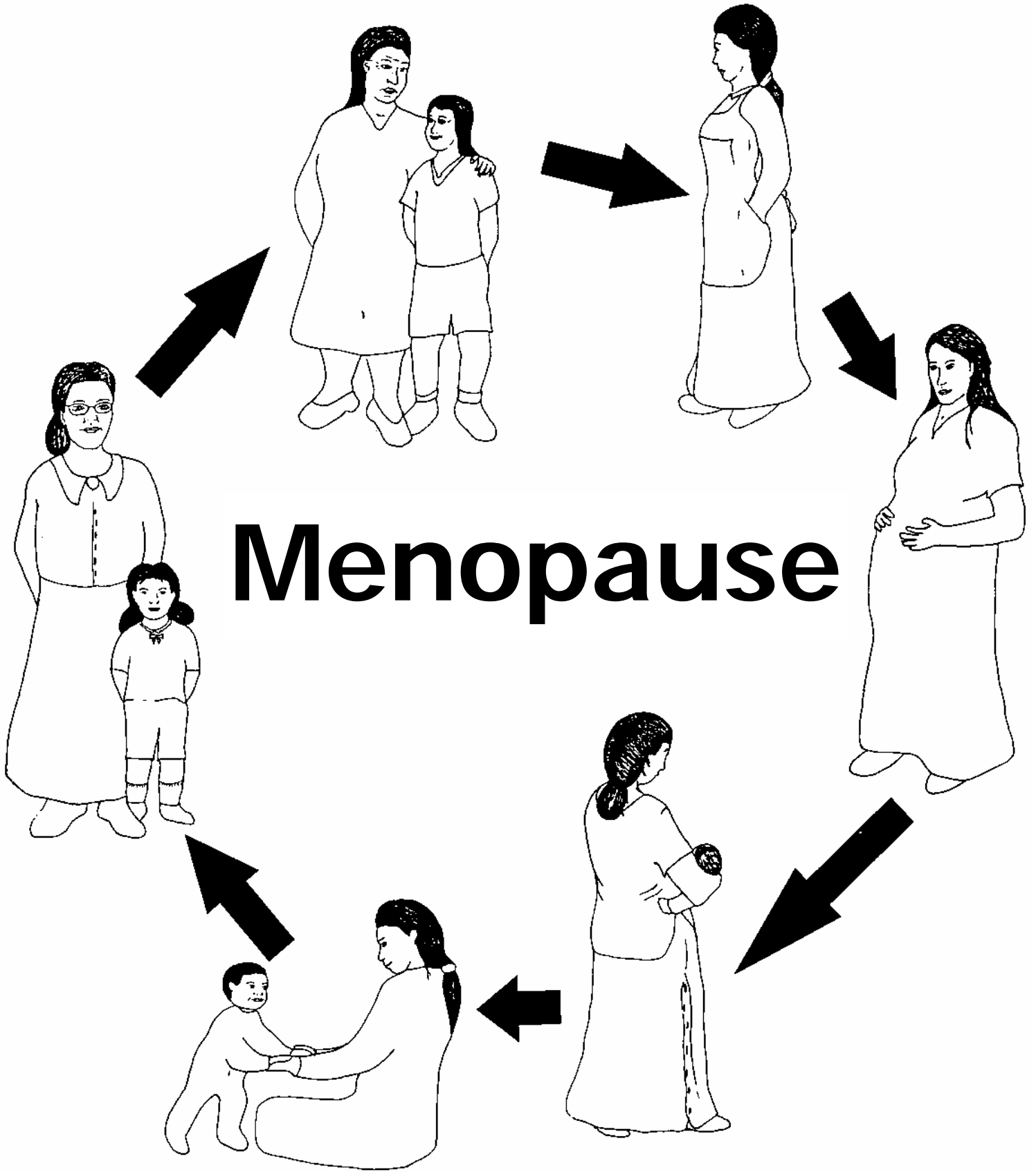
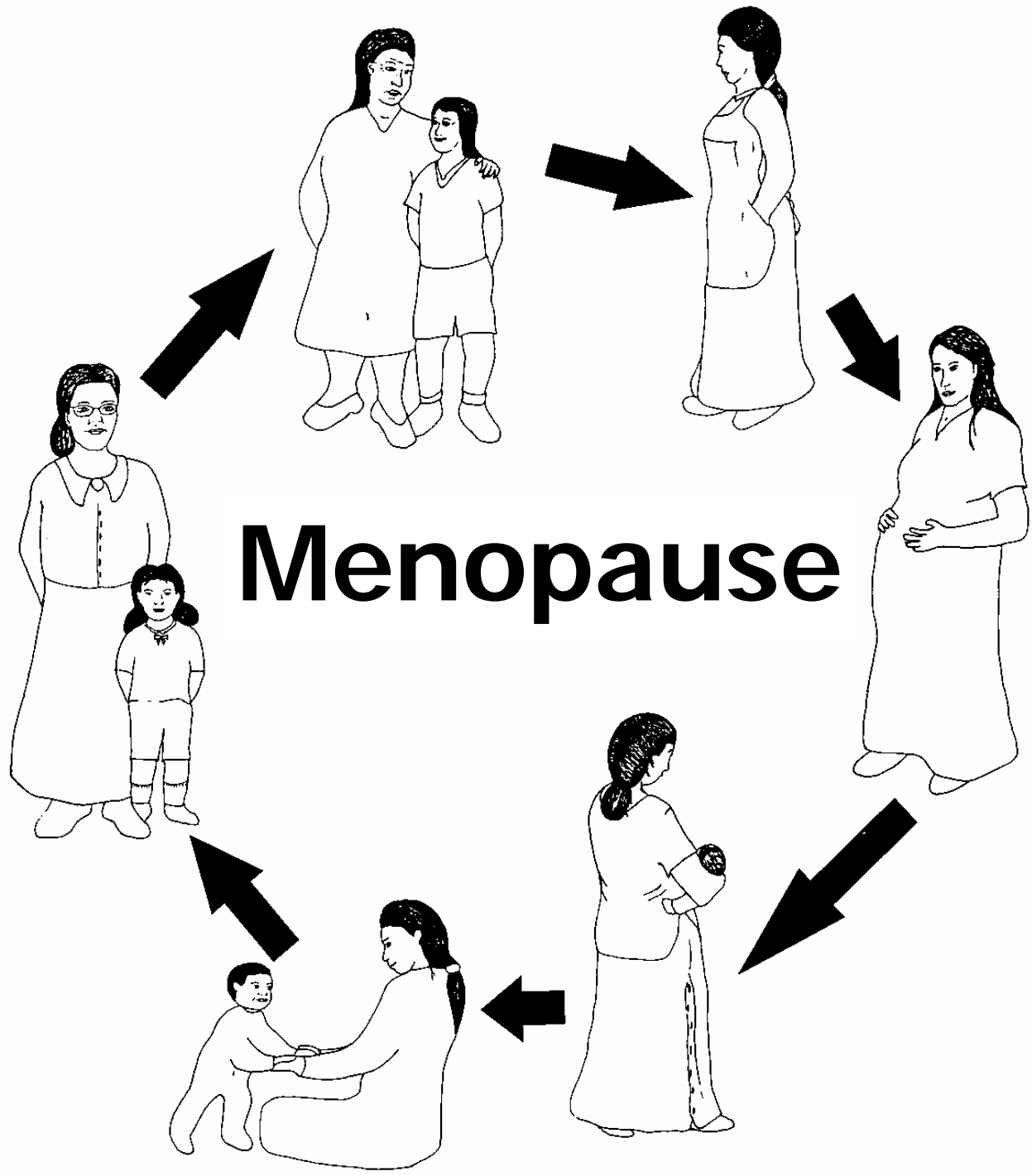


Menopause





What is menopause?

Menopause is the time in a woman's life when she stops having her period forever. Some people call menopause "the change" or "the change of life." Menopause is a natural part of getting older.

Menopause starts happening three to five years before a woman's last period. A woman is done with menopause after she has not had a period for an entire year.

Menopause can happen anytime between ages 35 and 55. The average age is 51.

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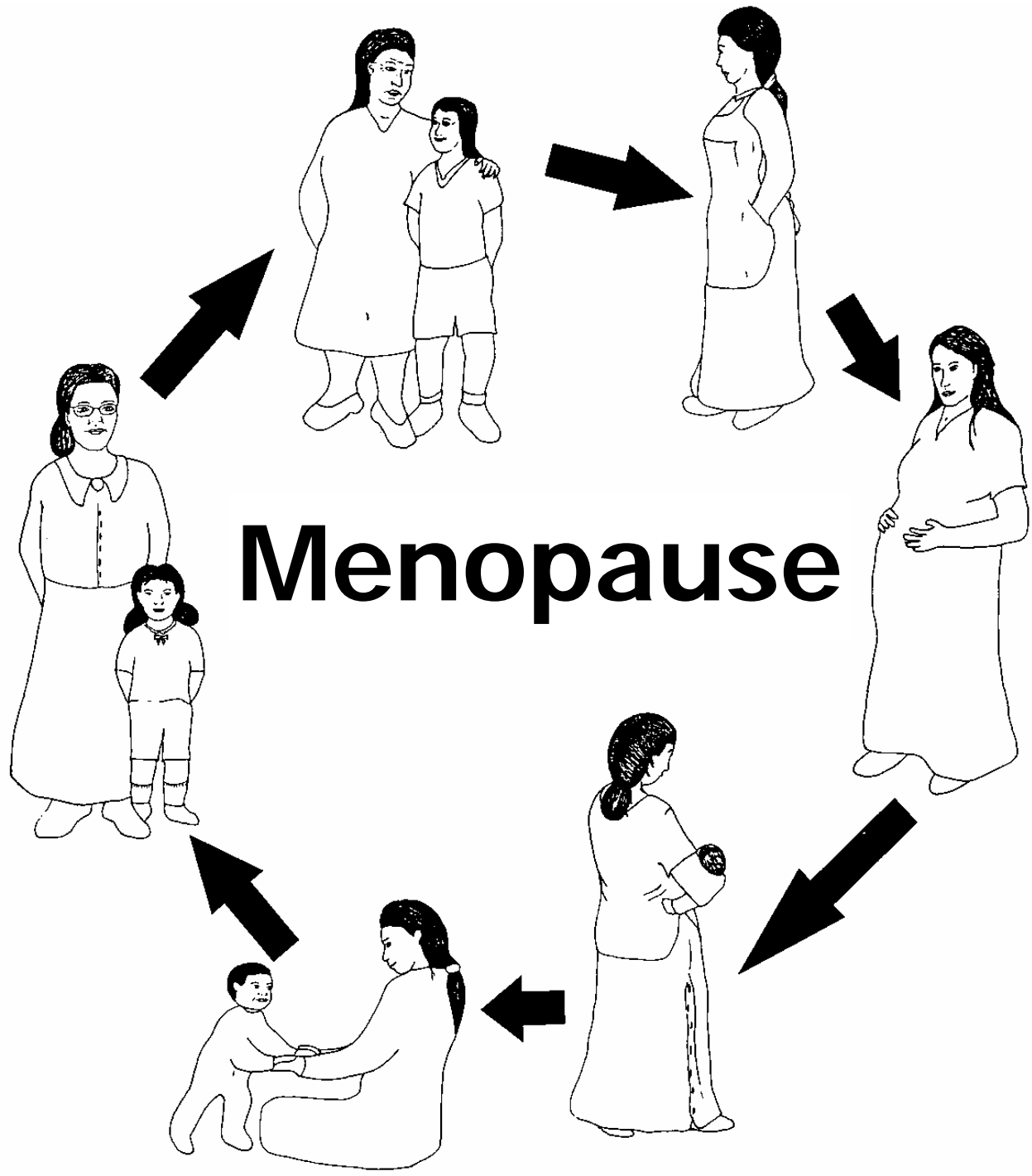
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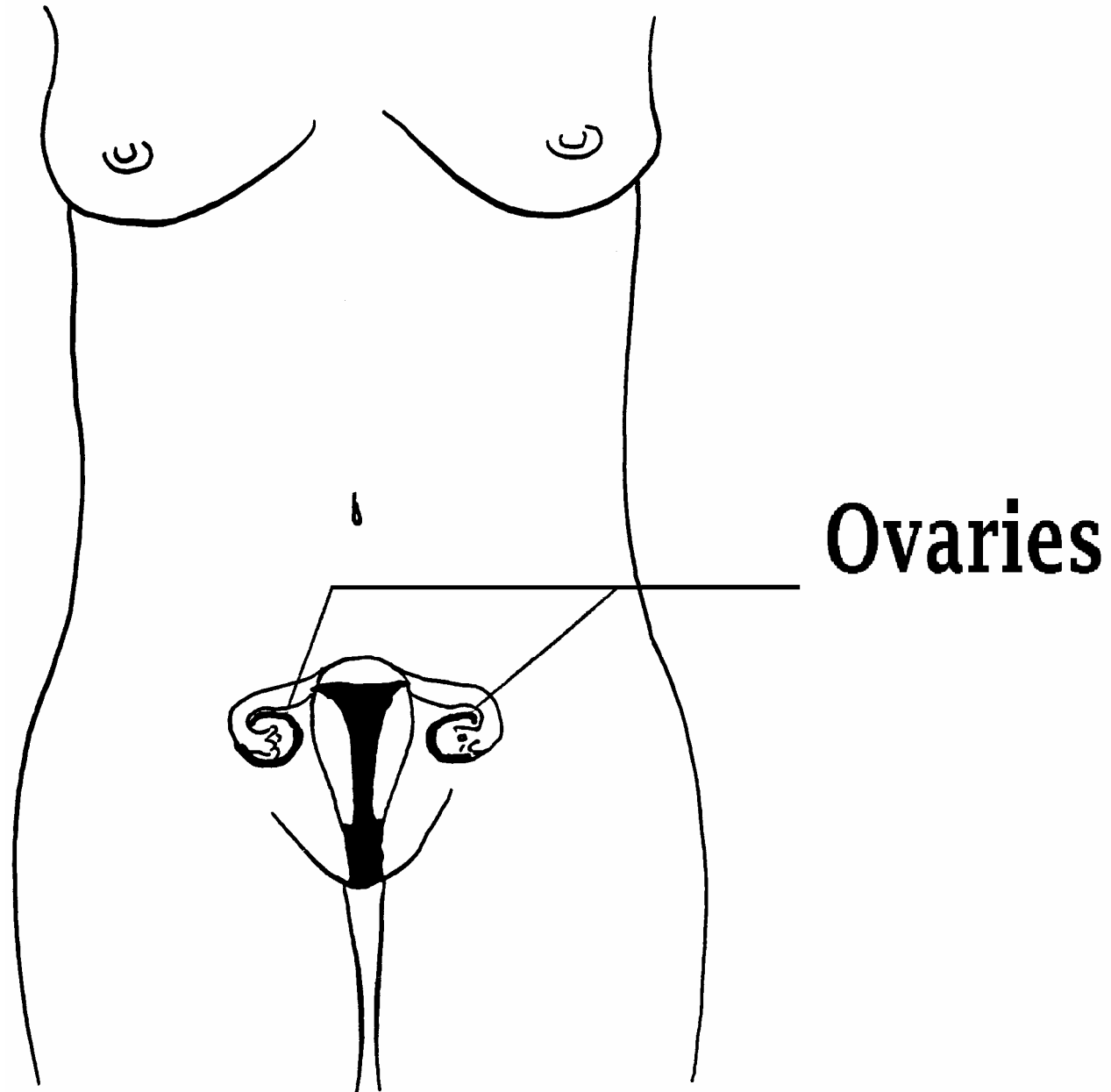
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What happens during menopause?

As a woman gets older, her ovaries produce less estrogen and progesterone. These are the female hormones that affect reproduction and sexuality. These hormones also affect other parts of the body. This is why menopause can cause changes in more than just a woman's menstrual cycle.

What happens during menopause?



Signs of menopause

Menopause is different for every woman. Some women hardly notice it, while others experience big changes in their bodies and moods.

Changes in the menstrual cycle, hot flashes, and vaginal changes are the most common signs of menopause.

Signs of menopause



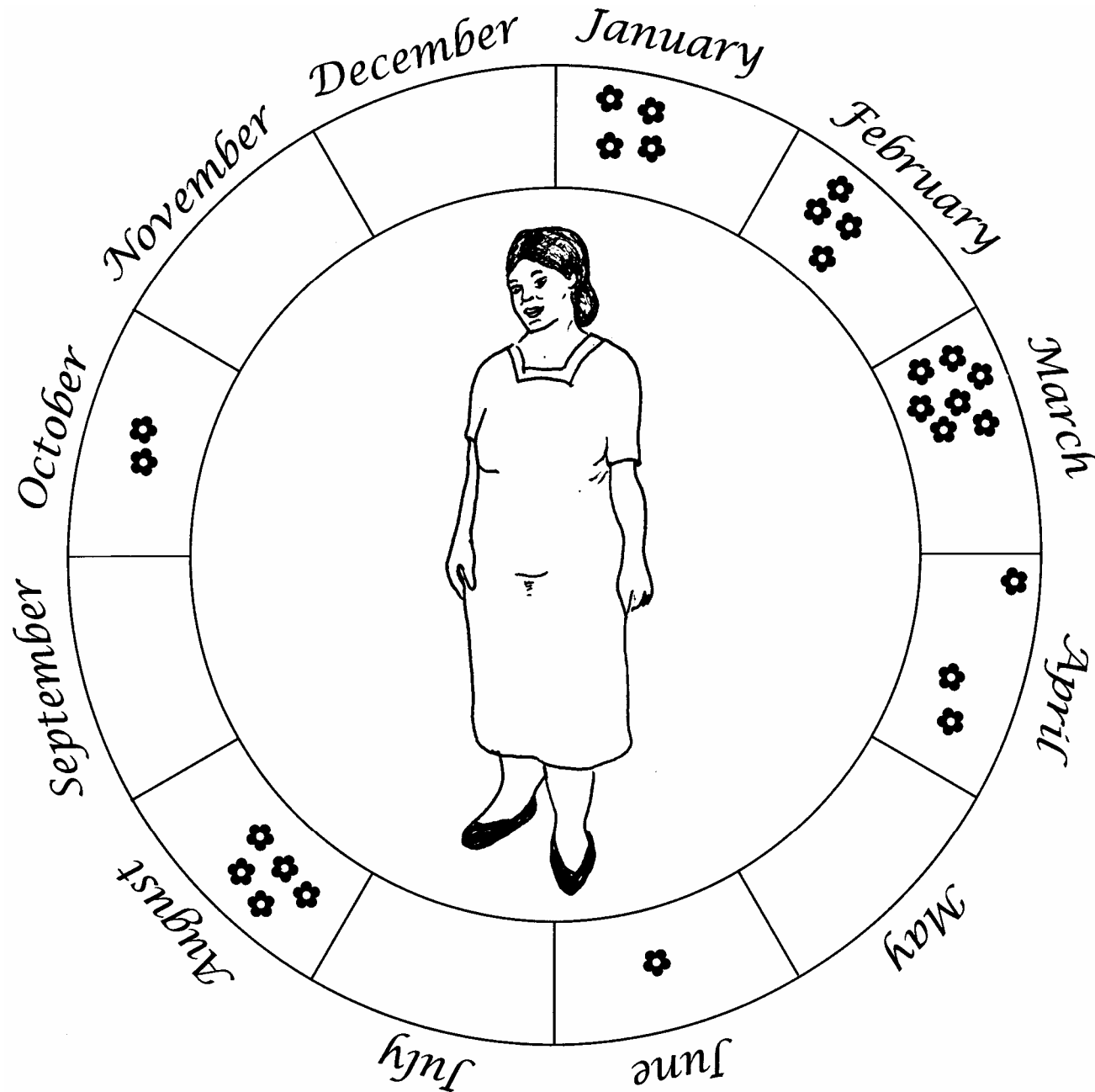
Changes in the menstrual cycle

During menopause, periods start to become irregular. This means that periods may come more or less often and the bleeding may be heavier or lighter. Later, a woman stops having her period completely. After this, she cannot become pregnant.

But until a whole year has passed since her last period, women who don't want to have children should use birth control. A woman can still get pregnant even if her periods are irregular.

This diagram shows how a woman's period may change when she is going through menopause. The flowers represent days of bleeding. One month a woman may have heavy bleeding and the next month very light bleeding. She may not have her period for several months in a row. These months are the ones with no flowers.

Changes in the menstrual cycle



Hot flashes

Many women experience hot flashes during menopause. A hot flash is a sudden feeling of heat in the body. The face and neck may become flushed (red) and red blotches may appear on the chest, back, and arms. This may be followed by lots of sweating and shivering. A woman's heart may speed up. A hot flash may last a few seconds, thirty minutes, or longer.

Hot flashes may happen at night, too. A woman may sweat so much that she wakes up and her sheets are wet.

Tips for hot flashes:

- Dress in layers so you can take clothes off as you get hot.
- Drink lots of water. This helps control the body temperature.
- Stay out of the heat as much as possible.
- Pay attention to what triggers your hot flashes and avoid them. Stress and foods like spicy foods, alcohol, and hot drinks can bring on hot flashes.

Hot flashes



Changes in the vagina

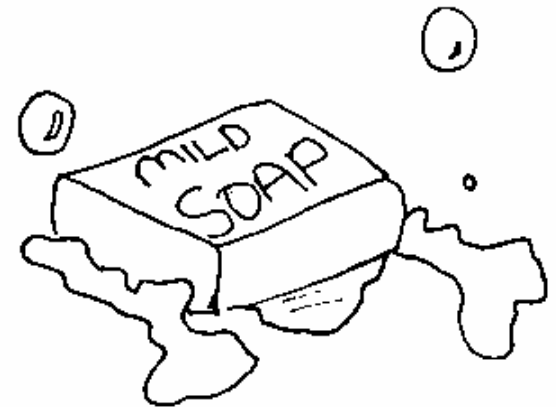
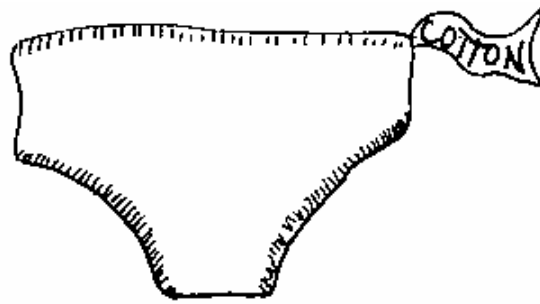
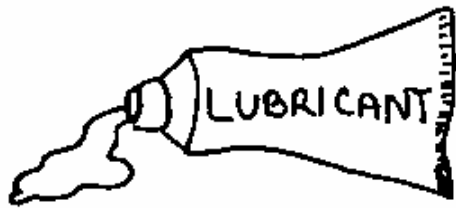
Some women experience changes in their vagina during menopause. The vagina may be drier, making sex uncomfortable or painful. Normally, when a woman becomes sexually aroused or excited, her hormones cause her vagina to become wet. Because the ovaries are producing less hormones, a woman's natural wetness may be less. The vagina might become thinner and less elastic or able to stretch.

Tips for vaginal changes:

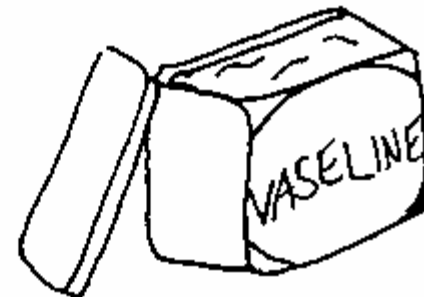
- Use a lubricant during sex. Lubricants are sold at drug stores and grocery stores. Using a lubricant before and during sex can help if there is dryness in the vagina because a lubricant makes the vagina wet. Use a water-based lubricant like KY Jelly. DO NOT use Vaseline or baby oil. They are oil-based and can cause more irritation and damage condoms.
- Wear cotton underwear and don't wear tight pants.
- Wash the vaginal area everyday with mild soap and gently pat dry.
- Don't douche. Douching washes away the natural moisture and natural bacteria in the vagina.

Vaginal changes

Dos



Don'ts



Other changes

During menopause a woman may also notice:

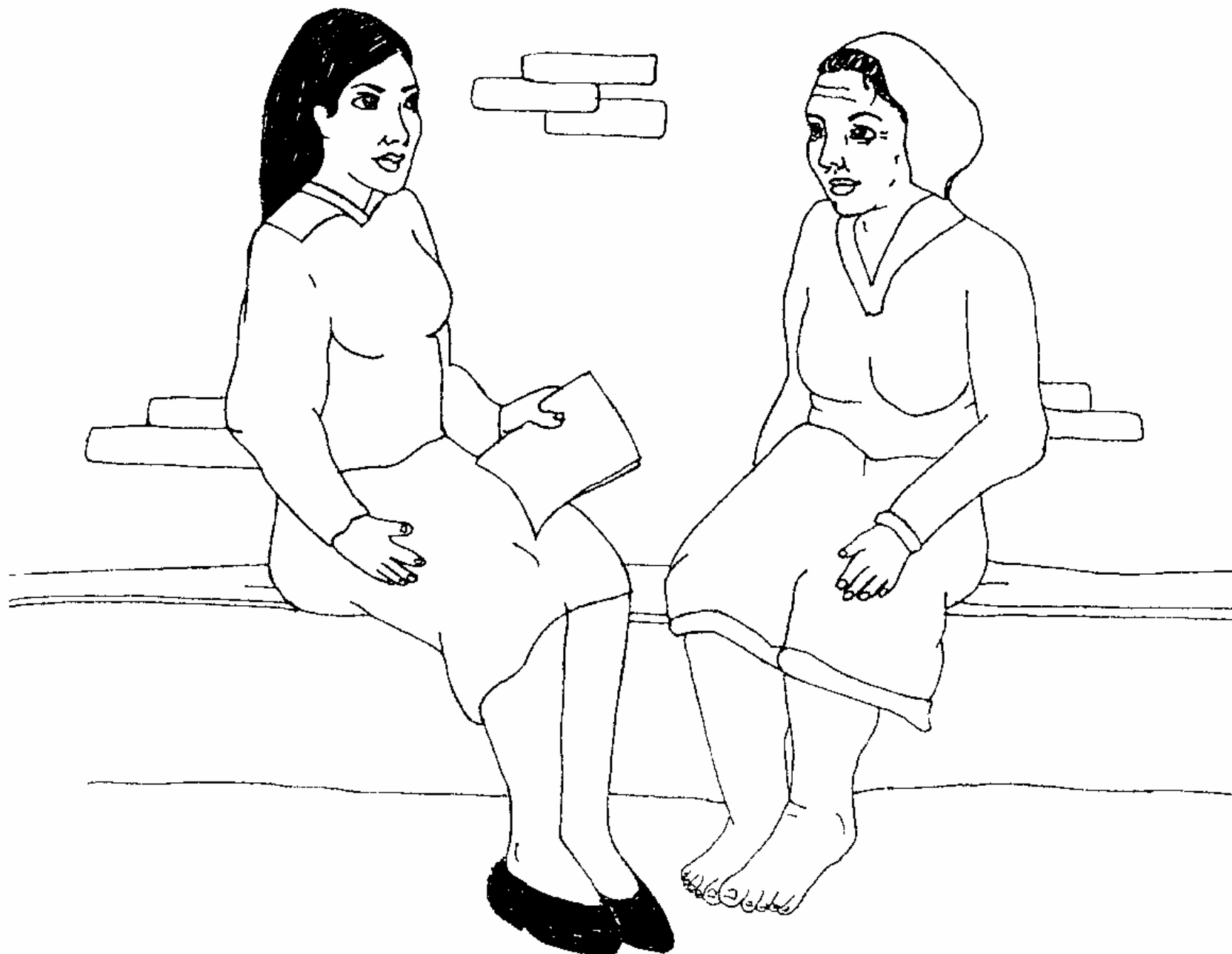
- thinning hair
- graying hair
- changes in her eyesight
- weight gain
- irritability
- quick changes in mood
- sudden tears
- sudden anger or rage
- anxiety
- difficulty concentrating
- breast tenderness
- depression

Not all changes that middle-aged women experience are because of menopause. Some may be because of aging or other changes in her life like taking care of parents, children moving out, or job changes.

How a woman feels about menopause may be influenced by how others feel about women growing older. Messages from society tell women that when they get older, they are less attractive, less sexually desirable, and less important. These messages can make going through menopause and growing older more difficult for women.

How a woman feels about menopause may also may be affected by how she feels about no longer being able to get pregnant.

Other changes



Sex and menopause

A woman's sex drive may change during and after menopause. Some women report an increase in their sex drive and say they enjoy not worrying about getting pregnant.

Other women have less desire for sex after menopause. Vaginal changes may make sex uncomfortable. Lubricants and vaginal moisturizers found at drug stores and grocery stores can help with this.

Sex and menopause



Pregnancy and menopause

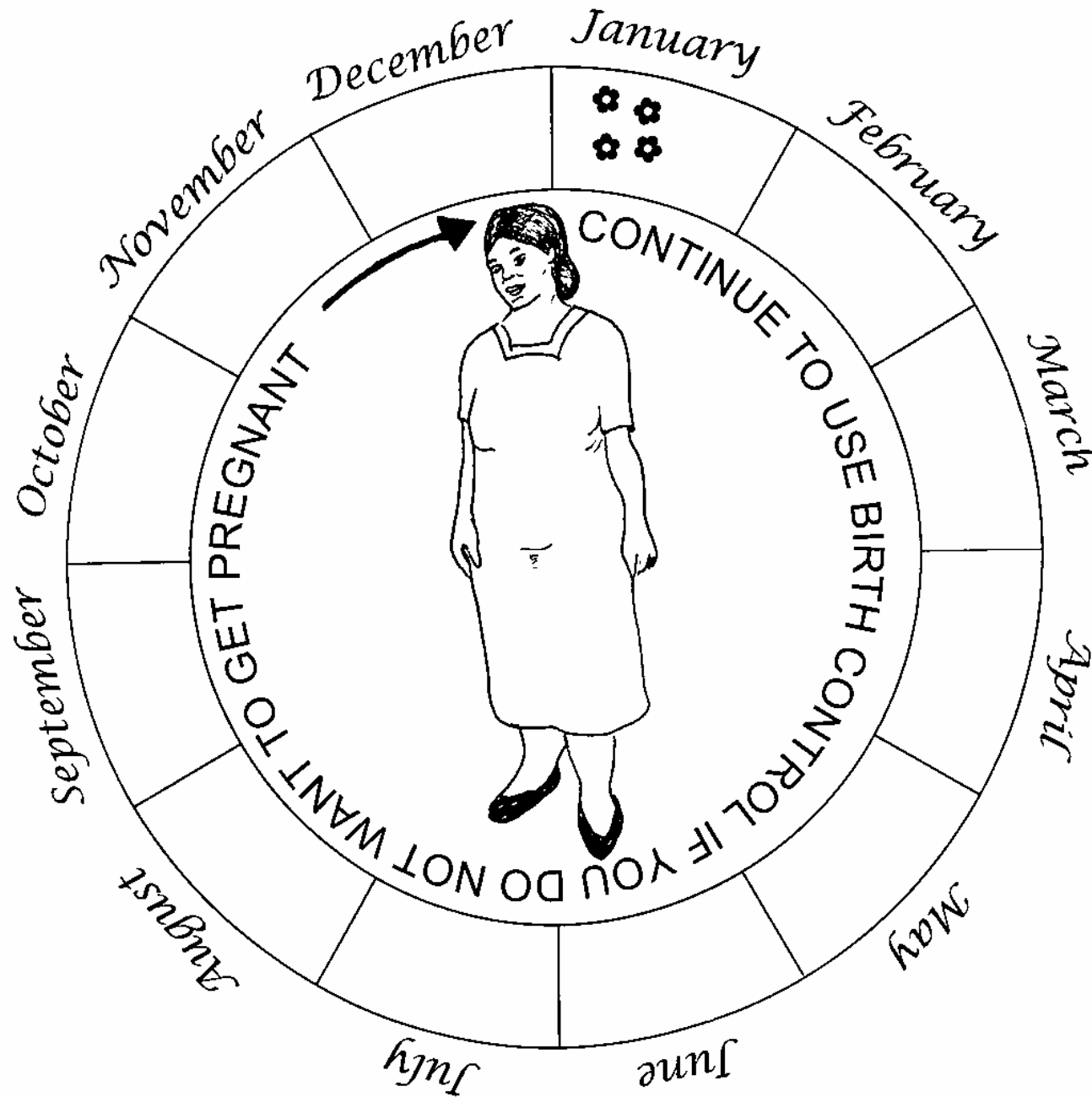
When menopause starts, a woman's period may be irregular. However, she can still get pregnant. A woman should wait an entire year after she stops having any monthly bleeding before she stops using birth control.

Using birth control pills (The Pill) can make it difficult to tell when a woman is going through menopause because she may continue to have her period. She can have her hormone levels checked by a doctor to see if she has reached menopause.

Menopause does not protect a woman from sexually transmitted diseases (STDs). She should still use condoms to prevent getting an STD.

This diagram shows how long a woman must wait before she stops using birth control. If a woman has a period in January but then doesn't have one for a whole year, she can no longer get pregnant. If she has even one day of bleeding, she must wait twelve more months before being sure that she cannot get pregnant.

Can I still get pregnant?

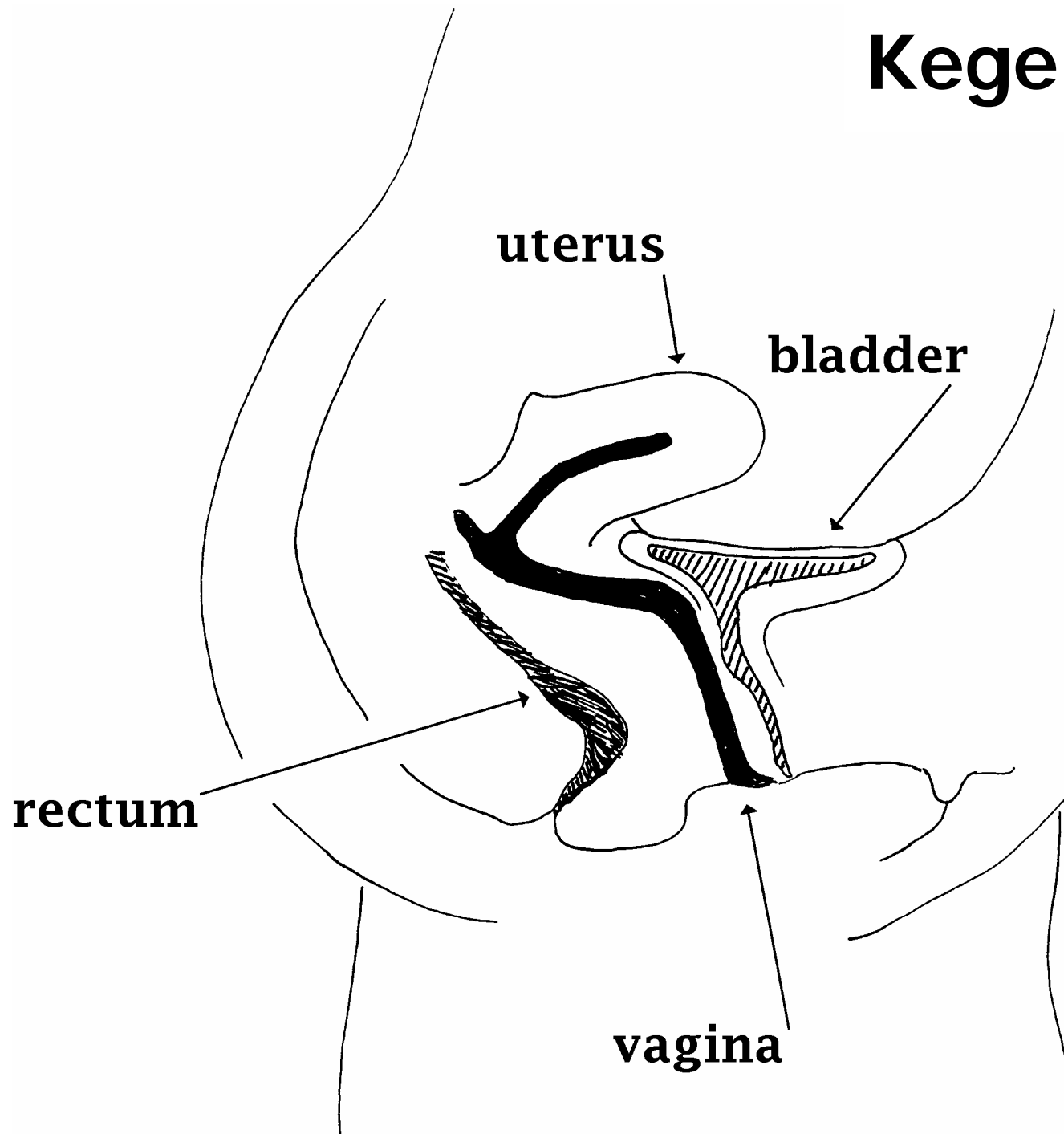


Kegel exercises

Kegel exercises make the vaginal and urinary tract muscles stronger. Exercising the muscles around the vagina and bladder can make sex more enjoyable and help prevent poor bladder control later on. These exercises can also help pregnant women push the baby through her vagina during labor.

Kegel exercises are very simple to do and can be done anywhere. Contract the muscle you use to start and stop urinating. First, just hold the muscle for one second and then release. Repeat this ten times. Do this several times each day. You should notice that the muscle gets stronger after a few weeks.

Kegel exercises



Hormone Replacement Therapy

Most women do not need medical treatment for menopause. For some women, however, menopause can start to cause problems in their daily life. Some women try Hormone Replacement Therapy — a combination of hormones which replace the hormones the body stops producing during menopause.

To start Hormone Replacement Therapy a woman needs to see a health care provider. She should think carefully about it because there are both benefits and risks.

Hormone Replacement Therapy



Benefits and Risks of Hormone Replacement Therapy

Benefits:

- Relieves hot flashes
- Relieves vaginal dryness
- Can prevent osteoporosis (the weakening of the bones)
- Improves energy and mood

Increases a woman's risk of:

- Breast cancer
- Cancer of the lining of the uterus
- Gall bladder disease
- Blood clots and strokes
- Depression
- Migraines
- Weight gain or retention of water

Benefits and Risks of Hormone Replacement Therapy



If you choose Hormone Replacement Therapy

- Have a complete physical exam, including a pelvic exam, Pap smear and mammogram.
- Talk to your health care provider about any health condition you have.
- Tell your health care provider if you have any problems while taking the hormone, especially chest, stomach, or leg pain, breast lumps, bleeding from the vagina, headaches, or moodiness.
- Do a monthly self breast exam.
- Only participate in short-term therapy. See your health care provider to evaluate your therapy every six months.

Hormone Replacement Therapy is not right for everyone. Talk to your health care provider about the benefits and risks.

If you choose Hormone Replacement Therapy



Osteoporosis

Osteoporosis is the loss of bone mass. Menopause can increase a woman's risk of developing osteoporosis. This means that bones become more brittle and are more likely to break.

Hormone Replacement Therapy can prevent bone loss, but a woman should think about the benefits and risks.

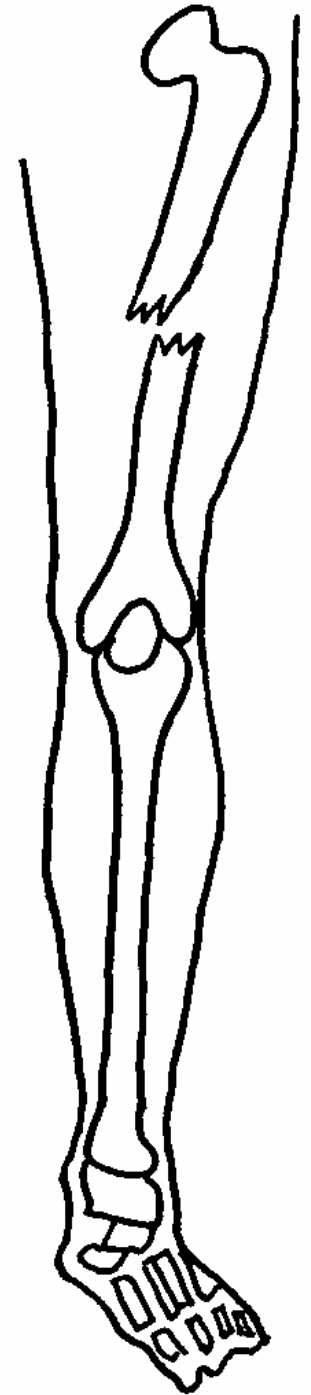
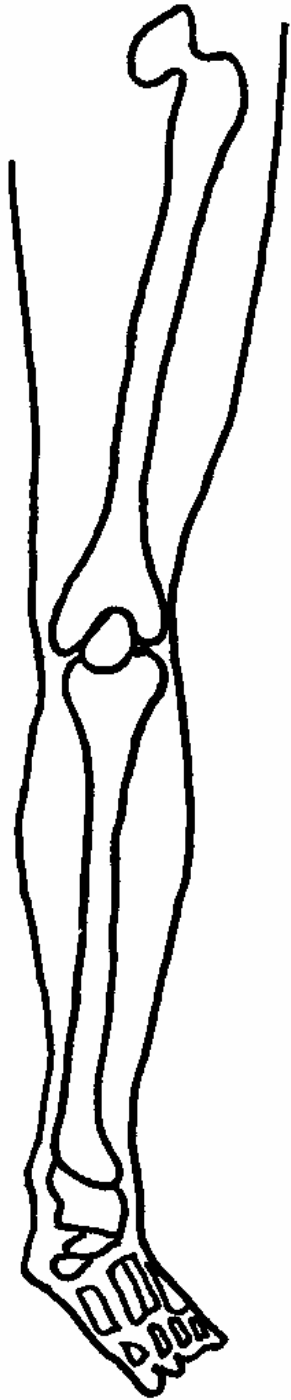
A woman may be at greater risk for osteoporosis if she:

- Reaches menopause before age 45
- Has a family history of osteoporosis
- Doesn't have much calcium or vitamin D in her diet
- Drinks or eats a lot of caffeine, alcohol, or protein
- Smokes
- Doesn't exercise much

Osteoporosis

Increases risks:

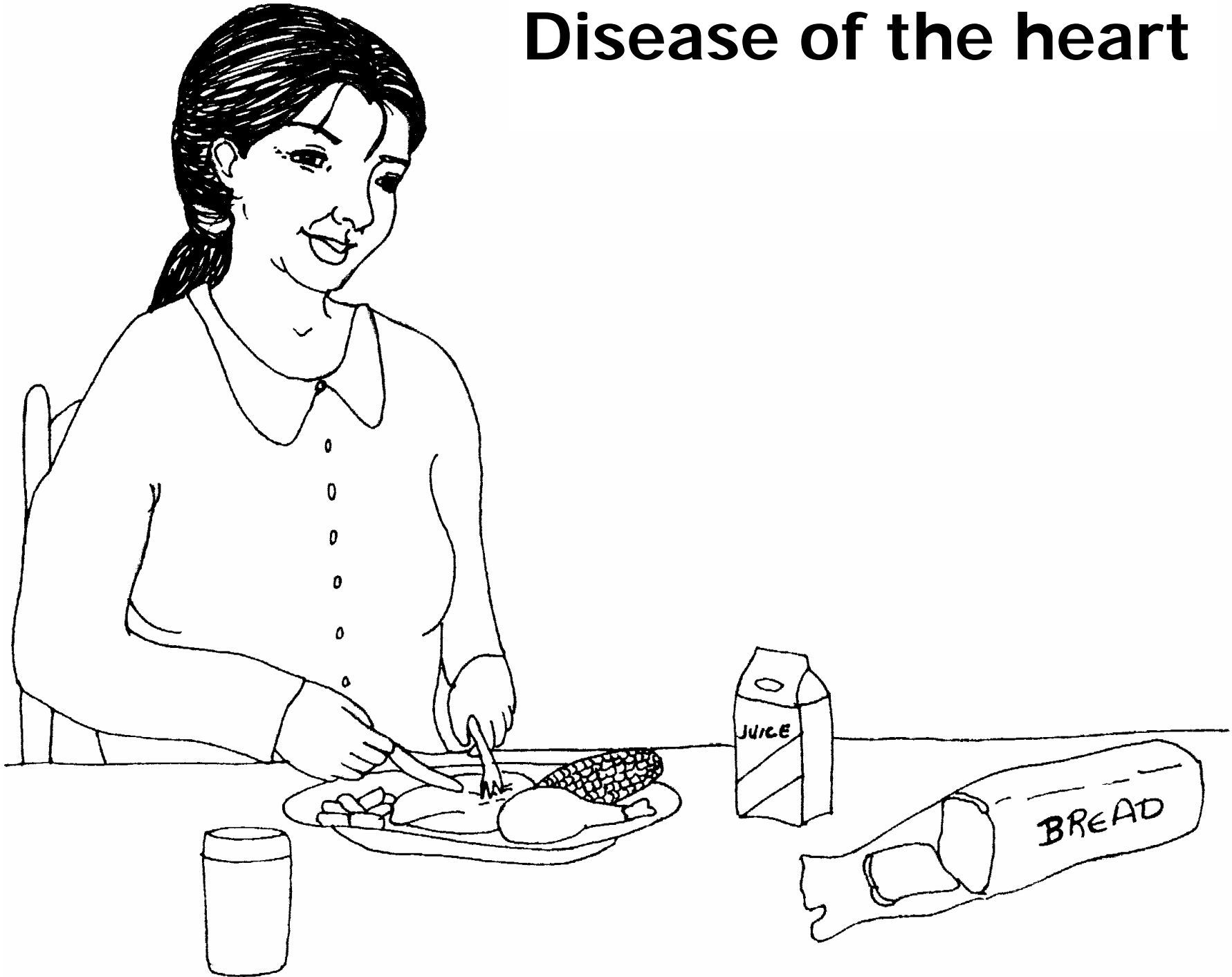
- menopause before age 45
- family history of osteoporosis
- little calcium or vitamin D in diet
- lots of caffeine, alcohol, or protein in diet
- Smoking
- little exercise



Disease of the heart

Heart disease is the number one killer of women in the US. The hormone, estrogen, helps to protect women from heart disease. After menopause when the body has less estrogen, women are at greater risk of developing heart disease. Eating a diet low in fat and getting regular exercise can help prevent heart disease. Talk to your health care provider about your risk for heart disease.

Disease of the heart



Myths about Menopause

Myth: All women who have gone through menopause do not want sex.

Fact: Women can enjoy sex before, during, and after menopause. Some women enjoy sex MORE after menopause because they do not have to worry about getting pregnant. Using lubricant before and during sex and doing Kegel exercises can help make sex more enjoyable for a woman going through menopause.

Myth: Women who have gone through menopause do not need to have yearly pelvic exams or Pap smears.

Fact: Women should continue to have pelvic exams and Pap smears once a year during and after menopause. Pap smears, the test for cervical cancer, are especially important as a woman gets older. Even though a woman does not get her period anymore and can no longer get pregnant, she should still take care of the health of her reproductive organs.

Myth: Once a woman begins to go through menopause, she can't get pregnant.

Fact: During the time when a woman is going through the changes of menopause (changes in her period, changes in her vagina, hot flashes, etc.) she can still become pregnant. A woman should wait until she has not had a period for twelve months before stopping birth control.

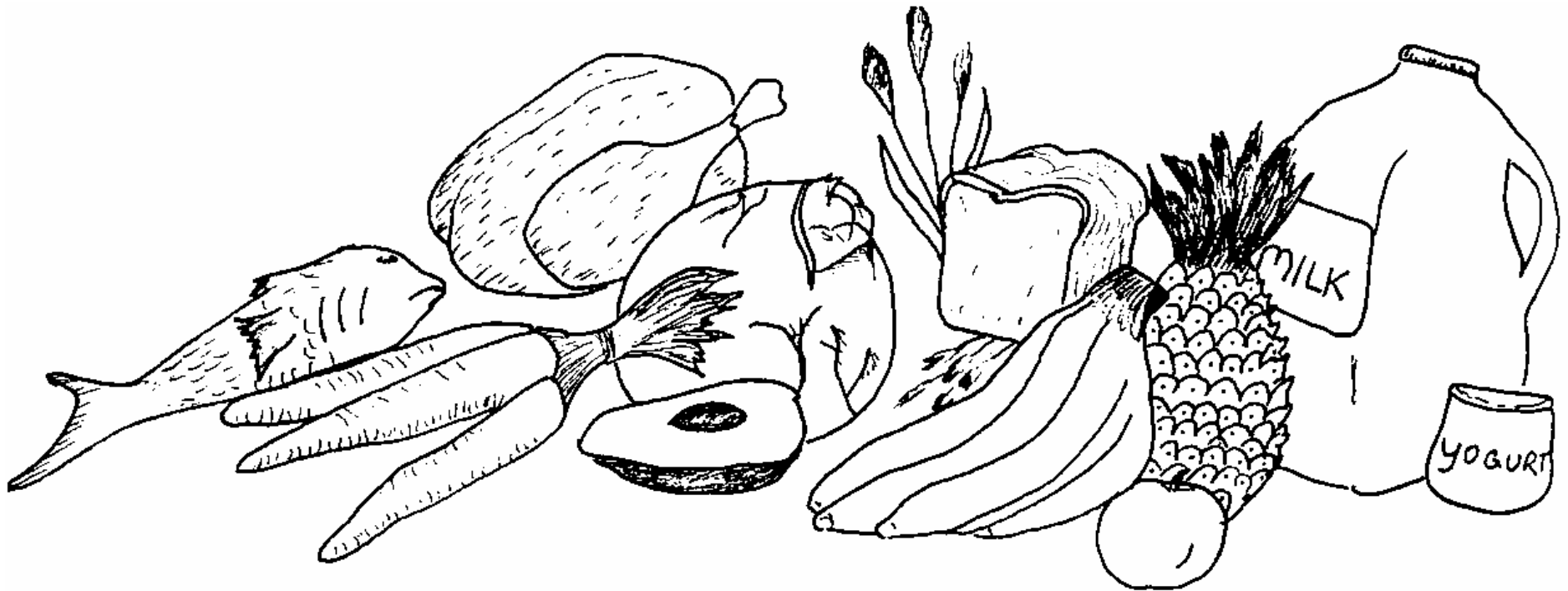
Myths about Menopause



General tips for menopause

- Eat healthy foods.
- Get plenty of calcium. Milk, dark green vegetables, calcium fortified orange juice, and canned fish all have a lot of calcium.
- Limit drinking and eating salt, caffeine, sugar, and alcohol.
- Exercise regularly to keep your bones and heart healthy.
- Don't smoke.

Tips for menopause



Conclusion

Menopause is a natural part of growing older. Talk about any feelings or worries about menopause or the changes you are experiencing with supportive friends and family, a Camp Health Aide, or a health care provider.

Menopause is a natural part of growing older

