



PERIMENOPAUSE

The perimenopause can be one of the most challenging periods in a woman's life because, hormonally, anything can happen, and everyone's experience is different. Even when hormonal balance is achieved, levels may change once again causing a completely different set of symptoms.

You have been told by your doctor that you are in perimenopause. This is the transitional period before menopause, which can last from a few months to several years. In perimenopause, levels of oestrogen rise and fall, testosterone levels fall, and the body stops producing progesterone. Some women have mild symptoms, which feel like PMS. For others, the insomnia, heavy bleeding, weight gain and anxiety can be debilitating.



## Fluctuating oestrogen

The severity of symptoms relates to the level of oestrogen in the body. If oestrogen is high and fluctuating, women will experience heavy bleeding, bloating, acne, anxiety, and breast pain. When oestrogen levels remain low for a long period of time, this causes vaginal dryness, depression, hot flushes, and joint pain. This is only a guide as there is huge variability amongst women.

## Low progesterone

In perimenopause one thing is certain, progesterone levels are low. This is the anti-depressant and anti-anxiety hormone that aids sleep, improves mood, stops fluid retention, and prevents weight gain. It also helps to protect the womb against cancers and controls heavy bleeding.

# Treatment

## Progesterone

Perimenopausal symptoms are treated by replacing lost progesterone. You will have been prescribed progesterone as a capsule. This may be Utrogestan (100 mg capsule) or a specialist preparation if you require it. You will have been given a low dose to start with to make sure that you tolerate it. If you feel good, you will be told to increase your dose to two to three capsules at night. Please tell your doctor if you experience any side effects.

You may also be prescribed progesterone as a lozenge or rapid dissolving tablet. These can be used during the day without causing drowsiness and to improve your symptoms as and when they arise.

If you are prescribed a lozenge, you will start by taking one quarter of it in the morning, building up to your required dose. Please check the letter from your doctor for your specific instructions.

One rapid dissolving tablet is usually taken in the morning and may also be taken later in the day. You may also have been instructed to take your progesterone lozenge or melt when you need it, especially if you suffer migraines, intermittent PMS, or anxiety. Again, please check your doctor's letter for specific instructions.

## Oestrogen

You may also be prescribed oestrogen. This may be administered vaginally at first to protect your bladder or treat vaginal dryness. In time, you may be given oestrogen as a capsule, gel, or lozenge to take alongside your progesterone.

If too much oestrogen is given too soon in perimenopause, it can make symptoms worse. For this reason, when taking oestrogen, we ask you to look out for symptoms that remind you of PMS, or the start of your period. If you experience this, stop using oestrogen and continue with progesterone. You should only start to take oestrogen again once these symptoms have settled.

## Testosterone

You may also have been prescribed testosterone to help with energy, mood, focus, memory, confidence, strength, and stamina. Testosterone can also restore libido and help with hot flushes, as long as oestrogen and progesterone levels are balanced. You may have been prescribed a cream (Androfeme) or a pump from [C4U pharmacy](#).

The aim of your treatment is to feel your best, like your old self, but it can be a tricky time. Please tell your doctor if you have any concerns about the way you are feeling on the medication you have been prescribed.

## Tests and scans

You may be asked to have more blood tests before your next appointment, and a pelvic scan once a year whilst on treatment. This enables us to assess your ovaries and ensure that your womb lining is healthy. We will also check that your mammograms are up to date.

## Bespoke preparations

If for any reason you are unable to tolerate standard hormone medications, you will be given ones made in the MHRA licensed pharmacy – PCCA, or in one of our other pharmacies. Here the progesterone will be prescribed as a lozenge or rapid dissolving tablet. If prescribed the lozenge, you will need to cut the square into quarters, which is easy to do.

You take the lozenge by placing it between your lip and gum, usually at the top. You should allow this to dissolve, rather than sucking it. It should take no more than ten minutes, but if it does, place it under your tongue for a few minutes to soften it, before placing it back between your lip and gum. The rapid dissolving tablet is placed under the tongue and dissolves quickly.



## Long term

Perimenopause can be short, or last for several years before coming to an end. You will then be in menopause when all hormone levels are naturally low and need topping up. The transition from perimenopause to menopause should be seamless and easy. Your doctor will monitor you along the way to ensure you are on the best treatment.