



Cancer Symptoms vs. Menopause Symptoms: Knowing the Key Differences

If you are close to or going through menopause, you may experience hot flashes, night sweats, or trouble sleeping. But as you notice these symptoms, you might wonder “Can cancer be mistaken for menopause?”

In fact, menopause symptoms can often be very similar to the symptoms of certain types of cancer, such as [cervical cancer](#), [ovarian cancer](#), and [uterine cancer](#) (also called endometrial cancer).

“Some of the symptoms of menopause can mimic the symptoms of gynecologic cancers, which are cancers that start in the female reproductive organs. Being aware of the similarities and differences in symptoms is critical so that concerning or ‘red flag’ symptoms of a potential underlying cancer are not ignored or misidentified as symptoms of menopause,” said Eleonora Teplinsky, MD, American Society of Clinical Oncology (ASCO) expert and head of breast and gynecologic medical oncology at Valley-Mount Sinai Comprehensive Cancer Care.

Common symptoms of menopause

Menopause is a time in life when the ovaries stop making eggs and periods, or menstrual cycles, stop. Menopause usually occurs in the late 40s or early 50s. The time leading up to menopause, during which periods slow down or don’t happen as often, is called perimenopause. Perimenopause can begin 8 to 10 years before menopause.

The most common symptoms of menopause are:

- Hot flashes
- Night sweats
- Trouble sleeping
- Depression
- Anxiety
- Mood changes
- Vaginal dryness
- Pain during sex
- Weight gain
- Belly bloating
- Joint pain
- Osteoporosis, which is when the bones become weak

Can cancer be mistaken for menopause?

The symptoms of menopause can often seem like the symptoms of gynecologic cancers. This can be troubling for women as they get older and go through menopause. Some cancers, including ovarian and uterine cancers, become more common as you age.

Watch for these symptoms of gynecologic cancers:

- **Abnormal vaginal bleeding.** This is the most common symptom of **endometrial or uterine cancer.** It may be hard to tell the difference between abnormal bleeding and your period, especially during perimenopause. Uterine cancer is uncommon in people younger than 45. However, if you are over 45, some concerning signs are bleeding between periods, frequent bleeding, and heavy or prolonged bleeding.
- **Abnormal swelling or belly bloating, nausea, difficulty eating, or shortness of breath.** These are the most common symptoms of **ovarian cancer.** However, early ovarian cancer does not always have symptoms. About half of people who are diagnosed with ovarian cancer are 63 or older.
- **Irregular or heavy vaginal bleeding or bleeding after sex.** These are the most common symptoms of **cervical cancer.** Like ovarian cancer, early cervical cancer usually does not have any symptoms. This is why it is so important to get regular [cervical cancer screening](#).

Always talk with your doctor if you experience any new symptoms. They can help you manage the symptoms while they find and treat the cause.

Dr. Teplinsky is a member of ASCO's Patient Information Editorial Board. Read more about the collaboration between the American Cancer Society and ASCO on [ASCO Patient Resources](#) [↗](#).

Written by



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