



*Your essential guide to
managing the menopause*

Menopause

FOR DUMMIES®

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A Reference for the Rest of Us!®



UK Edition

Menopause
FOR
DUMMIES®

Menopause FOR **DUMMIES®**

**by Dr Sarah Brewer, Marcia L. Jones, PhD, and
Dr Theresa Eichenwald**



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About the Authors

Dr Sarah Brewer qualified as a doctor in 1983 from Cambridge University. She was a full-time GP for five years and now works in nutritional medicine and sexual health. Sarah is currently completing an MSc in Nutritional Medicine at the University of Surrey, Guildford.

Although her first love is medicine, her major passion is writing. Sarah writes widely on all aspects of health and has written over 40 popular self-help books. She is a regular contributor to a number of newspapers and women's magazines, and appears regularly on TV and radio. She was voted Health Journalist of the Year 2002.

Marcia L. Jones, PhD, had life experience in fertility treatment, perimenopause, and menopause. In 1991, while attempting to start a family at the age of 38, she scoured bookstores searching for down-to-earth information on the likely problems and how to proceed. Her doctor directed her to the only information available at the time, photocopies of technical articles from medical journals and pamphlets written by pharmaceutical companies trying to sell product. Today, many women are delaying childbirth, so the issue of fertility fits nicely into a discussion of perimenopause and menopause. These experiences served as her primary motivation for writing this book. She became certain that women in their mid-thirties to late forties need current, unbiased, reliable information on perimenopause and menopause written for a layperson.

Thanks to the efforts of her doctor, Jane Chihal, MD, a contributor to this book and a recognised expert on menopause and fertility, Dr Jones became the proud mother of two girls.

Dr Jones received her PhD from Southern Methodist University in anthropology. She led many research expeditions in the Middle East and served as an associate professor of anthropology at the University of Tulsa.

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Dr Theresa Eichenwald has extensive experience caring for menopausal women as an internist at hospitals in New York, Washington D.C., Philadelphia, and, most recently, Texas. She has taught at Albert Einstein School of Medicine and Mount Sinai Medical Center in New York.

In addition to teaching and caring for patients, Dr Eichenwald has authored a number of articles for professional journals, covering topics such as breast cancer and ovarian tumours as, well as patient education pamphlets. She is a member of the American Medical Association, the American College of Physicians, and in medical school participated in the American Medical Student Association Task Force on Aging.

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From Marcia: I am so grateful to the many talented people who have helped create this book. Special thanks to Dr Theresa Eichenwald for her contributions, collaborations, and review of early versions of this document. Thanks also to her husband Kurt Eichenwald and their three young sons for letting Theresa take the time to author this book.

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Introduction

We wrote this book to give women of all ages a clear view of the physical, mental, and emotional changes related to menopause. For generations, women of all ages have wandered blindly into menopause without knowing what to expect. Oh, you probably knew that menopause and hot flushes went hand in hand, but even that information isn't always true. The truth is that you may never have a hot flush, and if you do, it will probably be years before you're menopausal. Common knowledge about menopause is sparse and often wrong. (The medical community didn't even officially recognise the link between oestrogen and hot flushes until 1974!)

If menopause only concerned a small group of people on a desert island, this lack of information might be understandable. But over half of the world's population will become menopausal one day. Menopause has been the ugly family member of the research community for years. Even medical textbooks pay scant attention to the topic. Today, one group is paying attention to menopause. The pharmaceutical industry sees great opportunity in the field of menopause, and more research is under way. If you're looking for books to help reasonably intelligent women navigate the jungle of menopause (menopause is uncharted territory), your options are largely limited to pretty, glossy pamphlets published by drug companies (now that's what we call unbiased information) that you can find at your doctor's surgery. If you're really persistent, you may find some academic articles in medical journals, but your eyes will glass over as you try to pick out straightforward answers to your practical questions. We hope this book can fill that void. Our goal is to help you digest the research so you can make better and objective health decisions.

Menopause is not a disease – that's true. No one is going to die from menopause or its symptoms, but every day, women die from the medical effects of low oestrogen levels. Your risks of certain diseases and cancers rise after menopause. Some people may respond to that statement with one of their own, 'Well, that's because women are older when they go through menopause.' True again, but it's also true that oestrogen plays a role in an amazing number of functions in your body, some of which protect your organs, increase your immunity, and slow degeneration. This transformation we call menopause impacts our health in very significant ways. This book helps you understand the story behind the symptoms and the diseases.

Some women choose to use hormone therapy to relieve symptoms associated with menopause and protect their body from disease. The choice of whether to take hormones or not is quite controversial because hormone therapy has its own set of risks. The debate goes on in the medical community and media concerning the risks of hormone therapy. If you're like many women, your confusion only grows as you read more on the subject. Each new study seems to contradict the findings of the last one. You're an intelligent person. But how can you know which study you should believe? In this book, we try to provide enough information to enable you to make informed decisions about your health.

About This Book

We have no agenda in writing this book. We're not trying to sell you medications, alternative health strategies, or remedies. This book presents accurate and up-to-date information from the most credible sources. It contains straightforward information based on reliable medical studies without the academic lingo common to medical journals. When no clear-cut answers exist and when quality research shows mixed conclusions, we let you know.

Everyone's time is limited, so we cut to the chase. We cover the questions that are important to you during this phase of your life. If you want more detail, we provide an appendix full of resources to help with your personal research. We also try not to stray too far from the topic at hand. For example, during the years leading up to menopause, women may have difficulty getting pregnant. The same hormonal changes that cause those annoying symptoms prior to menopause also stifle fertility. Many women in their late thirties who are trying to get pregnant rely on hormone supplements. Despite the overlap in hormonal terms, fertility is not a concern for many women going through the change, so our discussion is limited.

Whether you're going through the change, have already been there, or are about to start off down that road, you'll find the information you need between these snazzy yellow and black covers. We cover all the health issues and therapy choices that confront women during the menopausal years.

Foolish Assumptions

Every author has to make a few assumptions about her audience, and we've made a few assumptions about you:

- ✔ You're a woman. (Sorry, guys, but menopause is a girls-only club.)
- ✔ You want to understand what's going on with your body.
- ✔ You're looking for straight talk for real people as opposed to scientific jargon and Medicaese (though we have a Medicaese icon to warn you when we stray into this territory).
- ✔ You want to evaluate your risks of disease as you pass through midlife and move into your menopausal years.
- ✔ You don't want a book that claims to let you diagnose yourself or figure out what medications you need. You have a medical advisor to discuss these things with.
- ✔ You want to be able to ask intelligent questions and discuss treatment alternatives with your healthcare providers.
- ✔ You want to feel more confident about the quality of your healthcare.
- ✔ You buy every book that has a black and yellow cover.

If any of these statements apply to you, you're in the right place.

How This Book Is Organised

We've organised this book into five parts so you can go directly to the topic that interests you the most. Here's a brief overview of each part:

Part I: The Main Facts about Menopause

The journey to menopause often catches women by surprise. You may not have been expecting to take the journey, or you may have been wondering when you would begin. In this part, we give you a quick overview of what your hormones are doing before, during, and after menopause. If you haven't thought about things like hormones and follicles for a while, don't worry; we refresh your memory. Your secondary school biology course probably never finished the story. In this part, you get the whole story from how the egg makes its journey from the ovary to the uterus to what happens when the ovary goes into retirement.

Part II: The Effects of Menopause on Your Body and Mind

Want to know how hormones affect the health of your body and mind? You can find the answers in Part II. We devote each chapter in this part to a specific

body part or health issue. In each chapter, you get an overview of how hormones function in relation to this part of your body and the types of conditions that can develop, how to recognise them, and what you can do about them.

Part III: Treating the Effects

You may want to evaluate the pros and cons of hormone therapy (HT) from time to time during your journey through menopause. This part of the book brings you up to date on what the medical community knows about HT. We discuss the effects of HT so that you can make informed decisions. Reading these chapters provides added benefits as well: You'll probably find it easier to evaluate the news about hormone research that comes out in future years.

We also include information about non-HT drugs and alternative treatments.

Part IV: Lifestyle Issues for Menopause and Beyond

Part IV is chock full of great ways to stay healthy and enjoy a long and active life during and after menopause. Staying healthy and active is simpler than you think. We discuss healthy eating habits and simple ways to stay fit. Whether you're looking for natural ways to lower your risk of specific diseases or for ways to slow the ageing process, you can find the information you need right here.

Part V: The Part of Tens

If you're a fan of *For Dummies* books, you probably recognise this part. These are short chapters with quick tips and fast facts. In Part V, we debunk (more than) ten menopause myths, review some common medical tests you may encounter, and suggest ten terrific exercise programs for menopausal women.

Part VI: The Appendixes

A glossary of menopause-related terms and a list of menopause-related resources cap the book.

Conventions Used in This Book

We use our own brand of shorthand for some frequently used terms, and icons to highlight specific information. The following sections help you get used to these conventions.

Taking in shorthand

As you read this book, you'll discover that menopause is a process, with different stages characterised by similar symptoms. These stages are referred to as *perimenopause*, the 3 to 10 years prior to menopause when you may experience symptoms; *menopause* itself, which you know you've reached only after you've reached it because the definition of menopause is the absence of periods for a year; and *postmenopause*, which is your life after you've stopped having periods. In this book, we use *perimenopause* to describe the premenopause condition, and we use *menopause* to refer to everything after that just because the term *postmenopause* isn't commonly used.

A major part of this book – the whole of Part III as well as sections in other chapters – talks about hormone therapy (HT), which is used to alleviate symptoms and address health concerns prompted by menopause. In literature and on Web sites, you can see hormone therapies referred to and abbreviated any number of ways, including hormone replacement therapy (HRT) and estrogen replacement therapy (ERT). But we stick pretty closely to using HT because we feel that it's the most inclusive and accurate term. Just be aware that *HT* means essentially the same thing as *HRT*.

And, speaking of hormones, a couple of the more important ones for menopausal women have several subcategories:

- ✓ Types of **oestrogen** include oestriol, oestradiol, and oestrone.
- ✓ **Progesterone** is the class of hormone; the form used in hormone therapy is often referred to as progestin.

We sometimes use these terms interchangeably and only refer to the specific hormone as necessary for clarity.

Eyeing the icons

In this book, we use icons as a quick way to go directly to the information you need. Look for the icons in the margin that point out specific types of information. Here's what the icons we use in this book mean.



The Tip icon points out practical, concise information that can help you take better care of yourself.



This icon points you to medical terms and jargon that can help you understand what you read or hear from professionals and enable you to ask your healthcare provider intelligent questions.



This fine piece of art flags information that's worth noting.



When you see this icon, do what it tells you to do. It accompanies info that should be discussed with an expert in the field.



The Technical Stuff icon points out material that generally can be classified as dry as a bone. Although we think that the information is interesting, it's not vital to your understanding of the issue. Skip it if you so desire.



This icon cautions you about potential problems or threats to your health.

Where to Go from Here

For Dummies books are designed so that you can dip in anywhere that looks interesting and get the information you need. This is a reference book, so don't feel like you have to read an entire chapter (or even an entire section for that matter). You won't miss anything by skipping around. So, find what interests you and jump on in!

Part I

The Main Facts about Menopause



'of course you realise the menopause
is the cessation of menstruation and signifies
the inability to have any more children.'

In this part . . .

The first act of *Dance of the Hormones* probably occurred three decades or so ago for you. You remember that one don't you? The bittersweet tale of teenage angst and joy that we call puberty. And now, intermission (the menstrual years) may be coming to a close as the hormones once again take the stage for the second act – menopause. Well, take your seat and get ready to peruse your programme . . . well, Part I of this book, anyway.

In Part I, we provide you with an outline to your menopausal years. We define menopause, review the biology, introduce you to the actors – your hormones – and briefly review the related symptoms and health conditions (physical, mental, and emotional). Get to it before the usher dims the lights.