



# PREMATURE AND EARLY MENOPAUSE

## When is menopause considered early or premature?

The natural age of menopause varies widely. While the average age is 51 years in American and European women, it occurs earlier in Indian women. The average age of menopause was 46.2 years in one large Indian survey. Menopause is early if it occurs before 45 years and premature if before 40 years age.

## What are the causes of premature menopause?

Premature menopause can be due to genetic causes like Turner syndrome or autoimmune diseases (associated with thyroid disease, type 1 diabetes, rheumatoid arthritis, etc.), smoking, surgical removal of uterus and ovaries, or radiation or chemotherapy for cancer. However, the cause is unknown in 90% cases and there may be a family history, early onset of periods or low body weight.

## Does early menopause increase health risk?

Early menopause is associated with risk of osteoporosis and fractures, weight gain, type 2 diabetes, hypertension, high cholesterol, heart disease and premature death. In addition, there may be troublesome menopausal symptoms, vaginal dryness, sexual dysfunction, urinary incontinence, mood swings, depression and memory loss.

## Should early menopause be treated with hormone replacement therapy and for how long?

Hormone replacement therapy (HRT) is indicated in most women with premature menopause as it not only improves menopausal symptoms, but also reduces the risk of long-term diseases like osteoporosis, diabetes or heart disease and improves quality of life. Treatment is continued till the natural age of menopause but may be individualized depending on benefit-risk ratio. It is best to consult an endocrinologist or gynecologist about treatment.

## Are there any risks of HRT?

There is some concern about the risk of breast cancer, blood clotting, heart disease and stroke, but this risk is minimal in women with premature menopause who are younger. The risk is more in older women who are taking HRT many years after menopause.

## What are the treatment options for pregnancy in a woman with premature menopause?

With advances in technology, pregnancy is no longer elusive for women with premature menopause. Eggs or embryos can be preserved in advance for women where premature menopause is anticipated, e.g., a woman undergoing surgery or radiation. In vitro fertilization can be offered with Preserved or donor eggs. Surrogacy is another option.

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