

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 ovary⁵ with a steady loss of oocytes through atresia or ovulation throughout the child-bearing years, which does not necessarily occur at a constant rate.⁵ In fact even though the oocyte pool is depleted only about 500 ovulations have occurred over the child-bearing years.²

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.¹ It is identified retrospectively by the absence of menstruation for one year^{1,4} or if the woman is charting her cycle has evidence that she has not ovulated for one year.⁶ Menopause occurs within a wide age range between the ages of 42 to 58,⁵ and the age of the menopause has not changed since ancient times. In the **Massachusetts Women's Health Study**,³ involving over 2500 women aged between 45-55 the **median age** of the final menstrual period (FMP) was 51.3 years.^{1, 3}

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.¹ 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.⁶ The **Massachussetts study**³ 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.^{1, 3} For a given interval of amenorrhoea the probability that menopause has occurred increases with age.⁷ "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."⁷

References:

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