

Naming Women's Midlife

Jerilynn C. Prior (BA, MD, FRCPC) • E-mail: jerilynn.prior@ubc.ca

Professor, Dept. of Medicine, Division of Endocrinology-UBC; Founder & Scientific Director-UBC-CeMCOR;
Associate Member-School of Population & Public Health, UBC; Member-BC Women's Health Research Institute.

Why do specific names matter?

Because then two people can talk about something and each will know what the other means.

Today, the word **"Menopause"** is used in three different ways:

Ask just about any woman and she is likely to say:

"Menopause is all that is changing and negative about getting old."

Ask a gynecologist, however, and they will assert:

"Menopause is the final menstrual period."

Ask an epidemiologist and they will explain (as does the WHO) that:

"MENOPAUSE is a woman's final life phase that begins a year after the last menstruation."

The official meaning of **MENOPAUSE** is the final life phase (for a person born with ovaries) that begins a year following the last menstrual flow.

How do we know that the last flow was truly final?

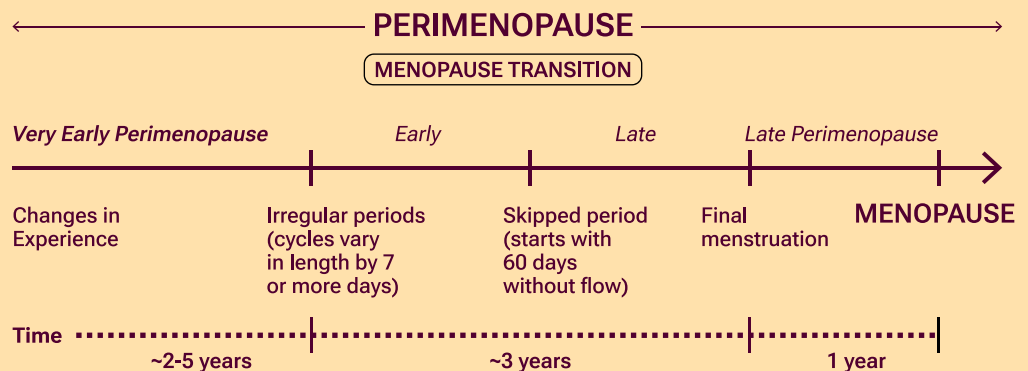
That is based on statistical probabilities. In a large, long-term study starting with women university students, researchers learned that after 1-year without a further period, 90% of women older than 45 years were unlikely to have another.¹

That means 10% of women who reach menopause at a normal age have to restart the 1-year menopause clock. Also, younger women had a 20% chance of further menstrual flow.¹ This was confirmed by a prospective randomly selected, population-based study.²

What do we call the time before the 1-year 'menopause clock' runs out?

"Climacteric" is old-fashioned and vague; "early menopause transition," and "late menopause transition" are currently used. But the official Medical Subject Heading (MeSH for literature searches) that is all-encompassing is **PERIMENOPAUSE** (it became official in 1995).

This CeMCOR diagram³ shows these midlife names relating to each other and to **MENOPAUSE**:



¹ Wallace, R. B et. al Am J Obstet Gynecol 135, 1021-1024 (1979).

² Astrup, K. & Olivarius Nde, F. Acta Obstet Gynecol Scand 83, 203-7 (2004) <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.0001-6349.2004.00400.x>

³ Prior, J. C., Seifert-Klauss, V. R. & Hale, G. in Current Topics in Menopause (ed V. Dvoryk) 54-83 (Bentham Science Publishers Ltd, 2012).