

Menopause Glossary

NAMS has compiled for you a comprehensive list of definitions for terminology related to menopause, perimenopause, and postmenopause, along with a selection of terms relating to other women's health issues. Select a letter below to take you near the menopause information you're looking for. Or, if you prefer, just scroll through the list to discover terms of interest.

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Abdomen. The part of the body below the ribs and above the pelvis.

Abnormal uterine bleeding (AUB). Bleeding that is abnormal in frequency, severity, or duration. Not the same as normal irregular periods during perimenopause or bleeding from menopause hormone therapy including estrogen and progestogen. Possible causes are hormone imbalance, pregnancy, fibroid tumors, uterine lining abnormalities, cancer, and other conditions of the vagina or cervix. See also Dysfunctional uterine bleeding.

Acupuncture. Ancient Chinese medicine practice that involves stimulating certain anatomic points in the body for therapeutic purposes, usually by puncturing the skin with a needle.

AIDS. Acquired immune deficiency syndrome, caused by the human immunodeficiency virus (HIV), transmitted through sexual contact or contaminated blood products.

Alendronate. An oral, nonhormonal, prescription drug (marketed as Fosamax) government approved for prevention and treatment of postmenopausal osteoporosis. It increases bone density in the spine and

hip and decreases the risk of spine and nonspine fractures. See also Bisphosphonate, Osteoporosis.

Alternative medicine. See Complementary and alternative medicine.

Alzheimer disease. A progressive disease in which nerve cells in the brain degenerate and brain matter shrinks, resulting in impaired thinking, behavior, and memory.

Amenorrhea. The absence of a woman's monthly period not related to menopause.

Anal incontinence. Loss of anal sphincter control leading to involuntary leakage of gas or solid or liquid stool sufficient to impair quality of life.

Androgenetic alopecia. Thinning of the hair on the scalp in midlife women. Rather than menopause, the actual cause is unknown but seems to be a combination of multiple factors including genetic predisposition, local androgen metabolism, growth factors, hormones, and stress.

Androgens. A group of hormones that promote the development and maintenance of male secondary sex characteristics and structures. They are produced in smaller quantities in women and are important in the synthesis of estrogen. They also play a role in sexual function, muscle mass and strength, bone density, distribution of fat tissue, energy, and psychological well-being. With women, the major androgens are produced in the ovaries and adrenal glands and include testosterone, androstenedione, and dehydroepiandrosterone (DHEA).

Antidepressants. Prescription therapy government approved to treat depression and anxiety. An example is a selective serotonin reuptake inhibitor (SSRI).

Antihypertensives. Prescription therapy government approved to treat high blood pressure. An example is hydrochlorothiazide.

Anti-inflammatory drug. A type of prescription and nonprescription therapy used to relieve inflammation, swelling, stiffness, and joint pain. Works by affecting prostaglandins and can therefore be useful in treating cramping associated with menstrual cycles. An example is ibuprofen.

Antimüllerian hormone (AMH). Identified as a marker of ovarian reserve, AMH levels are used primarily to assess ovarian reserve in women seeking fertility assessment. Levels fall to undetectable amounts about 5 years before menopause and have been proposed as a means of predicting age of menopause.

Anxiety. A feeling of apprehension, fear, nervousness, or dread accompanied by restlessness or tension.

Aromatase inhibitors. A class of prescription drugs government approved for the prevention and treatment of breast cancer. Works by blocking the formation of estrogen in the body's tissues.

Arthritis. A disease of inflammation in the joints that may be associated with pain, stiffness, swelling, and redness as well as deformities of those affected joints.

Asymptomatic. Causes no symptoms.

Atherosclerosis. Also called hardening of the arteries. A disease characterized by a narrowing of the arteries caused by cholesterol-rich plaques on the inside of the artery wall. Atherosclerosis is a common cause of heart disease. It can affect the arteries of the brain as well as the arteries of the extremities.

Atrophic vaginitis. Inflammation or infection of the vagina sometimes accompanied with vaginal walls that are thin, smooth, pale, dry, and inflamed.

Aura. A neurologic symptom that occurs just before or at the onset of a migraine headache. Symptoms are primarily visual, characterized by flashing lights or wavy lines or even temporary loss of vision. Rarely, speech problems or numbness, tingling, or weakness in an extremity can occur. Symptoms last less than 1 hour and completely reverse.

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Bazedoxifene (BZA). An estrogen agonist/antagonist, also known as a selective estrogen receptor modulator (SERM), that helps protect the uterine lining from the thickening that may occur in women who take estrogens. It is used in combination with conjugated estrogens to treat moderate to severe hot flashes as an alternative to estrogen plus progestogen therapy (EPT).

Benign. Noncancerous.

Bilateral oophorectomy. The surgical removal of both ovaries (and usually, fallopian tubes).

Biofeedback. The technique of making unconscious or involuntary bodily processes (as heartbeats or brain waves) perceptible to the senses (in order to manipulate them by conscious mental control).

Biopsy. A minor surgical procedure during which a small tissue specimen is removed and examined microscopically for the presence of disease (often cancer).

Birth control. A way for men and women to prevent pregnancy. Methods for women include birth control pills, condoms, vaginal spermicides, intrauterine devices (IUDs), and more.

Bisphosphonates. A class of prescription nonhormonal, bone-specific drugs government approved for the prevention and treatment of postmenopausal osteoporosis. Works by decreasing the activity of bone-

dissolving cells, preserving bone density and bone strength as well as reducing fracture risk. See also Alendronate, Ibandronate, Risedronate.

Bladder. A saclike organ in the pelvic region where urine is stored before it leaves the body.

Bladder prolapse. A condition in which the bladder moves downward from its normal position. It is usually caused by a weakness in the pelvic floor after childbirth. See also Prolapse.

Body mass index (BMI). A number calculated from a person's weight and height that provides for most people a reliable indicator of body size. Used to screen for size categories that may lead to chronic health problems.

Bone mineral density (BMD). The amount of bone tissue in a segment of bone. Measuring BMD is the best way to evaluate bone strength and predict fracture risk. Results are reported as T-scores and Z-scores. See also Dual-energy x-ray absorptiometry (DXA).

BRCA1 and BRCA2 genes. Gene mutations with potential cancer-causing effects. Women with these gene mutations are sometimes recognized through their family histories of breast and ovarian cancer.

Breast cancer. A disease in which abnormal cells in the breast divide and multiply in an uncontrolled fashion. The cells can invade nearby tissue and can spread through the bloodstream and lymphatic system (lymph nodes) to other parts of the body.

Breast ultrasound. A noninvasive, safe technique that uses sound waves to create images of structures deep within the breast. Often used as a follow-up to a mammogram or breast exam, it can determine whether an abnormality is a cyst or solid tissue.

Calcitonin. A hormone produced by cells in the thyroid gland (located in the neck) that controls the level of calcium in the blood and helps bones absorb calcium. Also a nonoral prescription drug government approved for the treatment of postmenopausal osteoporosis, although not as potent as other osteoporosis drugs. An example is salmon calcitonin.

Calcium. A mineral that ensures proper functioning of cells in the body including the heart, nerves, muscles, and bones. Calcium is found in the skeleton and teeth, in the cells, and in the blood. Adequate calcium intake is essential for healthy bones with beneficial effects on hypertension, colorectal cancer, obesity, and kidney stones as well. Calcium is best absorbed through dietary sources, including dairy foods, some leafy green vegetables, oily fish, calcium-fortified foods, tofu, and nuts. Nonprescription supplements are also available. An example is calcium carbonate.

Cancer. A general term for more than 100 diseases in which there is an uncontrolled, abnormal growth of cells. Cancer cells can spread through the bloodstream and lymphatic system to other parts of the body (metastases).

Cardiovascular disease (CVD). An umbrella term used to describe many conditions related to the circulatory system, both inside and outside the heart. Includes heart disease, coronary artery disease (CAD), and coronary heart disease (CHD) as well as peripheral vascular disease. See also Coronary artery disease (CAD), Heart disease.

Cataract. A clouding of the lens of the eye that obstructs the passage of light. Associated with aging.

Computed axial tomography (CAT). A special kind of body imaging that is processed by a computer and displayed on a screen for viewing.

Cervix. The lower, narrow end of the uterus. A Pap test tests for cancer of the cervix and for changes that would progress to cancer with time

(dysplasia).

Chemotherapy. The use of chemical agents in the treatment or control of disease (such as cancer). The drugs have a toxic effect on cells and may cause damage to the ovaries, resulting in early menopause for many women.

Cholesterol. A waxy, fat-like substance that's found in all cells of the body. Your body needs some cholesterol to make hormones, vitamin D, and substances that help you digest foods. Your body makes all the cholesterol it needs. Cholesterol also is found in some of the foods you eat.

Chronic condition. A condition that lasts or keeps coming back over a long period of time.

Clinical trial. An organized research program conducted with patients to evaluate a medical treatment, drug, or device.

Clitoris. A small, sensitive, erectile part of the female genitals at the anterior end of the vulva.

Clonidine. A prescription drug government approved to lower high blood pressure. Sometimes prescribed off-label to treat mild hot flashes.

Cognitive function. Conscious intellectual activity (thinking, reasoning, remembering).

Colonoscopy. A test to view inside the colon that also allows for the biopsy and removal of precancerous polyps. See also Sigmoidoscopy.

Complementary and alternative medicine (CAM). A broad range of healing philosophies and approaches not typically used in conventional medicine. A therapy is called "complementary" when it is used in addition to conventional medicine, whereas it is called "alternative" when it is used

instead of conventional treatment.

Congestive heart failure. A condition in which the heart is unable to maintain an adequate circulation of blood in the body.

Conjugated estrogens (CE). A mixture of estrogen hormones used to treat symptoms of menopause such as hot flashes and vaginal dryness, burning, and irritation. Other uses include prevention of osteoporosis in postmenopausal women and replacement of estrogen in women with ovarian failure or other conditions that cause a lack of natural estrogen in the body.

Contraception. Any method used to prevent pregnancy during sexual activity. Perimenopausal women who wish to avoid pregnancy are advised to use reliable contraception until 1 year has passed without a menstrual period.

Coronary artery disease (CAD). Sometimes called coronary heart disease (CHD). The most common form of heart disease, CAD refers to damaged or diseased blood vessels that supply blood to the heart. See also Cardiovascular disease (CVD), Heart disease.

Coronary heart disease (CHD). See Coronary artery disease (CAD).

Custom-compounded hormones. Hormone therapies that are mixed for women from a prescription into formulations such as topical creams, gels, lotions, tablets, and suppositories. These compounds are not regulated by the government. Efficacy and safety have not been proven in clinical trials.

Cystectomy. Surgical removal of an ovarian cyst, frequently performed with a minimally invasive technique called laparoscopy. See also Laparoscopy.

Cystitis. Inflammation of the urinary bladder. See also Urinary tract infection.

Cystocele. Protrusion of the urinary bladder through the vaginal wall. Can contribute to urinary symptoms such as incontinence.

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Dehydroepiandrosterone (DHEA). One of the androgens circulating in the body that is a precursor of androstenedione, testosterone, and estrogen. Produced mainly in the adrenal glands, decrease in DHEA levels occurs with aging, not menopause.

Dementia. Loss of memory and other intellectual abilities severe enough to interfere substantially with independence or usual daily activities.

Depression. A disorder marked by a persistent sad, anxious, or empty mood and feelings of hopelessness and helplessness that affects eating, sleeping, and activity. Major depression is not the same as the mood swings or feeling blue reported by some perimenopausal women.

Diabetes. A group of diseases in which the body cannot properly control the amount of sugar in the blood, resulting in high sugar levels that may cause a variety of complications ranging from cardiovascular disease to blindness and kidney failure. Diabetes occurs when the body does not produce enough insulin or does not use it properly (insulin resistance).

Digital mammogram. A mammogram that records the image of the breast directly into a computer and can be enlarged or highlighted. This technology is more expensive than film mammography and not as widely available. See also Mammogram.

Dilation and curettage (D&C). A surgical procedure that involves dilating (opening) the cervix and scraping, removing, and analyzing the uterine lining (endometrium) to determine the cause of abnormal uterine bleeding,

among other conditions.

Dual-energy x-ray absorptiometry (DXA). The standard test for measurement of bone mineral density (BMD). DXA uses the principles of absorptiometry (the degree to which tissues absorb radiation) to determine spine, hip, or total body BMD. See also Bone mineral density.

Dyslipidemia. An abnormal amount of lipids (cholesterol and/or fat) in the blood.

Dysmenorrhea. Pelvic pain and cramping associated with a menstrual period.

Dyspareunia. Vaginal pain during intercourse.

Dysplasia. The growth of abnormal cells. Dysplasia is a precancerous condition that may or may not develop into cancer at a later time.

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Early menopause. Menopause that occurs earlier than the normal range of menopause. See also Premature menopause.

Endometrial ablation. A surgical procedure in which heat energy, in the form of lasers or electrical currents, is used to remove or thin down the endometrium (the lining of the uterus) for the treatment of abnormally heavy uterine bleeding.

Endometrial biopsy. A sample of endometrial tissue is removed through the opening of the cervix and examined microscopically for abnormal cells. See also Biopsy.

Endometrial cancer. Cancer of the inner lining (endometrium) of the uterus.

Endometrial hyperplasia. An overgrowth of tissue or a thickening of the

uterine lining, probably caused by excess estrogen. It is a risk factor for cancer of the uterus.

Endometriosis. A condition in which the same kind of tissue that lines the inside wall of the uterus (endometrium) grows outside the uterus (eg, on the ovaries or bowel), often resulting in severe pelvic pain and infertility.

Endometrium. The tissue that lines the inside of the uterus.

Esterified estrogens. Oral products of synthetic estrogen mixtures.

Estradiol. Also called 17β -estradiol. The most potent of the naturally occurring estrogens and the primary estrogen produced by women in their reproductive years. Available in oral, skin patch, and vaginal prescription drugs government approved for treating moderate to severe hot flashes and the genitourinary syndrome of menopause and for preventing postmenopausal osteoporosis. See also Estrogen.

Estriol. The least potent of the estrogens produced in the body. Not available in government approved drug formulations. See also Estrogen.

Estrogen. A variety of hormone chemical compounds produced by the ovaries, influencing the growth and health of female reproductive organs. They are active in many cells throughout the body by interacting with estrogen receptors. The three main naturally occurring estrogens in women are estradiol, estrone, and estriol. Estrogen levels fall after menopause. Several types of estrogen therapies are available for menopause indications. Also available in some contraceptives but at much higher doses than those used for menopause treatment. See also Estrogen therapy (ET).

Estrogen patch. Also Estrogen skin patch or Estrogen transdermal delivery system. A form of estrogen therapy contained in a special patch that is adhered to the skin. The patch technology allows a gradual release of estrogen through the skin directly into the bloodstream where it circulates

throughout the entire body (systemically), affecting many different tissues. See also Estrogen.

Estrogen plus progestogen therapy (EPT). Also known as combination hormone therapy. Estrogen is the hormone in this duo that provides the most relief for menopause-related symptoms. Progestogen is added to protect the uterus from estrogen stimulation and the increased risk of endometrial cancer. See also Hyperplasia, Progestogen.

Estrogen therapy (ET). General term describing a wide range of estrogen types that are available in various systemic and local formulations in oral, skin patch, and vaginal prescription drugs government approved for treating moderate to severe hot flashes and vaginal atrophy, and preventing postmenopausal osteoporosis. ET is prescribed without progestogen to women without a uterus. See also Estrogen, Progestogen.

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Fallopian tubes. Narrow, muscular tubes attached to the upper part of the uterus that serve as tunnels for the egg to travel from the ovaries to the uterus. Conception, the fertilization of an egg by a sperm, normally occurs in the fallopian tube.

Fecal occult blood test. Also Fecal immunochemical test. A test that detects the presence of blood in the gastrointestinal tract not visible to the naked eye.

Fertile. Capable of reproducing.

Fertilization. The moment at which a sperm penetrates an egg and an embryo begins to develop into a baby.

Fibrinogen. A protein in the blood that helps it to clot.

Fibroids. Common, benign (noncancerous) tumors (myomas) made up of

muscle cells and connective tissue that develop within the wall of the uterus. Fibroids are a common cause of abnormal uterine bleeding in midlife and beyond. See also Abnormal uterine bleeding.

Flibanserin. A medication approved for the treatment of hypoactive sexual desire disorder in premenopausal women.

Follicle-stimulating hormone (FSH). A hormone produced by the pituitary gland (located at the base of the brain). In women, FSH stimulates the growth of ovarian follicles (the small cysts that hold the eggs) and the supporting cells responsible for the growth and nurturing of the egg. FSH also stimulates production of estrogen by the ovaries. When estrogen production is low (after menopause), FSH levels will be high.

Formication. Irritating sensations to the skin, ranging from severe itching to phantom symptoms of “ants crawling on their skin” experienced by some perimenopausal women.

Fracture. The breaking of bone, resulting either from trauma (such as a fall) or because bone has become weakened from a condition such as osteoporosis. See also Osteoporosis.

FRAX. Risk-calculating computer software that evaluates the 10-year fracture risk in women.

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Gabapentin. A nonhormonal prescription drug government approved for the treatment of seizures from epilepsy, sometimes prescribed off-label for treating hot flashes.

Genital warts. Soft growths that occur on the genitals. Genital warts are a sexually transmitted infection (STI) caused by certain strains of the human papillomavirus (HPV). These skin growths can cause pain, discomfort, and itching.

Genitourinary syndrome of menopause (GSM). A collection of symptoms and signs associated with decreased estrogen and other sex steroid levels that can involve changes to the labia, clitoris, vagina, urethra, and bladder. The term includes symptoms associated with menopause affecting the vaginal area as well as the lower urinary tract.

Glaucoma. A disease of the eye marked by increased pressure within the eyeball that can result in damage to the optic disk and gradual loss of vision.

Gonadotropin-releasing hormone (GnRH). A hormone released by the hypothalamus (a region in the brain) that helps suppress ovarian production of estrogen. Drugs similar to GnRH are sometimes prescribed to shrink fibroid tumors or control abnormal uterine bleeding.

Gonorrhea. A sexually transmitted infection caused by the bacterium *Neisseria gonorrhoeae*. In women, symptoms are mild or nonexistent. Untreated gonorrhea can spread to the reproductive tract, anus, urethra, mouth, throat, and eyes. Several antibiotics can cure gonorrhea.

Gynecologist. A doctor who specializes in the care and health of the female reproductive organs.

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Heart disease. Any disorder that affects the heart muscle or the blood vessels of the heart (eg, arrhythmia, coronary heart disease, coronary artery disease, dilated cardiomyopathy, heart attack, heart failure, hypertrophic cardiomyopathy, mitral regurgitation, and pulmonary stenosis). See also Cardiovascular disease (CVD), Coronary artery disease (CAD).

Herpes, genital. Infections caused by the herpes simplex virus type 1 (HSV-1) and type 2 (HSV-2). Most genital herpes is caused by HSV-2, and infection typically occurs during sexual contact.

High-density lipoprotein cholesterol (HDL-C). Referred to as the “good” cholesterol. High HDL-C helps to lower the risk of heart disease.

Homeopathy. An unconventional Western medical system based on the theory that treating a disease with a substance that causes the symptoms of that disease in healthy people would cure similar symptoms in sick people.

Hormone. Specifically, a sex hormone (such as estrogen, progesterone, testosterone) produced by the ovaries (in women), testes (in men), or adrenal gland (in both women and men) that affects the growth or function of the reproductive organs or the development of secondary sex characteristics. Also includes non-sex hormones such as thyroid hormone.

Hormone therapy (HT). Prescription drugs used most often when treating menopause symptoms. Encompasses ET and EPT. See Estrogen therapy (ET) and Estrogen plus progestogen therapy (EPT).

Hot flash. A condition resulting in a red, flushed face and neck, perspiration, an increased pulse rate, and a rapid heartbeat, often followed by a cold chill. This is the most common menopause-related discomfort, thought to be the result of changes in the hypothalamus, the part of the brain that regulates the body’s temperature. If the hypothalamus mistakenly senses that a woman is too warm, it starts a chain of events to cool her down. Blood vessels near the surface of the skin begin to dilate (enlarge), increasing blood flow to the surface in an attempt to dissipate body heat. See also Vasomotor symptoms.

Human immunodeficiency virus (HIV). A virus that gradually attacks the immune system. The virus destroys a type of white blood cells called T-helper cells and makes copies of itself inside them. If left untreated, AIDS can develop, by which time HIV has severely damaged the immune system.

Human papillomavirus (HPV). The most common sexually transmitted

infection (STI). HPV is so common that nearly all sexually active men and women get it at some point in their lives. There is no treatment for HPV, but in most cases, it goes away on its own and does not cause any health problems. When HPV does not go away, it can cause genital warts and cancers including cancer of the vulva, vagina, penis, or anus. It can also cause cancer in the back of the throat, including the base of the tongue and tonsils. Nearly all cervical cancers are caused by HPV.

Hyperplasia. See Endometrial hyperplasia.

Hypertension. Abnormally high blood pressure.

Hypoactive sexual desire disorder. Problems with sexual desire, arousal, orgasmic response, and sexual pain. Between one-third and one-half of perimenopausal and postmenopausal women experience these problems.

Hysterectomy. Surgical removal of the uterus. Does not result in menopause, but ends menstrual periods and fertility. The term is often mistakenly used to describe removal of the uterus and both ovaries, which results in surgical menopause.

Hysteroscopy. A surgical procedure to examine the inside of the uterus by inserting a thin, lighted tube into the vagina and through the cervix (lower, narrow end of the uterus).

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Ibandronate. A potent prescription bisphosphonate drug, government approved in the United States (but not Canada) for the prevention and treatment of postmenopausal osteoporosis. See also Bisphosphonates.

Incontinence. Involuntary loss of bladder control (urinary incontinence) and/or bowel control (anal incontinence).

Induced menopause. Menopause that occurs earlier than expected when

both ovaries are surgically removed or permanently damaged by cancer treatments (pelvic radiation or chemotherapy).

Infertility. The condition of being incapable of, or unsuccessful in, reproducing (in women, becoming pregnant).

Insomnia. Difficulty falling asleep, staying asleep, or waking early.

Intrauterine device (IUD). Also called Intrauterine system (IUS). A device with either progestin or copper inserted in the uterus by a healthcare provider to prevent unwanted pregnancy. The progestin device can be used with estrogen. See also Estrogen plus progestogen therapy (EPT).

Isoflavones. Naturally occurring estrogen-like compounds found in soybeans, soy products, and red clover.

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Kegel exercises. Urogenital muscle exercises sometimes helpful for urinary incontinence.

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Late menopause. A vague term used to indicate menopause that occurs later in the normal range of menopause.

Laparoscopy. A surgical procedure to look inside the pelvic cavity by inserting a tubelike instrument through a small cut in the abdomen.

Low-density lipoprotein cholesterol (LDL-C). The “bad” cholesterol. Elevated LDL-C increases the risk of heart disease.

Leiomyoma. A fibroid tumor. See also Fibroids.

Lichen planus. An inflammatory dermatosis that affects the skin of the vulva characterized by the thickening of all layers of the epithelium. The

cause is unknown, although an autoimmune process is suspected. Treated with topical corticosteroids.

Lichen sclerosis. A thinning of the vulvar epithelium characterized with sore, burning lesions that can be seen over the entire labia. The lesions can also appear on the thighs, breasts, and shoulders. There is a high association of lichen sclerosis with vulvar cancer. Treated with topical corticosteroids.

Leiomyoma. The technical term for a fibroid tumor. See also Fibroids.

Local therapy. Drug therapy that has an effect limited to the site of drug application. It is not systemic (does not circulates through the body, affecting many body systems). Examples include most vaginal estrogen drugs. See also Systemic therapy.

Luteinizing hormone (LH). Produced by the pituitary gland (located at the base of the brain). In women, causes the dominant follicle to release its egg from the ovary (ovulation).

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Macular degeneration. An incurable eye disease that is the leading cause of blindness for individuals aged 55 and older in the United States, caused by the deterioration of the central portion of the retina.

Mammogram. Specialized x-rays of the breast used to detect abnormal growths or changes in the breast tissue.

Melatonin. A hormone that is secreted by the brain in response to darkness. Has been linked to the regulation of the body's 24-hour (circadian) rhythm. Available as a nonprescription supplement.

Menarche. The first menstrual period.

Menopause. The final menstrual period, which can be confirmed after 12 consecutive months without a period. This time marks the permanent end of menstruation and fertility. It is a normal, natural event associated with reduced functioning of the ovaries, resulting in lower levels of ovarian hormones (primarily estrogen).

Menopause transition. See Perimenopause.

Menorrhagia. Increased menstrual bleeding occurring at regular intervals or bleeding that last more than 7 days.

Menses. The menstrual period.

Menstrual cycle. The time each month (typically every 4 weeks) when an egg develops in the ovary, the lining of the uterus thickens, and the egg is released into the uterus. If the egg is not fertilized by sperm, the lining of the uterus (with the egg tissue) is shed through menstruation and the cycle begins again. This cycle typically becomes irregular during perimenopause and ends completely at menopause. See also Menstruation.

Menstruation. A woman's "period"—the discharge of blood, secretions, and tissue debris from the uterus that recurs in nonpregnant women. See also Menstrual cycle.

Metabolic syndrome. The presence of three or more of the following factors: central obesity (increased waist circumference), elevated triglyceride levels, low HDL-C, elevated blood pressure, elevated fasting glucose level. Women with metabolic syndrome are at increased risk for heart disease, stroke, and type 2 diabetes (adult-onset diabetes).

Migraine. A condition typically marked by a moderate to severe throbbing pain that is worse on one side of the head and usually aggravated by physical activity. Other symptoms are nausea, vomiting, and sensitivity to light and noise. See also Aura.

Mind-body medicine. Self-care approaches to healing for the management of symptoms or illness. Components integrate relaxation techniques with nutrition, exercise, and cognitive skills.

Magnetic resonance imaging (MRI). An imaging technique that allows the soft tissues of the body to be seen.

Myomectomy. An operation to remove fibroid tumors (myomas).

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NAMS Menopause Practitioner. A licensed healthcare provider who has achieved a certification in the field of menopause from The North American Menopause Society by passing a competency examination.

Naturopathy. An alternative medical system that views disease as a manifestation of alterations in the processes by which the body naturally heals itself.

Night sweats. Hot flashes that occur at night that can interfere with sleep, even if they are not strong enough to cause awakening. If heavy perspiration occurs, the condition is called night sweats. Although it is a myth that menopause makes a woman irritable, inadequate sleep causes fatigue, which may lead to irritability. See also Hot flashes.

Nonsteroidal anti-inflammatory drugs (NSAIDs). A class of drugs that groups together drugs that provide analgesic (pain-killing), antipyretic (fever-reducing), and in higher doses, anti-inflammatory effects. NSAIDs are nonnarcotic and so are used as nonaddictive alternatives to narcotics. The most prominent members of this group of drugs are aspirin, ibuprofen, and naproxen and are all available over the counter.

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Obesity. Excessive accumulation of fat in the body defined as a body mass

index greater than 30. Obesity is associated with adverse health consequences including type 2 diabetes, cardiovascular disease, stroke, hypertension, some cancers, osteoarthritis, and premature death. See also Body Mass Index.

Off-label. Refers to the use of a drug to treat a condition for which it has not been officially government approved. This practice is legal and common in medicine.

Oophorectomy. Surgical removal of an ovary. See also Bilateral oophorectomy.

Orgasm. Sexual climax.

Ospemifene. An oral medication used to treat dyspareunia (pain during sexual intercourse) encountered by some postmenopausal women. Ospemifene is a selective estrogen receptor modulator (SERM).

Osteoarthritis (OA). The most common form of joint disease. Increases in frequency with the “wear and tear” of aging and particularly affects aging women. Considerable research is ongoing to clarify the relationship between hormones and arthritis. See also Rheumatoid arthritis.

Osteoporosis. Postmenopausal osteoporosis is a disease of older women in which the bone density of the skeleton has decreased to a point where bone has become fragile and at higher risk for fractures, often with little or no trauma. In most women, bone loss accelerates during the first few years after menopause, which is related to the decline in estrogen levels.

Ovarian cancer. An abnormal growth of tissue that develops into a malignant tumor in a woman's ovaries.

Ovarian cyst. A sac filled with fluid or a semisolid material that forms on or within one of the ovaries, usually noncancerous.

Ovary. The female gonad, one of a pair of reproductive glands in women located in the pelvis, one on each side of the uterus. In premenopausal women, the ovaries produce eggs (ova) and hormones such as estrogen, progesterone, or testosterone. During each monthly menstrual cycle, an egg is released from one ovary. The egg travels from the ovary through a fallopian tube to the uterus. The ovaries are the main source of female hormones before menopause.

Ovulation. The release of a mature egg cell from the ovary.

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Pap test. A screening test in which a sample of cells is taken from a woman's cervix and examined under a microscope for precancerous conditions. Named after George N. Papanicolaou.

Parathyroid hormone (PTH). A substance made by the parathyroid gland (located in the neck) that helps the body store and use calcium. Available as a synthetic hormone (teriparatide) in a prescription injectable drug government approved for the treatment of postmenopausal osteoporosis when there is high risk for fracture. See also Osteoporosis, Teriperatide.

Paroxetine. A selective serotonin reuptake inhibitor (SSRI) antidepressant used to treat major depressive and general anxiety disorders as well as in the treatment of hot flashes and night sweats associated with menopause.

Pelvic cavity. The space inside the lower abdomen that holds the reproductive organs (eg, uterus, ovaries, fallopian tubes).

Pelvic examination. Clinical exam of the vulva (external genitalia), vagina, cervix, uterus, and ovaries. A speculum is inserted into the vagina and a Pap test is usually done during this exam. See also Pap test, Speculum.

Pelvic inflammatory disease (PID). An infection in the pelvis caused by

bacteria, usually from a sexually transmitted disease. PID can affect the uterus, ovaries, and/or fallopian tubes, and may cause pain, fever, scarring of the pelvic organs, and infertility.

Pelvic ultrasound. A test that uses sound waves to produce an electronic image of the organs of the pelvis.

Pelvis. The lower part of the abdomen, located between the hip bones.

Perimenopause. A span of time that begins with the onset of menstrual cycle changes and other menopause-related symptoms and extends through menopause (the last menstrual period) to 1 year after menopause. Perimenopause is experienced only with spontaneous (natural) menopause, not induced menopause. Also called the menopause transition. See also Induced menopause.

Phytoestrogens. Plant compounds (such as isoflavones) that have a chemical structure similar to that of estrogen and have weak estrogen-like biologic activity. Available in foods (such as soy) and as nonprescription supplements. See also Isoflavones.

Placebo. An inactive substance used in controlled experiments testing the effectiveness of another substance (as a drug).

Postmenopause. The span of time after menopause (the final menstrual period).

Premature menopause. Menopause that occurs at or before the age of 40, which may be the result of genetics, autoimmune disorders, or medical procedures or treatments. See also Early menopause.

Premenopause. The span of time from puberty (onset of menstrual periods) to perimenopause.

Primary ovarian insufficiency (POI). A condition that occurs at an earlier

age than 40 in which many periods in a row are skipped or there are no periods at all, which can be a sign of menopause or of very few eggs left in the ovaries. POI differs from premature menopause, however, in that ovarian activity may resume.

Progesterone. A female hormone that is released by the ovaries after ovulation to prepare the lining of the uterus (endometrium) to receive and sustain the fertilized egg and thus permit pregnancy. If pregnancy does not occur, progesterone (and estrogen) levels fall, resulting in menstruation. Available in prescription and nonprescription therapies (as a bioidentical hormone). See also Hormone therapy.

Progestin. A class of progestogen compounds synthesized to act like progesterone in the body. Available in oral prescription drugs and combined with estrogen in prescription skin patches. See also Progestogen, Hormone therapy.

Progestogen. A naturally occurring or synthetic progestational hormone. There are various progestogen options: progesterone (identical to the hormone produced by the ovaries) and several different progestins (compounds synthesized to act like progesterone). See also Progesterone, Progestin, Hormone therapy.

Prolapse. The falling down or slipping of a body part from its usual position (eg, with a uterus or bladder if the ligaments holding it in place become stretched). See also Bladder prolapse.

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Raloxifene. A type of a class of drugs known as selective estrogen-receptor modulators (SERMs), this oral prescription drug is government approved for the prevention and treatment of osteoporosis in postmenopausal women. Raloxifene is also being studied as a breast cancer prevention drug. See also Selective estrogen-receptor modulator (SERM).

Rheumatoid arthritis (RA). A joint disease caused by the immune system attacking healthy tissue, causing inflammation. This is different than the aging-related wear and tear that leads to osteoarthritis (OA). Often affects women at midlife and beyond. See also Osteoarthritis.

Risedronate. A prescription oral bisphosphonate drug government approved for the prevention and treatment of postmenopausal osteoporosis. See also Bisphosphonate, Osteoporosis.

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Selective estrogen-receptor modulator (SERM). A compound that has a similar chemical structure to estrogen and has an estrogen-like effect on some tissues and an antiestrogen effect on others. Available as various prescription drug therapies. See Raloxifene, Tamoxifen.

Selective serotonin-reuptake inhibitor (SSRI). The most commonly prescribed class of antidepressants. SSRIs block the reabsorption (reuptake) of the neurotransmitter serotonin in the brain. The SSRI paroxetine is approved to treat hot flashes related to menopause.

Sexual function. An overall term that includes issues of sexual desire, arousal, satisfaction, and attitudes; age- and health-related concerns; and counseling and other therapeutic interventions where there are problems

Sexually transmitted infection (STI). A disease passed from one person to another by unprotected sexual contact involving the mouth, anus, or vagina. Examples include the human papilloma virus (the infection that causes cervical cancer and precancer), gonorrhea, and HIV (the infection that causes AIDS).

Sigmoidoscopy. A test to view inside the rectum and lower colon. See also Colonoscopy.

Sonogram. An imaging procedure (called ultrasound) in which echoes from

sound waves passing through tissue create pictures of structures deep within the body.

Soy. Soy foods (such as soy nuts and tofu) and nonprescription supplements sometimes used for health benefits such as relieving mild hot flashes, although research is not conclusive. See also Isoflavones, Phytoestrogens.

Speculum. A metal or plastic instrument inserted into the vagina to help examine the vagina, cervix, and uterus. See also Pelvic examination.

Spontaneous menopause. Menopause that is not caused by any medical treatment or surgery. It occurs, on average, at age 52. Also known as natural menopause. See also Menopause.

Statins. A group of prescription drugs government approved to lower cholesterol. See also High-density lipoprotein cholesterol (HDL-C), Low-density lipoprotein cholesterol (LDL-C).

Stress incontinence. An involuntary loss of urine that occurs during activities such as coughing, sneezing, laughing, or exercising.

Surgical menopause. Induced menopause that results from surgical removal of both of the ovaries (bilateral oophorectomy) for medical reasons. Surgical menopause can occur at any age before spontaneous menopause. See also Bilateral oophorectomy, Induced menopause.

Syphilis. A sexually transmitted infection caused by the bacterium *Treponema pallidum*. It can remain undetected for many years. Syphilis can be cured in early stages with one dose of penicillin.

Systemic therapy. Drug therapy that circulates through the body, affecting many body systems. Examples include oral and skin patch estrogen drugs. See also Local therapy.



T-score, Z-score. Values that report the results of evaluating bone strength and predicting fracture risk. The Z-score compares the bone density to similar-age women and is a rough index of the need for extra diagnostic studies, whereas the T-score compares bone density to young women and is a rough index of the need for treatment. See also Bone mineral density, Dual energy X-ray absorptiometry (DXA).

Tamoxifen. A prescription selective estrogen-receptor modulator (SERM) that is approved for the prevention and treatment of breast cancer in high-risk women. Although it has an antiestrogen effect in the breast, it acts like an estrogen in the uterus and may cause the lining to thicken. See also Selective estrogen-receptor modulator (SERM).

Teriperatide. An injectable prescription drug government approved to treat postmenopausal osteoporosis in women at high risk for fracture. See also Parathyroid hormone (PTH), Osteoporosis.

Testosterone. The male androgen hormone that is essential for sperm production and responsible for inducing and maintaining male secondary sex characteristics. In women, testosterone (partially produced by the ovaries) may regulate sexual desire and may also help maintain bone and muscle health. See also Androgen.

Thyroid gland. A gland located beneath the voice box in the throat that produces thyroid hormone, which helps regulate growth and metabolism.

Transdermal estrogen. Estrogen therapy delivered through the skin into the bloodstream, such as via skin patch or topical lotion, cream, or gel. See also Estrogen patch.

Trichomoniasis. A sexually transmitted infection caused by *Trichomonas vaginitis*, usually accompanied by a copious vaginal discharge. Bladder symptoms may also be present. Treated with the antiparasitic drugs

metronidazole or tindazole.

Tubal ligation. The tying, clamping, and/or cutting of the fallopian tubes to prevent pregnancy and induce sterility.

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Ultrasonography. A diagnostic imaging technique based on the application of ultrasound, used to see internal body structures such as tendons, muscles, joints, vessels, and internal organs. Helpful in cases of abnormal uterine bleeding, breast cancer screening, and cervical evaluation.

Urge incontinence. Involuntary leakage of urine accompanied by a sense of urgency (cannot reach the bathroom in time), usually because of an overactive bladder. May be helped by medication and/or pelvic floor therapy. See also Kegel exercises.

Urinary incontinence. Involuntary loss of urine caused by any number of conditions, including urinary tract infection, pelvic relaxation, and bladder contractions. See also Incontinence, Stress incontinence, Urge incontinence.

Urinary tract infection (UTI). An often uncomfortable condition that occurs when bacteria in the urinary tract cause infection and inflammation. Typical treatment is an antibiotic.

Urogynecologist. A gynecologist specially trained to treat problems of the female urogenital (urinary and reproductive) system, such as incontinence and pelvic relaxation problems.

Urologist. A doctor specially trained to treat problems of the urinary system.

Uterine bleeding. Any bleeding that originates in the uterus, including a menstrual period, but typically used to describe abnormal uterine bleeding.

See also Abnormal uterine bleeding.

Uterus. The small, hollow, pear-shaped organ in a woman's pelvis where menstrual bleeding originates and in which a fetus develops. See also Hysterectomy.

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Vagina. The muscular, tubular part of the female genital tract that joins the cervix (the lower part of uterus) to the outside of the body. The vagina allows for sexual intercourse and childbirth and for the release of the menstrual flow.

Vaginal atrophy. A condition in which estrogen loss causes tissues of the vulva (the external parts of the female genital organs) and the lining of the vagina to become thin, dry, and less elastic. Vaginal secretions diminish, resulting in decreased lubrication. See also Genitourinary syndrome of menopause.

Vaginal dryness. Inadequate lubrication of the vagina that can be caused by low estrogen levels, medication, or lack of sexual arousal.

Vaginal estrogen. Prescription estrogen therapy that is applied vaginally (as cream, ring, suppository, or tablet) and is government approved to treat moderate to severe vaginal dryness and atrophy. Most vaginal estrogen therapies provide local, not systemic, treatment. See also Local therapy.

Vaginal lubricant. Nonprescription, water-based products that are applied to the vagina to decrease friction and reduce discomfort during intercourse.

Vaginal moisturizer. Nonprescription products similar to vaginal lubricants, but offering longer duration of effect by replenishing and maintaining water content in the vagina, often preferred by women who have symptoms of irritation, itching, and burning that are not limited to intercourse. Vaginal moisturizers also help to keep a healthy pH (level of acidity) in the vagina,

helping to guard against infection (but not sexually transmitted infections).

Vaginitis. Inflamed vaginal tissues that result in vaginal discharge, burning, or irritation. Tissues may be prone to injury, tearing, and bleeding during sexual intercourse or a pelvic examination.

Vasomotor symptoms. Also known as hot flashes and night sweats, common symptoms during perimenopause and early postmenopause. In almost all women, menopause-related vasomotor symptoms subside over time without any intervention. See also Hot flashes, Night sweats.

Vitamin D. A nutrient that enables the body to absorb calcium, among other things. It is normally produced within the skin in response to sunlight, provided no sunscreen is worn. Also available in supplement form, usually recommended for those at risk of inadequate sun exposure.

Vulva. The external parts of the female genitalia (lips or labia) around the opening of the vagina.

Vulvodynia. Pain in the vulva, usually described as a burning, stinging, itching, irritating, or raw feeling.

Vulvovaginitis. An inflammation or infection of the vulva that has many causes, such as bacteria, yeast, viruses, allergens, and sexually transmitted infections. Women and girls of any age can get vulvovaginitis.

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Weight-bearing exercise. Exercise during which bones and muscles work against the force of gravity or bear the body's weight. Examples include brisk walking, jogging, dancing, and resistance training exercises. May slow bone loss in the early postmenopausal years and reduce fracture risk.

Women's Health Initiative (WHI). Large research project established by the National Institutes of Health in 1991 to look into the most common

causes of death, disability, and impaired quality of life in postmenopausal women. The findings most reported by the media refer to oral hormone therapy initiated in older women (past perimenopause) to determine its relationship to cardiovascular disease, stroke, breast cancer, osteoporosis, colon cancer, and other conditions.

Women's health specialist. A doctor, nurse practitioner, physician assistant, or other allied health professional specializing in women's health issues.

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Yeast vaginitis. An infection of the vagina caused by one of the many species of fungus called *Candida albicans*.

Z	
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Z-score, T-score. See T-score.

Sources: The North American Menopause Society. *Menopause Practice: A Clinician's Guide*. 5th ed. Mayfield Heights, OH: The North American Menopause Society; 2014. The North American Menopause Society. *The Menopause Guidebook*. 8th ed. Mayfield Heights, OH: The North American Menopause Society; 2015.