A booklet about the menopause for adults with Down's syndrome.

Down's Syndrome Scotland
helping people realise their potential

Let's talk about the menopause

For more information or to obtain any of our other publications please visit www.dsscotland.org.uk

This booklet will tell you about the Menopause and how it will affect your body.

Going through the menopause is not easy. It can be hard to cope with all the things that happen to your body. Remember that's it's natural and happens to every woman.

What is the menopause?

The menopause is the time in a woman's life when her periods stop for ever.

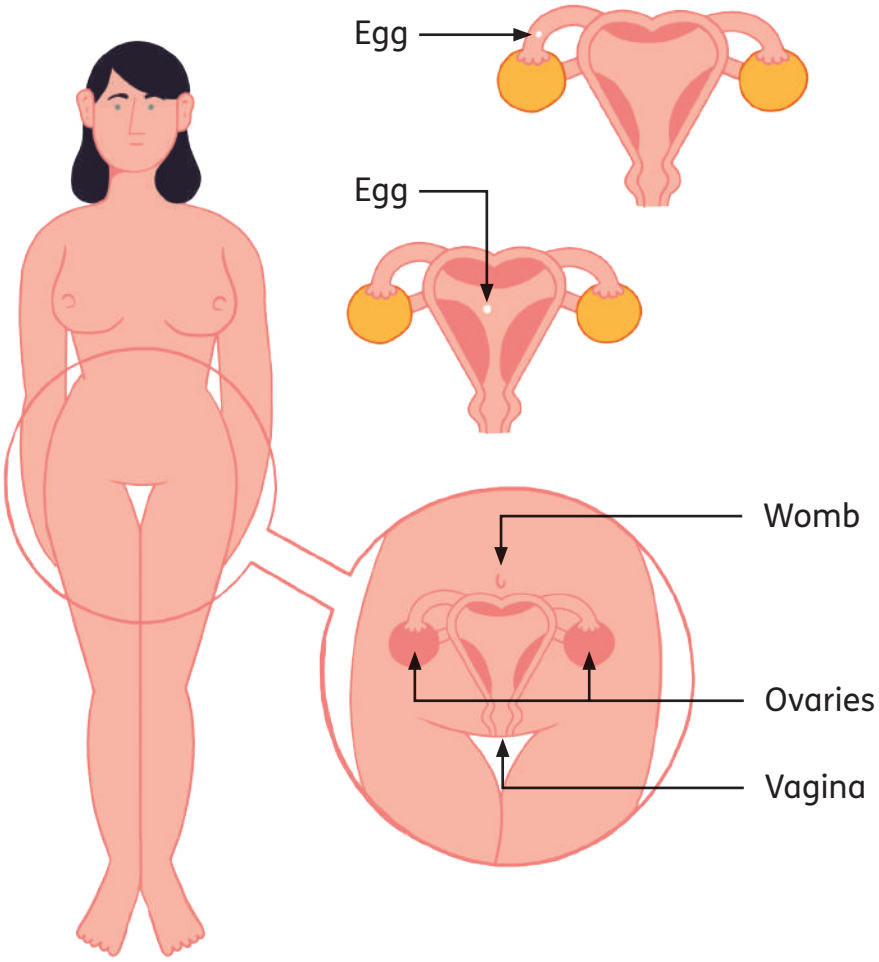
The menopause does not happen overnight. For most women the menopause lasts for around 2 years. For some women it can be longer than this.

Women with Down's syndrome usually start the menopause in their early 40's. It can be earlier.

Why do women have the menopause?

All baby girls are born with eggs inside their ovaries.

When a girl starts to have periods, 1 egg is released from the ovaries each month.

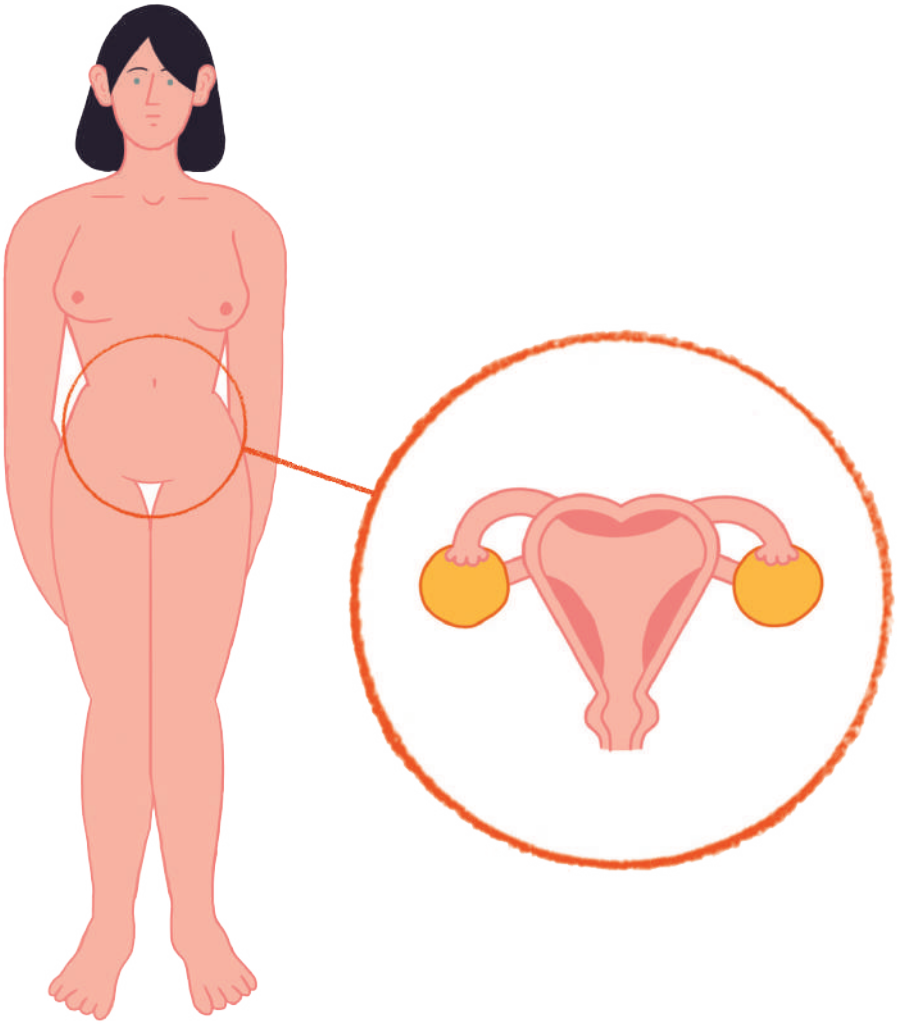


Women have periods for over 25 years. This means that as the years pass the eggs slowly get used up until there are only a few left.

When there are only a few eggs left, periods will start to change. Instead of happening every 4 weeks, periods may happen more often or less often. They might be lighter or heavier than before.

Eventually periods will stop altogether. When a woman has not had a period for over a year she has finished the menopause.

After the menopause (post-menopause), a woman can not become pregnant and have a baby.



Your body

Things that can happen to your body during the menopause

Hot flushes

This is when a woman feels very hot and sweaty. Her neck and face can be red.

Hot flushes can happen during the day or night. They can happen when the weather is hot or cold.

They usually only last for a few minutes but can last up to an hour. They can happen several times each day. No one else knows that it is happening

What helps?

Do

- Wear layers of thin clothes.
- Wear cotton clothes.
- Have warm showers.
- Drink plenty of water.
- Use cotton sheets on your bed.
- Use a fan to cool yourself down.
- Turn the heating down.

Don't

- Wear thick, heavy clothes.
- Have really hot baths.
- Drink too many fizzy drinks.
- Drink too much coffee.
- Eat too much spicy food such as curry or chilli.

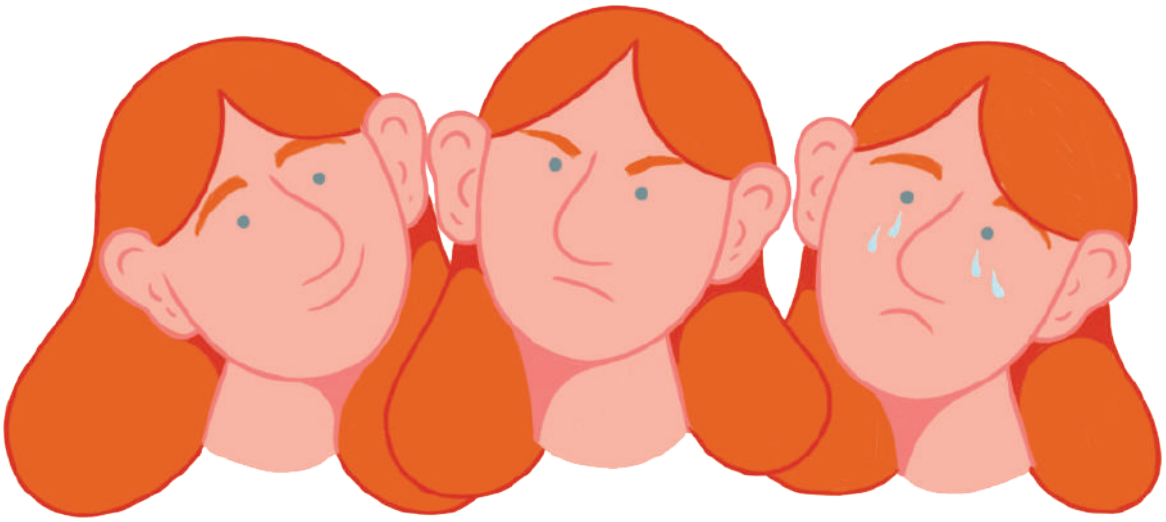
Mood swings

Many women have mood swings during the menopause.

‘Mood’ is the way you are feeling. Moods can be happy, sad, angry, tearful. ‘Mood swings’ are when your feelings change quite quickly.

For example, you may wake up in the morning and feel quite happy but by lunchtime you are angry and fed up.

Women cannot help having mood swings during the menopause.



What helps?

Do

- Tell someone how you are feeling. Talking about your mood will help.
- Have your own space where you can be alone for a while. This could be your bedroom.
- Go out for a walk, fresh air can make you feel better.
- Try not to worry about it, mood swings are normal.
- Keep doing the things you enjoy.
- Try to do some type of exercise every day – exercise can make you feel happier.
- Yoga and relaxation can help you to feel calm

Tiredness

Many women feel more tired than usual during the menopause.

Women find that although they are tired during the day they cannot sleep properly at night.

Some women find it hard to fall asleep.

Some women wake up several times during the night. They might need to go to the toilet. They might be having a hot flush.

It can be hard to get back to sleep again. In the morning women may still feel tired.

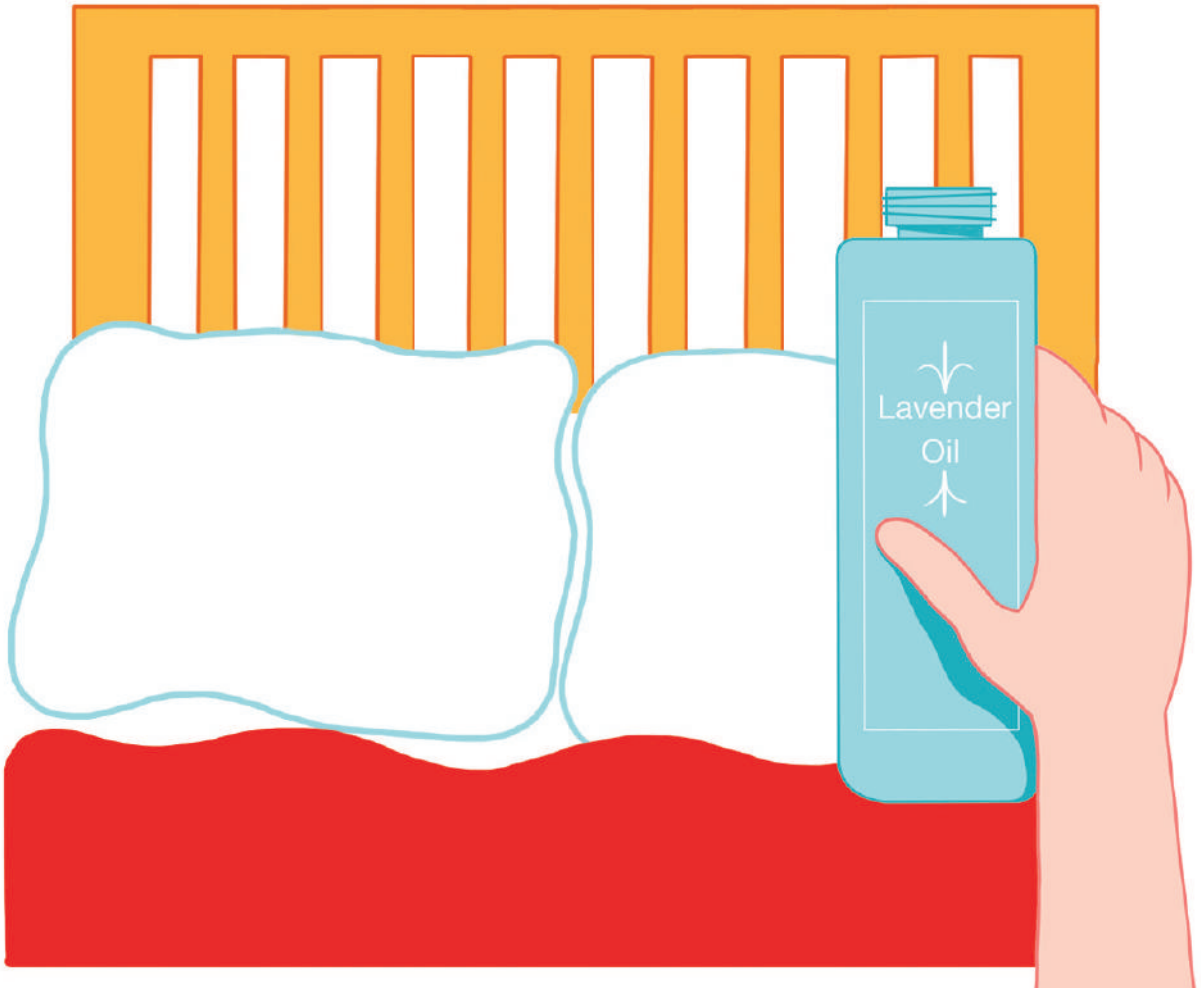
What helps?

Do

- Find time to sit and relax.
- Have a short nap during the day.
- Have a small milky drink before bed.
- Use lavender oil on your pillow.
- Listen to relaxing music.

Don't

- Drink tea or coffee just before bed.
- Eat a meal before bed.
- Lie awake worrying because you cannot sleep, think of something nice!



Aches and pains

Lots of women get aches and pains during the menopause.

Many women get headaches.

Knees, shoulders, wrists, elbows, hips, ankles, fingers and toes may be painful.

Women may find that their breasts feel sore.

What helps?

Do

- Take a mild painkilling tablet
- Have a warm bath
- Take some gentle exercise
- Go and see your doctor is the pain becomes too bad.

Skin and hair

Changes in the skin and hair

Skin and hair change as we grow older. You will notice these changes more during the menopause.

Skin becomes more lined and wrinkly, especially on your face and neck. Skin becomes thinner and you may see the blue veins. Skin often becomes dry and the colour of skin may change.

Hair changes colour gradually and becomes greyer. Grey hair is thicker and not so soft anymore.

There is not so much hair on the head and you may see the skin on top of your head through it. Many women find that hair begins to grow on their face.

What helps?

Do

- Use hand cream, face cream and body lotion to keep your skin soft.
- Use a sun cream on hot days.
- Have a ‘facial’ at the beauty salon.
- Eat a healthy diet.
- Drink plenty of water.
- Use conditioner on your hair.
- Use special cream to remove facial hair.
- Colour your hair if you don’t like the grey.

Weight

Food cravings and weight.

Women can often put on weight as they get older. Their body shape changes and their waist may get thicker.

It can be hard for women to lose this weight.

Women often want more of certain foods during the menopause. This is natural but can be unhealthy if it is the wrong type of food. Sugary food or food that has a lot of fat in it can be bad for your health.

What helps?

Do

- Eat a balanced diet.
- Snack on fruit between meals if you are hungry rather than sweets but try not to over eat.
- Drink plenty of water; it helps you to feel full.
- Keep active.
- Some type of exercise every day or as often as you can. Walking and swimming are good for staying active.

Osteoporosis

‘Osteoporosis’ means thinner bones that break more easily.

During and after the menopause, women lose calcium from their bodies. Calcium is a mineral that helps to keep bones strong.

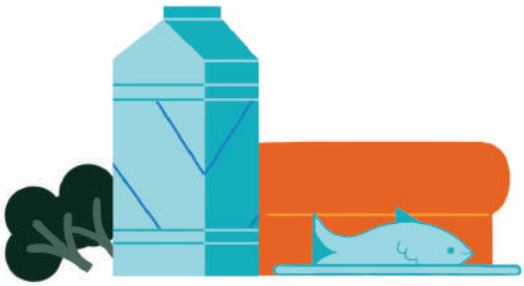
If too much calcium is lost, the bones become thinner and weaker. They break more easily and take longer to heal.

Sometimes broken bones do not heal properly. This may stop women from doing things that they enjoy.

Osteoporosis can cause cramps and pain. It can also make people shorter and more bent over.

What helps?

Do



- Eat food that contains calcium such as fish, semi-skimmed milk, broccoli, almonds, brown bread, dried apricots and cheese.
- Eat cereals.
- Get some sunshine, vitamin D helps the body to soak up calcium.
- Some weight bearing exercise every day, such as walking.
- Ask your Doctor about taking calcium tablets.

Hormone replacement therapy

Hormone Replacement Therapy (HRT) is a type of medicine. It can help women to cope with the effects of going through the menopause.

Women can take HRT in different ways – tablets, patches, implants or injections.

Many women feel that HRT really helps them to cope with the menopause. It makes them feel better.

HRT means that women will still have a period every month. Many women using HRT have sore breasts.

Some Doctors think that using HRT may increase the risk of breast cancer. This means that you need to think carefully about using HRT. You will need to talk to your Doctor and your family and carers to help you to decide.

Going through the menopause is not easy. It can be hard to cope with all the things that happen to your body.

Remember that it is natural and happens to every woman.

This booklet is in an easy read format. It is advisable that family/carers/friends read the book and discuss the content with the person.

Down's Syndrome Scotland provides support to families, carers and professionals who care for people with Down's syndrome.

If you would like to access further support please call us on 0131 442 8840.

For further information visit: **www.dsscotland.org.uk**

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