transition

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In the medical literature these two terms, **pre-menopause** and **peri-menopause** are now called the '**menopausal transition**'. The **two** criteria for measuring the beginning of the menopausal transition are:

- The onset of irregular cycle lengths
- The change in hormone levels, specifically of FSH

One definition states the menopausal transition **begins** with variations in menstrual cycle length in a woman who has levels of FSH in the early follicular phase that are increased above levels found in regularly menstruating women under the age of 35, and **ends** with the final menstrual period¹. The **median age of onset** of transition in one study was quoted as 45.5 years, with a **median duration** of 4.8 years.²

Definition of menopausal transition – STRAW Report

In order to reach agreement as to when the **menopause transition begins**, a consensus document was issued in 2001 by the **Stages of Reproductive Aging Workshop, (STRAW Report)**³ which proposed that reproductive life could be characterized by **seven** stages. **Before menopause** the reproductive life could be divided into the *reproductive years (three stages)* and the *transition years (two stages: early and late transition)*. **Postmenopause (two stages)** follows the final menstrual period, (FMP).

The **STRAW Report** uses **two** criteria to assess menopausal transition- **(i)** cycle length and **(ii)** FSH level. STRAW proposes an elevated FSH level obtained in the early follicular phase that exceeds 2 SDs of the mean level for a sample of normal women of peak reproductive age (25-30 years).³ According to STRAW in the **early** menopausal transition (**stage -2**), a woman's menstrual cycles remain regular but the duration changes by 7 days or more (e.g. her regular cycles are now every 24 instead of 31 days).³ According to STRAW the **late** menopausal transition (**stage -1**) is characterized by two or more skipped menstrual periods and at least one intermenstrual interval of 60 days or more.³

An article by Harlow et al² which reviewed the work of STRAW and others suggests that the **onset** of early menopausal transition may be best described by ovarian activity consistent with the persistent >6 day difference, i.e. the length of the cycle is >6 day different from the previous cycle and this magnitude of difference is observed again within ten cycles.²

References:

1. Liu JH, Gass ML; 'Management of the perimenopause'; 2006; Pub. McGraw-Hill, ISBN 0-0-142281-1
2. Harlow S D, Mitchell ES, Crawford S; 'The ReStage Collaboration:

defining optimal bleeding criteria for onset of early menopausal transition'; *Fertil Steril*; vol 89, No1, Jan 2008.

3. Soules MR, Sherman S, Parrot E et al; Executive summary: Stages of Reproductive Aging Workshop (STRAW). *Fertil Steril*. 2001; 76: 874