

Menopause and Perimenopause

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Topic Overview

What is menopause?

Menopause is the point in your life when you permanently stop having menstrual periods. After 1 year of having no periods, you've reached menopause.

In most cases, menopause happens around age 50. But everyone's body has its own time line. You may stop having periods in your mid-40s. Or you might have them well into your 50s.

Menopause is a natural part of growing older. You don't need treatment for it unless your symptoms bother you. But it's a good idea to learn all you can about menopause. Knowing what to expect can help you stay as healthy as possible.

What is perimenopause?

Perimenopause is the process of change that leads up to menopause. It can start as early as your late 30s or as late as your early 50s. How long perimenopause lasts varies, but it usually lasts from 2 to 8 years. You may have irregular periods or other symptoms during this time.

What causes menopause?

Normal changes in your body cause menopause. You start to ovulate less often. Your hormone levels fluctuate, causing changes in your periods. Over time, you stop ovulating and the levels of the hormone estrogen drop. This causes your menstrual cycle to stop. Some medical treatments can trigger early menopause.

What are the symptoms?

Menopause symptoms include hot flashes, trouble sleeping, and vaginal dryness. You may have only a few mild symptoms. Or you might have severe symptoms. Symptoms tend to get worse the first year after menopause. But then many of them improve or go away.

How is it diagnosed?

Your age, your history of menstrual periods, and your symptoms will tell your doctor if you are near or at menopause. You likely won't need to be tested to see if you have started perimenopause or reached menopause. But if your doctor suspects another medical condition, you may have some tests.

How is menopause treated?

If your symptoms are bothering you, there are treatments that can help. Medicines may include hormonal birth control, hormone therapy, antidepressants, clonidine, or gabapentin. Other treatments that may help include cognitive behavioral therapy, hypnosis, and an over-the-counter vaginal lubricant.

How can you care for yourself?

A healthy lifestyle can help you manage menopause symptoms. It can also help lower your risk for heart disease, osteoporosis, and other long-term health problems.

- If you smoke, stop. Quitting smoking can reduce hot flashes and long-term health risks.
- Get regular exercise. It can help you manage your weight, keep your heart and bones strong, and lift your mood.
- Limit caffeine and alcohol. This may help manage menopause symptoms.
- Eat a heart-healthy diet. Choose foods like vegetables, fruits, nuts, beans, fish, or whole grains. Limit foods that have a lot of salt, fat, and sugar.
- Be sure you are getting enough calcium and vitamin D to help your bones stay strong. Eat foods that are rich in calcium. Ask your doctor if taking a supplement with calcium and vitamin D is right for you.
- Try to manage stress. Breathing exercises, meditation, or yoga may help.

Cause

Normal changes in your reproductive and hormone systems cause menopause. Your body starts to ovulate less often. During this time, your hormone levels go up and down unevenly (fluctuate). This causes changes in your periods and may cause other

symptoms. Over time, you stop ovulating, and estrogen and progesterone levels drop. This causes your menstrual cycle to stop.

Certain lifestyle choices and medical treatments are linked to an earlier menopause. They include:

- Smoking.
- Radiation therapy to or removal of the pituitary gland.
- Chemotherapy.
- Radiation therapy or other treatment to the belly or pelvis that damages the ovaries so that they no longer function.
- Genetic and autoimmune diseases.
- Removal of both ovaries (oophorectomy). This causes sudden menopause.
- Low body fat.

Symptoms

Symptoms may include:

- Hot flashes.
- Trouble sleeping.
- Vaginal dryness and sexual problems.

Symptoms related to mood and thinking may also happen around the time of menopause. These include:

- Mood swings, or feeling depressed or worried.
- Problems with remembering or thinking clearly.

You may have only a few mild symptoms. Or you might have severe symptoms that disrupt your sleep and daily life.

Symptoms tend to last or get worse the first year or more after menopause. Over time, hormones even out at low levels. Many symptoms improve or go away. But sometimes symptoms don't go away.

What Happens

In your late 30s, your egg supply starts to decline and hormone production changes. You may notice a shorter menstrual cycle and new PMS symptoms.

Starting sometime between your late 30s and your early 50s, your periods become irregular. This lasts for 2 to 8 years.

During this time, your ovaries sometimes produce higher and sometimes lower amounts of hormones. This can lead to heavy menstrual bleeding.

About 6 to 12 months before your periods stop, your ovaries stop releasing eggs. Estrogen levels drop. This causes your periods to stop. After a year of no periods, you have reached menopause.

During the next year or so, estrogen levels keep going down. This creates some health concerns, including:

- Higher risk of osteoporosis.
 - Skin changes, including thinner, drier skin; thinner, weaker vaginal lining and urinary tract; and higher risk of vaginal and urinary tract infections.
 - Higher risk of tooth loss and gum disease.
-

When To Call

Call your doctor if you have:

- Menstrual periods that are unusually heavy, irregular, or prolonged (1½ to 2 times longer than normal).
 - Bleeding between menstrual periods, when periods have been regular.
 - Renewed bleeding after having no periods for 6 months or more.
 - Unexplained bleeding while you are taking hormones.
 - Symptoms, such as insomnia, hot flashes, or mood swings, that aren't responding to home treatment and are interfering with your sleep or daily life.
 - Vaginal pain or dryness that doesn't improve with home treatment, or you have signs of a urinary tract infection, such as pain or burning during urination or cloudy urine.
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Exams and Tests

Your age, your history of menstrual periods, and your symptoms will tell your doctor if you are near or at menopause. If you can, bring a calendar or journal of your periods and symptoms.

You likely won't need to be tested to see if you have started perimenopause or reached menopause. But if your doctor suspects another medical condition, you may have some tests. Tests may include a pregnancy test or hormone tests.

If you have heavy, irregular periods, your doctor may want to do tests to rule out a serious cause of the bleeding. Heavy bleeding may be a normal sign of perimenopause. But it can also be caused by infection, disease, or a pregnancy problem.

Treatment Overview

If your symptoms are bothering you, there are treatments that can help.

Medicines may include:

- Hormonal birth control before menopause.
- Hormone therapy (HT).
- Antidepressants.
- Clonidine.
- Gabapentin.

Other treatments that may help include cognitive behavioral therapy, hypnosis, and an over-the-counter vaginal lubricant.

Self-Care

A healthy lifestyle may help you manage menopause symptoms. It can also help lower your risk for heart disease, osteoporosis, and other long-term health problems.

- If you smoke, stop. Quitting smoking can reduce hot flashes and long-term health risks.
- Exercise regularly. It can help you manage your weight, keep your heart and bones strong, and lift your mood.
- Limit alcohol and caffeine. This may help manage menopause symptoms and reduce long-term health risks.
- Eat a heart-healthy diet. Choose foods like vegetables, fruits, nuts, beans, fish, or whole grains. Limit foods that have a lot of salt, fat, and sugar.
- If you are overweight, try to lose a little weight. In addition to overall health benefits, weight loss may reduce hot flashes.
- Pay attention to how the emotional side of menopause is affecting you. Have a support network, and seek help as needed.
- Make sure you get enough calcium and vitamin D. Eat foods that are rich in calcium. This can help lower your risk of osteoporosis. Ask your doctor if taking a supplement with calcium and vitamin D is right for you. The amount of calcium and vitamin D that you need to take depends on your age, your health, and how much calcium you get from the foods you eat.
- Improve bladder control with regular Kegel exercises.
- To manage hot flashes, keep your environment cool, dress in layers, and manage stress.
- If you're having problems with vaginal dryness, try these things:
 - Use an over-the-counter lubricant before intercourse. Lubricants can be water-, silicone-, or oil-based. Ask your doctor about what kind may be a better option for you.
 - Use a vaginal moisturizer, such as Replens. It can be used on a regular basis to help reduce vaginal dryness.
 - Ask your doctor about using vaginal estrogen (cream, tablet, or ring).
- Try to manage stress. Breathing exercises, meditation, or yoga may help.

Explore more

- Menopause: Managing Hot Flashes (See Menopause: Managing Hot Flashes in appendix)
- Stress Management: Relaxing Your Mind and Body (See Stress Management: Relaxing Your Mind and Body in appendix)

Medicines

If your symptoms bother you, you may want to ask your doctor about prescription medicines.

All medicines for menopause symptoms have possible risks or side effects. Talk with your doctor about the risks and benefits of treatment options for you.

Hormone medicines include:

- Low-dose vaginal estrogen (cream, tablet, or ring). These forms are mainly used to treat vaginal dryness and other tissue changes in and around the vagina. They may also help prevent urinary tract infections (UTIs) and other urinary symptoms.
- Estrogen and progestin therapy. This form of hormone therapy (HT) sends hormones throughout the body. It can come in the form of a pill, patch, vaginal ring, gel, spray, or cream. It can be used to treat menopause symptoms such as hot flashes and vaginal dryness.
- Estrogen therapy (ET). This is the use of estrogen without progestin. This form of HT also sends hormones throughout the body. It's most often used in people who have had surgery to remove their uterus (hysterectomy).
- Testosterone with estrogen. This is sometimes used for menopause symptoms that don't improve with estrogen therapy.

You may have heard of a form of HT called compounded bioidentical hormones. Treatment with this type of HT is not approved or regulated by the FDA and may have more risk. This type of HT can vary in quality and may be more costly. And studies show that compounded bioidentical hormones are not more effective than FDA-approved HT.¹

Non-hormone medicines include:

- Antidepressants. These can reduce how many hot flashes you have. They can also make them less severe. And they may help with irritability, depression, and moodiness.
- Clonidine. It can reduce the number of hot flashes and how severe they are. It may cause side effects related to low blood pressure.
- Gabapentin (Neurontin). It can reduce the number of hot flashes and how severe they are. Possible side effects include sleepiness, dizziness, and swelling.
- Ospemifene (Osphena). This is used to reduce vaginal changes that can make sex painful.

Learn more

- Menopause: Should I Use Hormone Therapy (HT)? (See Menopause: Should I Use Hormone Therapy (HT)? in appendix)

Other Treatment

There are many non-medicine treatments to relieve menopause symptoms.

- Cognitive-behavioral therapy is a type of counseling. It focuses on changing certain thoughts and behavior patterns. It may help you feel less bothered by hot flashes.
- Hypnosis is a state of focused concentration. With it, you become less aware of what is around you. It may reduce the number of hot flashes and make them less severe.
- Mind and body relaxation, such as breathing exercises. This may help with hot flashes and mood symptoms.
- Yoga and biofeedback can help you reduce stress.
- Black cohosh (such as Remifemin) may help relieve symptoms. But the research on black cohosh has had mixed results.
- Soy may improve symptoms. But studies have shown mixed results.

Remember that dietary supplements aren't regulated like medicines, and they may have risks. If you choose to take them, tell your doctor what you take.

Related Information

- Abnormal Uterine Bleeding
 - Abnormal Vaginal Bleeding
 - Birth Control
 - Breast Cancer
 - Deep Vein Thrombosis
 - Endometrial (Uterine) Cancer
 - Fibrocystic Breasts
 - Heart Attack
 - Hysterectomy
 - Osteoporosis
 - Sexuality and Physical Changes With Aging
-

References

Citations

1. Jackson LM, et al. (2020). *The Clinical Utility of Compounded Bioidentical Hormone Therapy: A Review of Safety, Effectiveness, and Use*. Washington, DC: National Academies Press (US). <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/books/NBK562877/>. Accessed May 10, 2023.
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Credits for Menopause and Perimenopause

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Clinical Review Board

(<https://www.healthwise.org/specialpages/legal/abouthw/en>)

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Appendix

Overview

A hot flash is a sudden feeling of intense body heat. Your head, neck, and chest may get red. Your heartbeat may speed up, and you may feel anxious. You may find that hot flashes occur more often in warm rooms or during stressful times.

It's common to have hot flashes at some point before or after menopause. Hot flashes happen when estrogen levels drop. You may have few to no hot flashes, or you may have them many times each day.

Hot flashes can be uncomfortable and upsetting. They can lower the quality of your sleep and daily life. But they aren't a sign of a medical problem. They are a normal response to natural changes in your body.

Hot flashes usually get better or go away after the first or second year after menopause. At that point, estrogen levels usually stay at a low level.

You can try lifestyle changes that may help you manage or reduce your hot flashes.

- Avoid using tobacco or drinking a lot of alcohol.
- Manage stress.
- Exercise regularly, and eat a healthy diet.

You also can talk to your doctor about treatments that may either reduce or stop your hot flashes. These include taking hormone therapy and certain medicines.

How can you manage hot flashes?

Lifestyle choices

You can manage hot flashes by making certain lifestyle choices. Some measures may help to prevent or reduce hot flashes. Others can make you more comfortable when you're having a hot flash.

- Eat and drink well.
 - Limit food and drinks that make your symptoms worse. This may include things like caffeine, alcohol, or spicy foods.
 - Drink cold liquids rather than hot ones.
 - Eat healthy foods.
- Stay cool.
 - Keep your area cool. Use a fan.
 - Dress in layers. Then you can remove clothes as needed.
 - Wear natural fabrics, such as cotton and silk.
 - Sleep with fewer blankets.
- Reduce stress.
 - Get regular exercise.
 - Use relaxation techniques, such as breathing exercises, yoga, or biofeedback.
- Don't smoke or use other forms of tobacco.

Medicines

There are prescription medicines that can help with hot flashes.

- **Hormone therapy (HT)** can reduce or stop hot flashes and other menopause symptoms. It replaces the hormones that drop at menopause.
- **Estrogen-progestin birth control pills** (before menopause) can reduce or stop hot flashes and other symptoms.
- **Antidepressant medicine** can reduce the number of hot flashes and how bad they are.
- **Clonidine** may relieve hot flashes.
- **Gabapentin** may lower the number of hot flashes each day. It also may make hot flashes less severe.

Related Information

- Hot Flashes and Menopause
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Credits for Menopause: Managing Hot Flashes

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Menopause: Should I Use Hormone Therapy (HT)?

1. Get the facts
2. Compare your options
3. What matters most to you?
4. Where are you leaning now?
5. What else do you need to make your decision?

1. Get the facts

Your options

- Use hormone therapy (HT).
- Don't use HT. Try other treatment to manage your menopause symptoms.

Key points to remember

- Hormone therapy lowers the risk of osteoporosis and possibly colon cancer. But for some people, HT may increase the risk of breast cancer, stroke, blood clots, and possibly dementia and heart attack.
- The health risks linked to HT are not high for most people. But these small risks may outweigh the small benefits of HT.
- HT can help you deal with menopause symptoms such as hot flashes and sleep problems. See your doctor regularly to check your benefits and health risks.
- Instead of HT, you might try other prescription medicines or cognitive-behavioral therapy to manage hot flashes. A lubricant gel or an estrogen cream, ring, or tablet may help with vaginal soreness and dryness.
- HT helps prevent bone loss and osteoporosis. But if you are at high risk for osteoporosis, HT is only one of several treatments you could try.

FAQs

What is menopause?

Menopause is the point in your life when you permanently stop having menstrual periods. After 1 year of having no periods, you've reached menopause.

In most cases, menopause happens at around age 50, but everyone's body has its own timeline. As you get closer to menopause, your estrogen levels go up and down unevenly. This causes changes in your period and other symptoms, such as hot flashes, headaches, and sleep problems. After your estrogen levels drop past a certain point, your menstrual cycles end.

Menopause is a natural part of growing older. You don't need treatment for it unless your symptoms bother you.

What is hormone therapy?

Hormone therapy usually uses a combination of two hormones, estrogen and progestin. HT comes in the form of a pill, patch, gel, spray, or vaginal ring. HT increases the estrogen and progestin levels in your body. It can prevent osteoporosis and ease menopause symptoms such as hot flashes and sleep problems.

What if you don't take HT?

Menopause symptoms can be upsetting and uncomfortable. But you don't have to suffer through them. There are other things besides taking HT that you can do to help.

The first step is to have a healthy lifestyle. This can reduce your symptoms and also lower your risk of heart disease and other long-term problems linked to aging. Eat a heart-healthy diet, get regular exercise, don't smoke, and limit caffeine, alcohol, and stress.

If you still need help dealing with symptoms, you might try:

- Cognitive-behavioral therapy. This may help reduce hot flashes.
- Hypnosis. This may help reduce the number and severity of hot flashes.
- Mind and body relaxation, such as breathing exercises. This may help with hot flashes and mood symptoms.
- Soy. Some people feel that eating soy helps even out their menopause symptoms.
- Yoga or biofeedback. They may help reduce stress.
- Vaginal lubricants (such as Astroglide and K-Y Jelly) and moisturizers to help with vaginal dryness, and vaginal estrogen to relieve soreness.
- Antidepressant medicines, a blood pressure medicine called clonidine, or gabapentin. These may lower the number of hot flashes you have. And they can make hot flashes less severe when you do have them.

To manage symptoms before you start menopause, you might think about taking hormonal birth control.

What are the benefits of taking HT?

Hormone therapy:

- Reduces the number of hot flashes you have, and it makes them less severe when you do have them.
- Lowers your risk of osteoporosis. Estrogen slows bone thinning and helps increase bone strength.
- Prevents vaginal dryness and soreness caused by low estrogen.
- Slows the loss of skin collagen. Collagen puts the stretch in skin and muscle.

- Reduces the risk of dental problems, such as tooth loss and gum disease.
- May reduce the risk of colon cancer.

What are the risks from HT?

Risk varies based on when you start HT in menopause and how long you take it. Short-term use of hormone therapy in early menopause has less risk than when it is started later in menopause.

HT may increase your risk for:

- Stroke.
- Blood clots.
- Heart attack.
- Breast cancer.
- Gallstones.
- Dementia.
- Urinary incontinence.

Your risk will differ based on your personal or family history.

Why might your doctor recommend hormone therapy?

Your doctor may recommend HT if:

- You have no risk factors for heart disease, blood clots, stroke, or breast cancer; you are willing to accept the small increase in risks of cancer and heart disease; **and**
- You have thought about or tried other treatments.
- You have menopause symptoms that are lowering your quality of life.

2. Compare your options

	Take HT	Don't take HT
	<p>What is usually involved?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • You take daily pills or use a patch, gel, spray, or vaginal ring to increase hormone levels. • You take hormone therapy (HT) to relieve menopause symptoms. 	<p>What is usually involved?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • You manage menopause symptoms such as hot flashes with: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◦ Cognitive-behavioral therapy. ◦ Hypnosis. ◦ Mind and body relaxation. ◦ Soy. ◦ Yoga or biofeedback. ◦ Antidepressant medicines, blood pressure medicine (clonidine), or gabapentin. ◦ Vaginal lubricants (such as Astroglide and K-Y Jelly), moisturizers, or low-dose vaginal estrogen.
	<p>What are the benefits?</p> <p>Taking HT:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Helps you deal with hot flashes and other menopause symptoms. • Lowers your risk of osteoporosis. • Eases vaginal dryness and soreness. • Slows loss of skin collagen. • Reduces the risk of dental problems. 	<p>What are the benefits?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • You avoid the health risks from HT.

What are the risks and side effects?

Side effects can include:

- Vaginal bleeding or spotting.
- Breast tenderness.
- Bloating.
- Nausea.

HT may increase your risk for:

- Stroke.
- Blood clots.
- Heart attack.
- Breast cancer.
- Gallstones.
- Dementia.
- Urinary incontinence.

Some risks depend on your age, when HT is started, and how long it is used.

What are the risks and side effects?

- Your menopause symptoms may still bother you.
- Other prescription medicines can have side effects, such as:
 - Headaches, upset stomach, and problems sleeping (antidepressants).
 - Problems linked to low blood pressure (clonidine).

Personal stories

Are you interested in what others decided to do? Many people have faced this decision. These personal stories may help you decide.

Personal stories about deciding whether to take hormone therapy (HT)

These stories are based on information gathered from health professionals and consumers. They may be helpful as you make important health decisions.

"I've been very fortunate. I made it through menopause without hot flashes or other major discomforts. My doctor tells me that all I have to do now is be sure I get my regular checkups and exams, take calcium and vitamin D for bone health, and take good care of myself."

— Karen, age 55

"By the time my periods stopped, I didn't have bad hot flashes or other problems. I was pretty proud of myself for getting exercise and eating right, and thought that I was one of the lucky ones. Did I get hit, though! The night sweats started a few months after my last period, and I couldn't sleep or get through the day after that. So, I tried low-dose HT for 6 months, to get some relief. Then, I tapered off of it over a few months, and they weren't as bad. I figure I can tough it out now till my body adjusts to its new state."

— Jane, age 52

"I started taking HT after my periods stopped. The problem is, I had bleeding on and off that was like my period, and I just couldn't take it after 6 months. I haven't taken it since, and I've grown used to my body's changes. I still get hot flashes sometimes but not like I used to. When I feel one

coming on, it really helps me to do relaxation breathing. I think that calming my body and mind has a big effect on making a hot flash go away."

— Mary Anne, age 60

"I have already had a terrible time with perimenopausal moodiness and some occasional hot flashes, and low-dose birth control pills have helped even out the hormone ups and downs. So if I still have symptoms in menopause, I'll talk with my doctor about HT."

— Jenessa, age 45

"I don't want to take estrogen or progestin, because of my family history of cancer. I used an antidepressant when my hot flashes were bad, and that helped me a lot. Now, I just take calcium and vitamin D supplements and get regular exercise to help protect my bones."

— Sondra, age 55

"A friend told me that they were having great results from cognitive-behavioral therapy, so I tried it for the hot flashes I was having. I think it's working quite well."

— Sam, age 49

3. What matters most to you?

Your personal feelings are just as important as the medical facts. Think about what matters most to you in this decision, and show how you feel about the following statements.

Reasons to use hormone therapy

Reasons not to use hormone therapy

Other treatment hasn't helped me deal with my menopause symptoms.

I want to try other treatment before I try HT for my symptoms.

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More important

Equally important

More important

The benefits of HT outweigh the risks for me.

I feel the risks from HT are too high for me.

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More important

Equally important

More important

I don't mind taking medicines to help me manage my symptoms.

I don't want to take medicines if I can avoid them.

--	--	--	--	--	--	--

More important	Equally important	More important
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My other important reasons:	My other important reasons:

More important		Equally important			More important	

4. Where are you leaning now?

Now that you've thought about the facts and your feelings, you may have a general idea of where you stand on this decision. Show which way you are leaning right now.

Using HT		NOT using HT
Leaning toward	Undecided	Leaning toward

5. What else do you need to make your decision?

Check the facts

1. Does taking HT raise your risk of health problems and disease?

- **Yes**
- No
- I'm not sure

You're right. HT may increase your risk of breast cancer, heart attack, stroke, blood clots, and dementia.

2. Can HT help you deal with menopause?

- **Yes**
- No
- I'm not sure

You're right. HT can help you deal with menopause symptoms such as hot flashes and sleep problems.

3. Are there other treatments that can help with menopause symptoms?

- **Yes**
- No
- I'm not sure

You're right. Instead of HT, you might try other prescription medicines, cognitive-behavioral therapy, or a vaginal estrogen to help deal with symptoms.

Decide what's next

1. Do you understand the options available to you?

- Yes
- No

2. Are you clear about which benefits and side effects matter most to you?

- Yes
- No

3. Do you have enough support and advice from others to make a choice?

- Yes
- No

Certainty

1. How sure do you feel right now about your decision?

--	--	--	--	--

Not sure at all

Somewhat sure

Very sure

2. Check what you need to do before you make this decision.

- I'm ready to take action.
- I want to discuss the options with others.
- I want to learn more about my options.

Use the following space to list questions, concerns, and next steps.

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Credits

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Author: Healthwise Staff **Clinical Review Board** All Healthwise education is reviewed by a team that includes physicians, nurses, advanced practitioners, registered dietitians, and other healthcare professionals.

Overview

There are lots of ways to relax. Some, like guided imagery, are designed to relax your mind. Others, like progressive muscle relaxation, help relax your body. But because of the way the mind and body are connected, many relaxation methods work on both the mind and the body.

How can you relax your mind and body?

Relaxing the mind

Here are some things you can do to help relax your mind. Try a few to see what works best for you.

- Take slow, deep breaths.

When you breathe deeply, it sends a message to you to calm down and relax.

- Practice mindful meditation.

The goal of mindful meditation is to focus your attention on things that are happening right now in the present moment. For example, listen to your body. Is your breathing fast, slow, deep, or shallow? Do you hear noises, such as traffic, or do you hear only silence? The idea is just to note what is happening without trying to change it. This may take some practice.

- Write about stressful things and events.

It may help to write about things that are bothering you. Write for 10 to 15 minutes a day about stressful events and how they made you feel. Or think about tracking your stress. For example, write down what was happening when you felt the stress, and how intense the stress was. This helps you find out what is causing your stress and how much stress you feel.

- Use guided imagery.

With this technique, you imagine yourself in a certain setting that helps you feel calm and relaxed. You can use online videos, scripts, or a teacher to guide you through the process.

- Let your feelings out.

Talk, laugh, cry, and express anger when you need to. Talking with friends, family, a counselor, or a spiritual advisor about your feelings is a healthy way to relieve stress.

- Do something you enjoy.

You may feel that you're too busy to do these things. But making time to do something you enjoy can help you relax. Try:

- Soaking in a warm bath.
- Listening to music. You can also try music therapy.
- Going out with a friend.
- Playing with and caring for pets.
- Finding a hobby you enjoy.
- A creative activity, such as writing, crafts, or art.
- Volunteer work.
- Laughter. Humor may reduce stress and boost your immune system.

Relaxing the body

Here are some things you can do to help relax your body.

- Get regular exercise.

Regular exercise is one way to manage stress. For many people, walking is a great way to get started. Even everyday activities such as housecleaning or yard work can reduce stress. Stretching can also relieve muscle tension.

- Try relaxation techniques.
 - Breathing exercises. For example, you can try deep breathing exercises.
 - Progressive muscle relaxation. This technique reduces muscle tension. You do it by relaxing separate groups of muscles one by one.
 - Yoga, tai chi, and qi gong. These techniques combine exercise and meditation. You may need some training at first to learn them. Books and videos are also helpful. You can do all of these techniques at home.
- Get a massage, or have someone give you a back rub.
- Have a warm drink that doesn't have alcohol or caffeine in it.

Try herbal tea or warm milk, for example.

- Try biofeedback.

Biofeedback teaches you how to use your mind to control skin temperature, muscle tension, heart rate, or blood pressure. All of these things can be affected by stress.

Related Information

- Mind-Body Wellness

Credits for Stress Management: Relaxing Your Mind and Body

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