

# Understanding the Menopause



## **Menopause:**

**Menopause** is the **final menstrual period** (FMP) and it marks the **end** of the woman's child-bearing years. Every girl when she is born already has the finite number of oocytes to last her child-bearing years and she will obtain no new ova after birth. The basis of **reproductive ageing** is oocyte depletion in the ovary<sup>5</sup> with a steady loss of oocytes through atresia or ovulation throughout the child-bearing years, which does not necessarily occur at a constant rate.<sup>5</sup> In fact even though the oocyte pool is depleted only about 500 ovulations have occurred over the child-bearing years.<sup>2</sup>

**DEFINITION OF THE MENOPAUSE:** The **World Health Organization** (1996) defines the menopause as the permanent cessation of menstruation resulting from loss of ovarian follicular activity.<sup>1</sup> It is identified retrospectively by the absence of menstruation for one year<sup>1,4</sup> or if the woman is charting her cycle has evidence that she has not ovulated for one year.<sup>6</sup> Menopause occurs within a wide age range between the ages of 42 to 58,<sup>5</sup> and the age of the menopause has not changed since ancient times. In the **Massachusetts Women's Health Study**,<sup>3</sup> involving over 2500 women aged between 45-55 the **median age** of the final menstrual period (FMP) was 51.3 years.<sup>1, 3</sup>

## **Definition of pre-menopause / perimenopause:**

The **perimenopause** is a natural and healthy phase of a woman's life but some women may have troubling symptoms associated with it.<sup>1</sup> It is well recognized that the decline of fertility and the symptoms associated with this stage of life, become more evident the closer the menopause approaches. Therefore some researchers refer to the '**pre-menopause**' as the **five to eight years** leading up to the menopause when the physiological decline in fertility has already begun, but without any noticeable clinical manifestations. The '**peri-menopause**' refers to the years immediately preceding and the two years or so following the menopause when clinical manifestations are very much in evidence.<sup>6</sup> The **Massachusetts study**<sup>3</sup> found that the **median age of the peri-menopause**, based on the appearance of menstrual irregularity was **47.5 years**, with the **length** of the typical '**menopausal transition**' estimated at nearly 4

years.<sup>1, 3</sup> For a given interval of amenorrhoea the probability that menopause has occurred increases with age.<sup>7</sup> "An amenorrheic interval of 6 months is predictive of menopause in 45% of women aged 45-49 years and in 70% of women over 53 years of age. That is 50% and 30% of women in those respective age groups could be expected to have one or more additional episodes of menstruation after 6 months without menses."<sup>7</sup>

#### References:

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