



For Women
For Health, For Menopause

“How do I know if I’m menopausal and do I need to have a blood test?”

GP and menopause specialist Dr Jane Davis explains how to respond to patient concerns about the all-important question of menopausal symptoms and whether blood tests are needed to diagnose menopause.



Q: “How do I know if I’m menopausal and do I need to have a blood test?”

A: Every woman was born with all the eggs she’ll ever have, and those numbers reduce up until menopause. As the egg numbers go down, the quality becomes lower and they don’t ‘fire’ reliably. This is what causes erratic periods. They get closer together, become more irregular, and then they’ll spread out with longer gaps or even shorter gaps. They may become lighter, but they often become heavier as well. Periods become very chaotic – that is the perimenopause.

If your patient’s last period was more than a year ago, she has passed perimenopause. Menopause is defined as the day that marks one year from your last period. After that, your patient is in the postmenopausal stage.

Red flags

It is very important to look out for symptoms such as **persistent bleeding** or **bleeding after intercourse**.

These are potential warning signs and need to be investigated.

Symptoms of perimenopause

Perimenopausal symptoms result from fluctuating oestrogen levels. Women have oestrogen receptors located around their whole bodies, and these receptors can be sensitive to change in different ways.

Recognised symptoms of perimenopause include vasomotor symptoms such as:

- Hot flushes
- Night sweats
- Poor sleep/Insomnia.

Women in perimenopause may also experience brain effects including:

- Mood changes/Mood swings
- ‘Brain fog’/Problems with memory
- Problems with concentration.

Some women also experience physical changes such as:

- Vaginal dryness
- Bladder irritability
- Itching
- Joint pains.

A full list of symptoms can be found on the NICE CKS website¹.

If a woman comes to you with any of these symptoms, this is enough information for you to diagnose perimenopause without a blood test.

If a woman comes to you with any of these symptoms, and her last period was more than a year ago and she has not had any bleeding since, she is postmenopause and no blood tests are needed to give a diagnosis.

Blood tests such as follicle-stimulating hormone (FSH) measurements are not needed to diagnose perimenopause or menopause in otherwise healthy women (who are not using hormonal contraception) aged over 45² years.

When blood tests are needed

Blood tests such as FSH tests are normally only needed for younger women under 40 reporting perimenopausal symptoms with a suspected diagnosis of premature ovarian insufficiency (POI) or a cessation of periods over a year ago, or if we are uncertain about the diagnosis³.

The test identifies if there’s any response in the ovaries and it’s only a snapshot of hormone levels at that time. It does not predict the future.

REFERENCES:

- ¹ <https://cks.nice.org.uk/topics/menopause/diagnosis/diagnosis-of-menopause-perimenopause/>
- ² <https://cks.nice.org.uk/topics/menopause/diagnosis/diagnosis-of-menopause-perimenopause/>
- ³ NICE CKS Menopause. Revised November 2020 Menopause | Health topics A to Z | CKS | NICE

This resource has been produced by primary care medical professionals on behalf of Theramex. Remember this is guidance and to please use your clinical judgement on a case-by-case basis.