

Is it aging or menopause? The symptoms many women don't expect

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Featured topic and speaker

Hot flashes aren't the only sign of menopause. Many women experience unexpected symptoms like joint pain, brain fog, sleep problems, fatigue, weight changes and mood shifts, often without realizing they may be linked to menopause.

OB/GYN Elizabeth Lapeyre, MD, explains the common and lesser-known symptoms of menopause, how they can affect daily life and when it's time to talk with your doctor. Learn how to recognize the signs and get the support you need to navigate this important life transition.

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Speaker

- **Elizabeth Lapeyre, MD**, obstetrician and gynecologist, Ochsner Health

Transcript

Speaker 1: I knew something was off. I was constantly tired.

Speaker 2: My sleep definitely was interrupted.

Speaker 1: You just know when something's wrong with you.

Dr. Lapeyre: Many women in midlife, they say they don't feel like themselves. Something is just different. They're not sure why. And is this normal aging, or is it menopause?

So menopause is a transition for women. Although it seems like an overnight event, it's really not. But the definition of menopause is a year without a period. And with that can come a lot of different symptoms. Hot flashes and night sweats, that's what everyone typically thinks of. But there's so much more-- brain fog, joint pain, vaginal dryness, pain with intercourse, low libido, lack of concentration. Sometimes women complain about itchy ears and hair loss, facial hair.

Hi. Dr. Lapeyre. Nice to meet you. It looks like you're having some hot flashes and some night sweats.

So I think one of the symptoms of menopause that really catches women off guard is joint pain. And some of the joint pain can be very specific, whether it's shoulder, knee, hip pain, just not able to exercise like they used to. Their recovery is harder. They're not expecting that, and they're not sure if it's menopause or if it's normal aging. So I think it's important for women to know that sometimes this can be related to menopausal changes.

Speaker 2: I would go to sleep, and then I would wake up in the middle of the night. And I could not go back to sleep.

Dr. Lapeyre: And of course sleep is really impacted during menopause. A lot of women have what we call Wake After Sleep Onset, or WASO, and that is a very common symptom where women just don't sleep well anymore. And this can affect your mood. This can affect what you eat the next day. This can affect how you move. And so the changes in sleep really catch women off guard.

Speaker 1: So it's constantly going to the gym. My meals were regulated. And there was a point where my body just wasn't reacting anymore. And I was actually what I thought was getting pudgier, especially around the middle. And I was like, this isn't right.

Dr. Lapeyre: What happens is we start losing lean muscle as soon as we start entering in menopause. And so when you lose your lean muscle, you gain central fat. And that's why a lot of women complain about, even if their weight isn't different, their shape is different and they're not fitting into their clothes, which is very upsetting. And then also, with that comes bone loss risk. So I think it's important to see a clinician who is well-versed in menopause and can help you tweak out what is related to hormones and what's not.

Speaker 1: I think women tend to take-- as caregivers, we tend to focus on taking care of everybody else, and we tend to be the last ones in terms of wanting to take care of ourselves. And you have to be your own advocate and really do that research and say, hey, maybe it's not X, Y and Z. Maybe it is perimenopause or menopause, and let's go down that avenue.

Dr. Lapeyre: If you have questions and concerns about menopause, you should talk to your doctor.

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