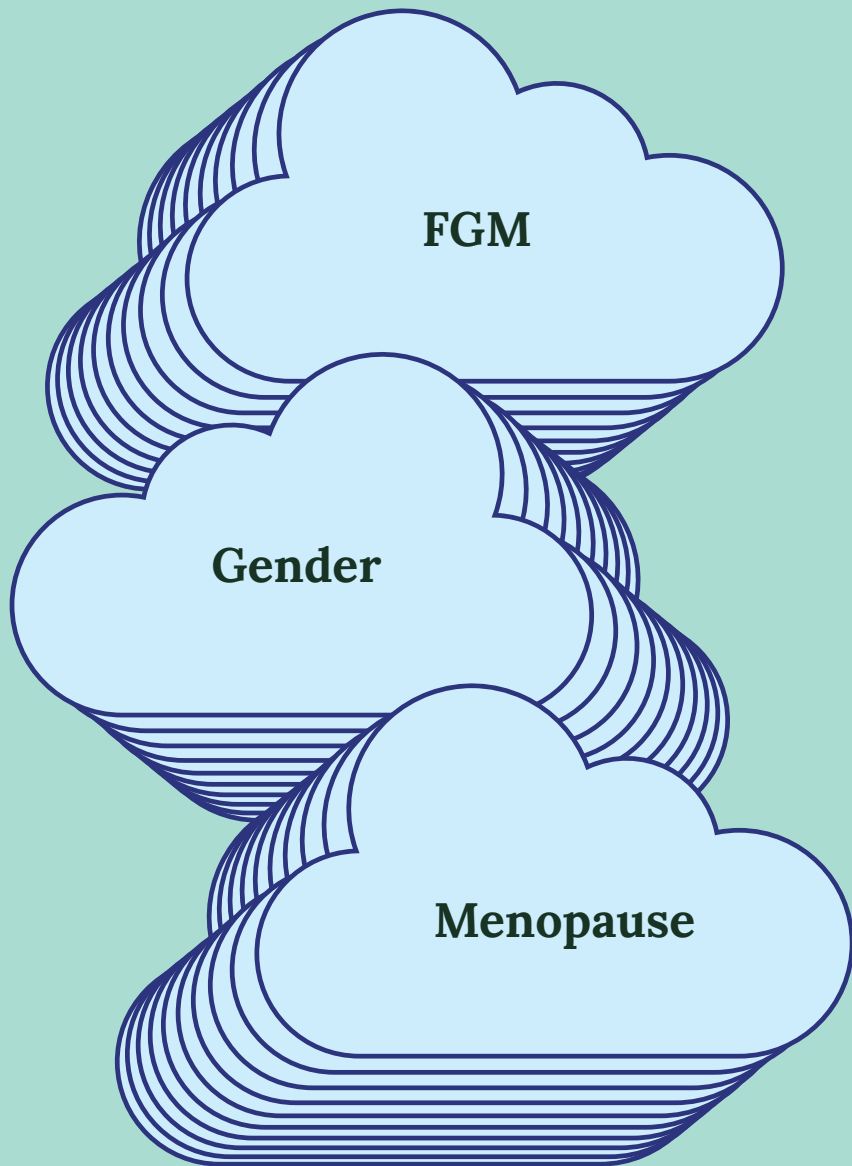


Know Your Body

LEVEL 3



Infertility

What is infertility?

Infertility is the inability to conceive children and affects up to 15% of reproductive-aged couples worldwide. It affects both men and women. A third of issues with infertility come from men, and another third are from women. The final third is a combination of other factors, or unknown causes. It is important to note that infertility is never a sign of weakness or a lack of femininity.

What are the causes or signs of infertility in men?

Sperm and semen: The most common cause is poor-quality semen (the fluid containing sperm that's ejaculated during sex). Things like a very low sperm count, no sperm at all or sperm that aren't moving properly make it harder for sperm to swim to the egg.

Abnormal sperm: Sperm can be an abnormal shape, making it harder for them to move and fertilise an egg.

Testicles: They produce and store semen; however an infection, testicular cancer, testicular surgery, congenital defect or injury can affect the quality of sperm.

Ejaculation disorders: This means it can be difficult for some men to release semen during sex or when they ejaculate.

Sterilisation: Some men choose to have a vasectomy, which involves cutting or blocking two tubes, called the vas deferens, so that sperm can no longer get into the semen.

Medicines and drugs: Certain types of medicines can also cause infertility problems.

What are the causes or signs of infertility in women?

Scarring: Cervical surgeries can scar or damage the fallopian tubes, obstructing the egg passing through.

Cervical mucus problems: Thick mucus can make it harder for sperm to swim during conception.

Fibroids: Non-cancerous growths around the womb could block a fallopian tube or prevent a fertilised egg from attaching to the womb.

Endometriosis: A condition where tissue usually found in the womb is present elsewhere in the body and can damage the ovaries or fallopian tubes. It can also cause very heavy, painful periods.

Dark or pale menstrual blood: Passing very dark, old blood or light, pale blood at the beginning of a period can also be a sign of endometriosis.

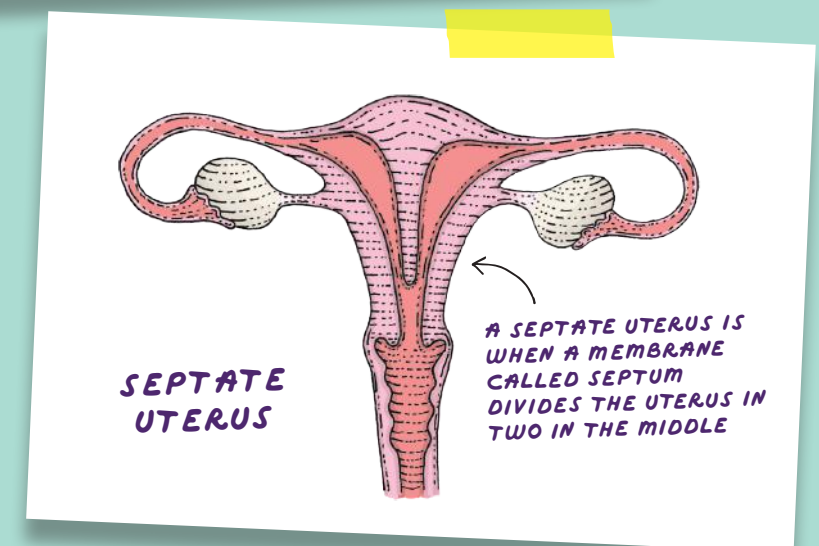
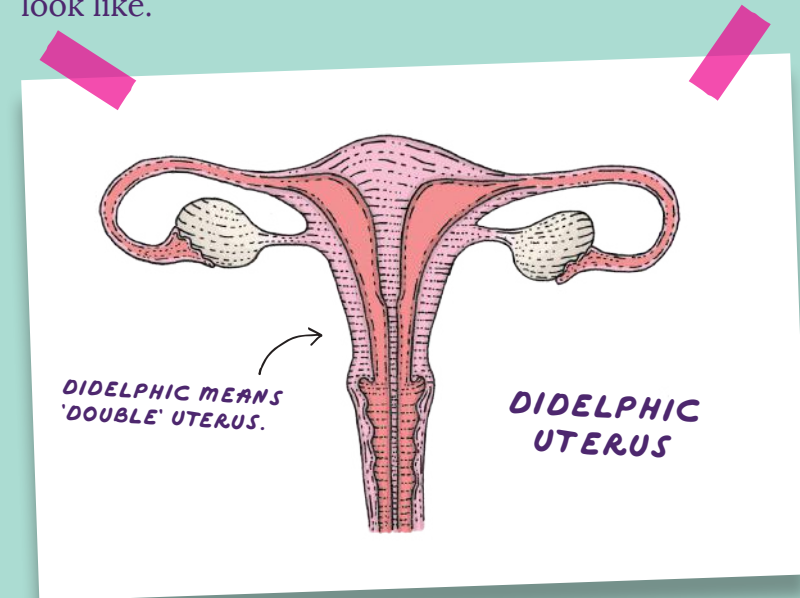
Irregular cycle: Usually a sign of irregular ovulation which can be caused by PCOS, obesity, being underweight, thyroid issues, etc.

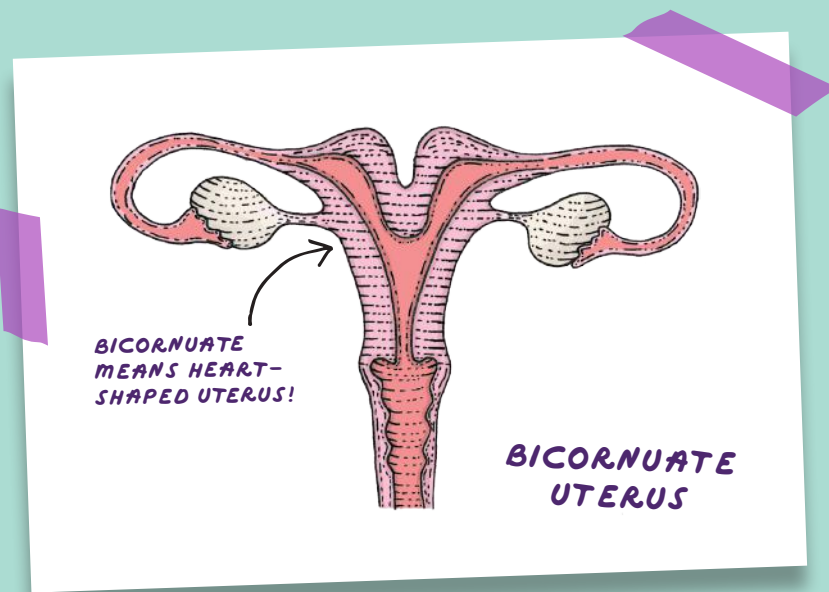
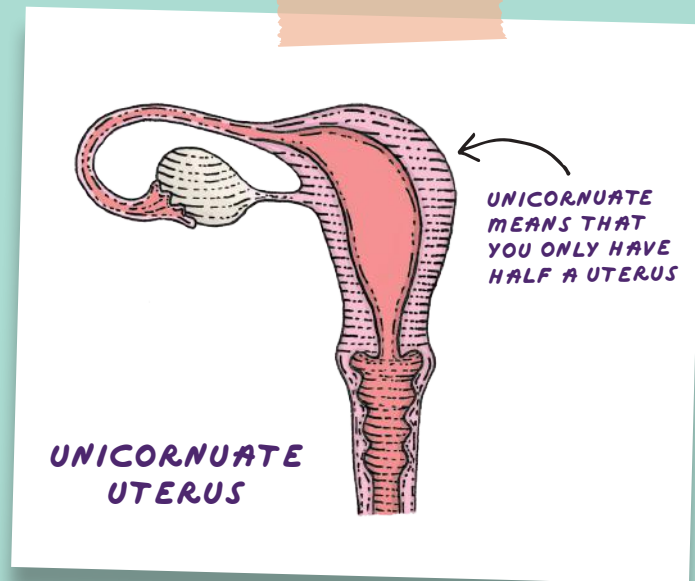
Pelvic Inflammatory Disease: An infection of the upper female genital tract, which includes the womb, fallopian tubes and ovaries - often sexually transmitted. It can damage and scar the tubes making it difficult for an egg to be released.

An estimated 34 million women, mostly from developing countries, are infertile as a result of maternal sepsis, lack of dignified and hygienic menstruation, and unsafe abortions.

Congenital Uterine Malformation

The uterus itself may also be abnormally shaped, which can sometimes interfere with pregnancy. Alternatively, you can also have a differently shaped uterus and be perfectly healthy as well! Here are some examples of what these uteruses can look like.





TRIGGER WARNING



Female Genital Mutilation

Women and girls who have undergone infibulation

Female genital mutilation/cutting (FGM/C), also known as female circumcision, is a practice where the female genitals are deliberately cut, injured or changed for *non-medical* reasons. Terms to refer to FGM in other languages are 'sunna', 'gudniin', 'halalays', 'tahir', 'megrez' and 'khitan'. It is a highly dangerous procedure which is banned in multiple countries due to its long term problems such as emotional and physical trauma, infection, infertility, and even death.

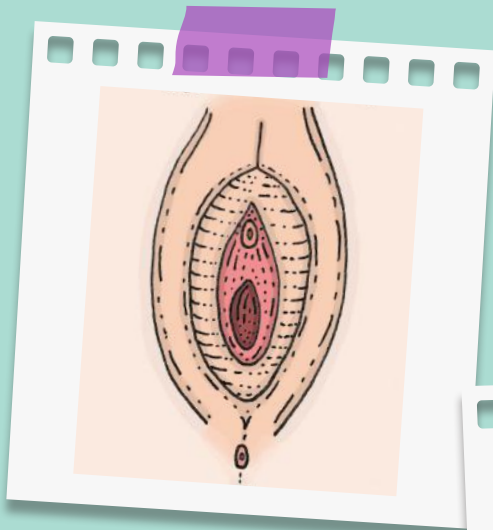
FGM is usually carried out on girls younger than 15 years old, but sometimes also on newborn babies and married women. It is often performed to control female sexual desires and to preserve her virginity until marriage. Those who don't undergo the procedure may be thought of as promiscuous. The belief that FGM equates to purity, cleanliness and 'good morals' is a reason why the practice continues.

Regardless of the reason, FGM enforces gender inequality and is a **direct violation of a person's fundamental human rights**.

The most extreme form of FGM is known as infibulation and results in the removal of the clitoris and labia minora, and stitching together the labia majora. A small opening is left in the vagina for the passage of menstrual blood and urine, which can cause significant health problems.

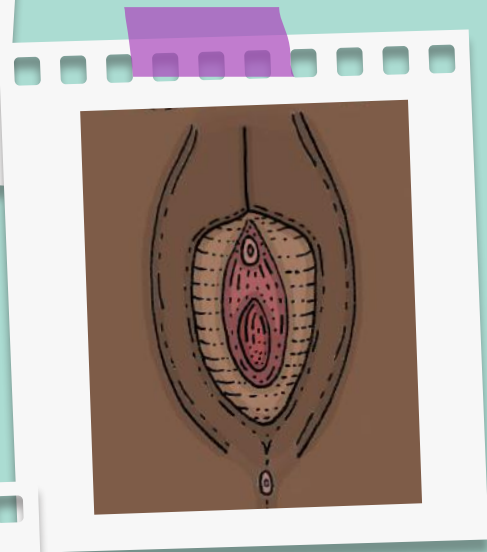
FGM can cause constant pain, cysts, and greater risks of infection, as well as difficulties with peeing, holding pee in and pregnancy. Menstruation is often accompanied by severe pain after infibulation, since blood is unable to flow freely and clots are more likely to form.

Types of female genital mutilation:



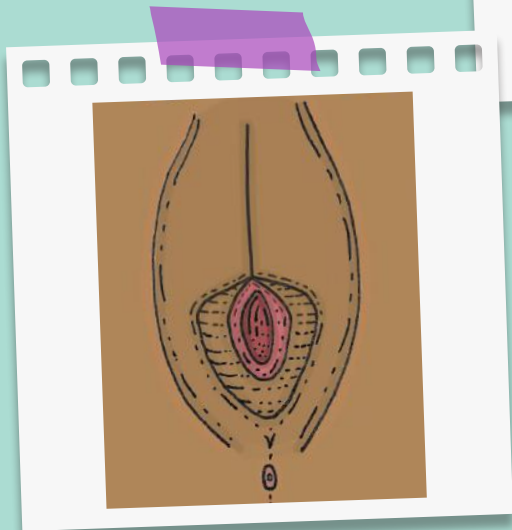
Type 1

Partial or total removal of the clitoris and/or the prepuce (the fold of skin surrounding the clitoris).



Type 2

Partial or total removal of the clitoris and the labia minora, with or without excision of the labia majora.



Type 3

Sealing and narrowing the vaginal orifice by cutting and positioning the labia minora and/or the labia majora closer, with or without excision of the clitoris (infibulation).

Gender Inequality

There has been lots of debate on the inequality arising from condoms being distributed for free in many countries at health clinics, university campuses, and more, whereas period products have a price tag (and are often taxed). This current situation is undeniably unfair, considering that period products are a necessity, much like condoms that help prevent sexually transmitted diseases and unwanted pregnancies. Additionally, there are only a selected handful of countries that don't place tax on period products. But this is slowly changing. Governments in countries including Scotland and Botswana are now funding public education institutions to distribute period products for free.

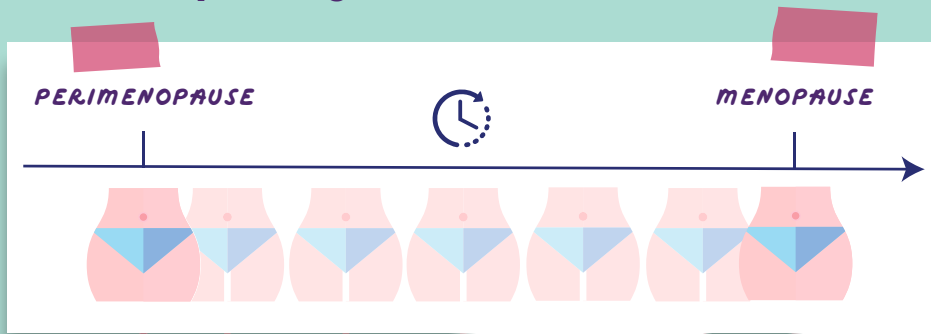
Another example of gender inequality in the context of menstruation is some UK hospitals providing razors and shaving foams to patients, but not offering sanitary products. However, as a result of medics voicing their concerns, patients can now access sanitary products free of charge from this summer.



Know Your Menopause

Why does it happen and what is it?

Although you might be too young to be going through menopause, this is a phenomenon which eventually happens to everyone who menstruates. There are people in your life who will have gone or are going through this experience at the moment. Menopause is the time that marks the end of your menstrual cycles. It's diagnosed after you've gone 12 months without a menstrual period. Menopause can happen in your 40s or 50s and is a natural biological process. It can also happen due to other factors, such as chemotherapy or a hysterectomy (surgical removal of the womb). First off, let's discuss the difference between perimenopause and menopause. Perimenopause refers to the period of time right before menopause begins.



During perimenopause, your body is beginning the transition into menopause. That means that hormone production from your ovaries is beginning to decline.

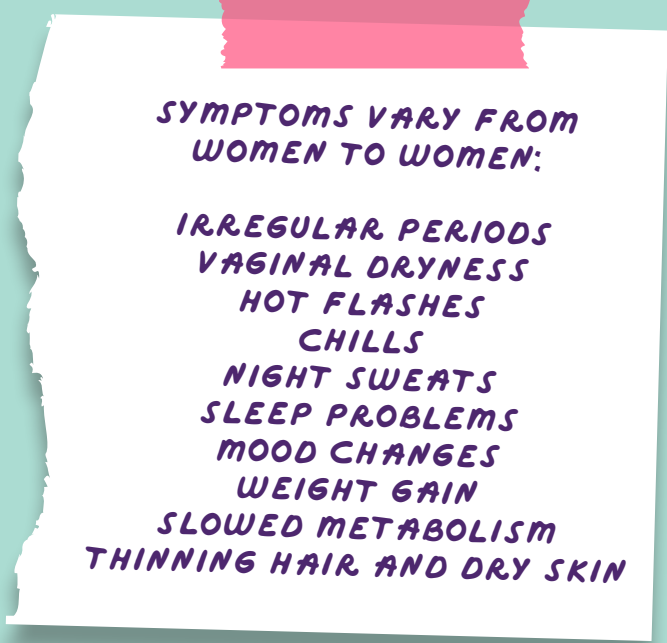
Symptoms associated with menopause will start. Your menstrual cycle may become irregular and will stop after the perimenopause stage.

Once your menstrual cycle stops for 12 consecutive months, you've entered menopause.

Symptoms and What to Do

What will you go through?

Emotional and physical symptoms, such as hot flashes may disrupt your sleep, lower your energy, or affect emotional health. There are many effective treatments available, from lifestyle adjustments to hormone therapy.



Be careful of your bones

During menopause, your estrogen production will decline and affect the calcium levels in your bones, decreasing bone density and leading to osteoporosis, making you susceptible to bone fractures. Take care of them.

JUST LIKE AUNTIE WHEN SHE BROKE HER HIP AFTER SHE TRIPPED ON THAT STEP! CAREFUL! - S.

How do you keep your bones healthy?

TO KEEP YOUR BONES HEALTHY:

EAT FOODS WITH LOTS OF CALCIUM. SUCH AS DAIRY PRODUCTS OR DARK LEAFY GREENS.

TAKE VITAMIN D SUPPLEMENTS.

EXERCISE REGULARLY AND INCLUDE WEIGHT TRAINING IN YOUR EXERCISE ROUTINE.

REDUCE ALCOHOL CONSUMPTION.



What is a Hot Flash?

During a hot flash, you'll feel the top half of your body temperature rise and your skin might become red or blotchy. This rush of heat could lead to sweating, heart palpitations, and dizziness. After the hot flash, you may feel cold. Hot flashes can happen daily or multiple times a day. It can last for a year or even several years. Multiple things can trigger or worsen your hot flashes, such as alcohol or caffeine, spicy food, feeling stressed, being somewhere hot, being overweight, and smoking.

How to manage hot flashes

A few techniques may help reduce your hot flashes and their symptoms:

- Dress in layers
- Use a fan in your home or office space
- Do breathing exercises when you experience a hot flash

Menopause and depression

You may feel depressed or experience negativity during or after menopause. Changes in your behaviour, habits, and environment can help you overturn these feelings. Menopause is a time of change, and you can turn it into a positive experience. Try to focus on the present and forget about your past regrets. Try not to look back in anger and worry about the future. It might also help to talk to other's going through menopause, socialise, and find new activities and opportunities, since menopause indicates new beginnings.

"Does menopause mean that I'm no longer a woman?"

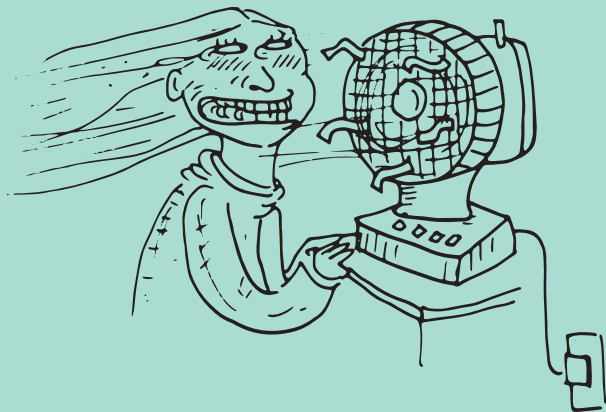
Women have been reduced to their biological functions for centuries. Periods allow you to have children and to be fertile. However fertility does not equate femininity. You are a woman and feminine regardless of your age or your ability to bear children. Menopause is just a change in a woman's life and will never define you.

"Will menopause make me gain weight?"

Changes in your hormone levels and aging may cause you to gain weight. Focus on maintaining a balanced diet, exercising regularly, and practicing other healthy habits to help control your weight.

"Will I experience the same symptoms as my mother, sister, or friends?"

Not necessarily. Menopause can differ slightly depending on the person. The symptoms can vary from one woman to another, even in the same family. However, you're all in this together and should support each other.



"Can I still be pregnant or have periods?"

Not during menopause. However, during perimenopause, your periods may skip a month or several, then return. They are often on shorter cycles and are closer together. Despite irregular periods, pregnancy is possible. If you've skipped a period but aren't sure you've started the menopausal transition, consider a pregnancy test. However, seek medical advice if you are bleeding from the vagina after menopause.

"When should I see a doctor?"

You should have regular visits with your doctor to prevent health issues and if you have any concerns. Continue getting these appointments during and after menopause. As you age, the doctor can recommended health screening tests such as colonoscopy, mammography and triglyceride screening, and thyroid testing if suggested by your history and breast and pelvic exams.





Question Corner



Menopause Reflections

Menopause is my power

Going through menopause and post-menopause can be a massive change in someone's life.

What are you thoughts about current or future menopause?

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Always appreciate the good stuff. What are your top 5 best memories in your life so far?

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List 5 things you want to change in your life.

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Now draw one of those memories.

DEAR BIG SISTERS,

I had menstruations for the first time when I was 10 years old and the event has left me with shame within my family.

Nobody explained to me this phenomenon and its implications on my future. The years following I suffered each month with dysmenorrhea and it was one of the most painful physical suffering in my life.

I spent almost all my life in hospital during my periods and I was disadvantaged in all my activities. Today I am in my fifties and menopause has been the only solution for my suffering.

**SUBMISSION BY
ANONYMOUS**

