## Main Line HealthCare



Making the Transition to Menopause by Sara Wheeler, MD

Great Valley OB/GYN

Feeling tired, irritable, or out-of-sorts? Not sure when to expect your next period? If you are a woman between the ages of thirty-five and fifty, you have entered that stage of life referred to as "the perimenopause". This period marks the end of the ovary's primary function, producing eggs through ovulation. Although the process is highly variable, some general trends are seen. In the late thirties, many women will occasionally see irregular periods. In the early forties, this trend becomes more pronounced, and sometimes the cycle length shortens. In the late forties, the hormones become more erratic, with normal periods interspersed with other patterns that are unpredictable. The dreaded "hot flashes" may start for a while but subside. In the early fifties, menses usually cease by the age of fifty-two. Some women experience hot flashes as debilitating, while for others, they are only a mild annoyance.

Taking care of yourself during this period begins with understanding the changes. As ovulation ceases, other hormone systems change as well. Stress hormones may begin to elevate as the stresses of middle age increase. Exercise becomes extremely important to help avoid the common weight gain around the middle. Truthfully, exercise should be daily. Diet should improve, as there is less room for error. Whole grains, fresh fruits and vegetables, and lean sources of protein should predominate. Take time to prepare your own food, and take time to enjoy it with a glass of wine! Taking vitamins, trace minerals, and adequate calcium can be helpful. Finally, it is important to establish a trusting relationship with a primary doctor or gynecologist. He or she can help you obtain the proper health screening to decrease your risk of cancer and heart disease. Women can live to a healthy, advanced age and can pursue lifelong dreams and ambitions even with a late start. So take the time to be healthy!