# The Men’s Guide to Menopause

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## Putting the Men in Menopause

It’s true. Menopause is a condition that men will never experience directly. Men will not have the massive changes to their physiology that women endure due to ever-changing hormone levels.

They will never deal with the emotional repercussions of these physical changes and identity issues associated with moving past child bearing years. As such, as a man you may think that you have it easy.

Not so fast. Though men do not experience the symptoms directly, they are in line to be affected by the results in indirect ways. If your wife or another woman in your life is moving towards menopause, you have options.

Option one is for you to continue your life unchanged. You can be rude, judgmental and ignorant to the shift that she is struggling to manage. Beware if you choose this option. It won’t help your relationship. If option one sounds good to you, you can stop reading now.

If you are still reading then option two is right for you. In option two, you work to understand and empathize with what your wife or partner is experiencing. You put your own needs on the backburner for small amounts of time to focus on the greater good of your family and relationship.

Remember, the work that you put towards menopause now will come back to benefit you greatly in the future. Are you ready to help the person that helps you? Here’s how:

### Take it Seriously

Over the years, it has become commonplace in the media to make fun of women in different stages of menopause. It’s easy to make a joke about hot flashes or increased irritability.

It is also easy to see why someone would want to make fun of menopause. Menopause is a big issue that is involved and difficult to understand. When something is intimidating, people tend to make fun of it to overshadow their insecurities.

Though it is good for a cheap laugh, it does no good to help your situation. This is not the time for jokes or insensitivities. It is time for action and concerted effort moving towards happiness. The easy way is usually not the best way.

### Get Educated

The road to understanding something new begins at education. Work to move away from the stereotypical and clichéd information about menopause and move towards solid information from reputable sources. To begin, gaining knowledge about the stages of menopause can do you a world of good. Here’s a breakdown:

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## Get Educated

- **Pre-menopause** – Contrary to what others may tell you, pre-menopause is not the period immediately prior to menopause. Pre-menopause refers to the entire period of time that a woman is able to reproduce.
- **Perimenopause** – This period can last up to 10 years but is usually a four-year period prior to menopause. Women typically enter this stage around age 47. In this stage, her ovaries reduce their release of eggs and their release of hormones like estrogen. In perimenopause, her periods will be erratic and inconsistent. Estrogen production will be unpredictable sparking symptoms of mood changes, anxiety and irritability. Periods of low estrogen will trigger hot flashes, vaginal dryness and diminished concentration. This will be a difficult stage for the both of you because symptoms are high and volatile.
- **Menopause** – Menopause does not refer to a period of time but rather a specific event. It is the date of her final period. You should not confirm the date of menopause until she has gone 12 consecutive months without having a period. Be sure to rule out other explanations like stress or health concerns for her missed periods.
- **Post-menopause** – Since menopause is the date of her last period, post-menopause is everything that happens following. Lowered levels of estrogen and progesterone are linked to long-term health problems. During this stage, she is at higher risk of osteoporosis and heart disease.

### Ask Questions

Your attempts at education will only take you so far. To get more specific details, go straight to the source. Ask your wife about her symptoms, experiences, thoughts and feelings related to her menopause. The act of asking questions shows that you are interested and concerned. She will be happy to know that you are taking an active role in learning about her state.

Since you are asking questions about it, be sure to ask how you can help. Let her see that you are willing to spend effort and energy working to improve her well-being. Ask her about using cold compresses to combat hot flashes or night sweats. Ask her about situations or times that are worse than others to find suitable solutions.

While you're at it, be sure to listen to the information she gives. Asking questions without paying attention to the answer shows that you are only going through the motions. This is rude and a sign of disrespect. Pay attention and write down the information to help your ability to recall it at a later time. A little listening now leads to big benefits later.

### Empathize and Validate

Some aspects of menopause do not have easy answers. Men tend to want to "fix" problems. If the pipe is leaking, you patch it up. If the car is making a funny noise, you check it out. Unfortunately, physical and emotional issues are not so easy to repair. Rather than trying to "fix" your wife's symptoms, take steps to empathize with her and validate her experience.

With empathy, you attempt to understand how someone is feeling and what they are going through by putting yourself in their shoes. Imagine what it would be like to have your body changing in drastic and unpredictable ways. Go on to imagine what it would be like to have emotional changes that you cannot control. Empathy is about understanding. It is not about pity or feeling sorry for them.

With validation, you let your wife know that her feelings are normal and natural. This is what happens during the stages of menopause. Remind her that she is doing the best she can. This support and understanding will go a long way towards her feeling justified.

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**Don’t Take it Personally**

All of the information, understanding and validation cannot prevent symptoms from popping up at times. When symptoms do arise, she may take her frustrations out on you, and this makes sense. You are there in the same room. You are a trusted support. You are the perfect target.

Oddly enough, under large amounts of stress, people tend to victimize their closest friends, family and relationships. There is a safety in expressing her feelings towards you because you are less likely to overreact or take it heart.

Taking the words she says or the behaviors she performs too personally helps no one in this situation. That does not mean that you dismiss everything she says and does, but it does mean that you work to find a balance between what is rational and what is fueled by menopause.

Creating and maintaining that balance will help with your own frustrations. Remember, if you become too frustrated, you can no longer help her.

**Support New Directions**

During the menopause stages, women have difficulty with the shift in their identity. It forces them to rediscover themselves, their relationships and their interests. The best thing that you can do is support her efforts to find herself.

Maybe she will be interested in taking a new class or joining a group in the community. Maybe she will reinvest time in church or other activities. This is perfectly normal and healthy. It is not an indication that she is angry with you or trying to sneak away. It only means that she is taking steps towards finding new happiness.

**Have Fun**

This may be last, but it is not the least important. No matter what stage of menopause she is experiencing, having fun should be your goal. Too often, couples fall into routines and ruts that are unfulfilling for each person.

Additionally, during stressful times associated with menopause, you may be more likely to avoid your wife for fear that you will irritate her. This plan only serves to diminish the relationship.

Rather than avoid, plan fun activities and events together. Go places that you have wanted to go and do the things that you have put off doing. Having fun will strengthen the relationship and make it easier to accomplish the other suggestions listed. Fun makes even stressful periods more pleasant.

**Conclusion**

You will never know what it’s like to have your last menstrual cycle, but that doesn’t mean that menopause just passes you by. Show your wife how much she means to you by investing your time, effort and energy in understanding her and helping her through this time of change.

Being a team always makes you a better mate.