

induced menopause explained

Menopause occurs in all women. It is the time in a woman's life when the ovaries naturally decrease production of the sex hormones estrogen, progesterone, and testosterone – leading to the end of menstruation and fertility.



One healthy ovary is able to produce sufficient hormones to prevent menopause.

Roles of Ovarian Hormones

The hormones produced by the ovaries – estrogen, progesterone, and testosterone – have a number of important functions. Estrogen keeps the vagina moist and healthy, and it helps to protect women from diseases such as heart disease and the bone-thinning disease osteoporosis. Estrogen, along with progesterone, regulate the menstrual cycle. Testosterone – one of the so-called “male hormones” or androgens produced in larger amounts in men’s testicles – helps to give women their sexual desire (libido).

Natural Menopause

Most women experience “natural menopause” – menopause not caused by any treatment or surgery.

In most cases, natural menopause occurs between the ages of 45 and 55 (age 51, on average). Natural menopause is a gradual process. Women may experience physical changes for six years or longer during the menopause transition prior to the last menstrual period, which is menopause itself. Levels of hormones decline slowly. This time of transition (also known as perimenopause) gives women an opportunity to adjust to this new stage of life, both physically and emotionally.

Induced Menopause

The term “induced menopause” describes menopause caused by a medical intervention. Although certain drug or radiation therapies that damage the ovaries can cause induced menopause, the most common cause is surgical removal of both ovaries. In women who experience surgical menopause, fertility ends immediately. With other types of induced menopause, fertility may end immediately or over several months. With induced menopause of any type, levels of both estrogen and testosterone decline more rapidly than they do with natural menopause. These women do not go through perimenopause; instead, they must adjust to much more rapid changes caused by the ovaries’ abrupt inability to produce higher, premenopausal levels of hormones.

A medical intervention will not cause menopause unless it involves removal of both ovaries, or causes severe damage to both ovaries, thereby making them unable to produce sufficient levels of hormones to prevent menopause.

TERMINOLOGY

Natural menopause:

Menopause that occurs naturally (not caused by any medical intervention), usually between the ages of 45 and 55.

Induced menopause:

Menopause in a reproductive-age woman caused by surgical removal of both ovaries or ovarian damage from certain radiation or drug therapies.

Ovarian failure:

The inability of the ovaries to produce eggs and the accompanying premenopausal levels of hormones.

Surgical menopause:

Menopause in a reproductive-age woman caused by surgical removal of both ovaries.

Premature menopause:

Menopause that occurs before age 40 – for any reason.