



Cascade Women's Health
PHYSICIANS AND SURGEONS

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HOW DOES YOUR PERIOD CHANGE AS YOU GET OLDER?

Many women experience changes in their menstrual bleeding pattern as they approach the menopausal transition. These changes can start as early as the late 30s and can last for many years. The average age of menopause is ~51 but there is a very wide variation in what changes women may experience during this transition time. This handout tells you what to expect, what is normal and what may signal a problem that you may need help with.

Some women continue to have periods that are predictable in start-time, amount of flow and length of bleeding time, up until menopause. However, it is very common and normal for women to begin to have more variation and irregularity in their flow pattern as they get older.

- **Cycle length:** Cycle length is the number of days from the first day of your period, until the first day of the next period. Most women have cycle lengths of about 28 days. As women get older, it is typical to have more cycle length variation. For example, some months your period may come in 28 days but other months may come in 25 days or 32 days. Your period may be less predictable in onset.

If your cycle length drops below 24 days or is longer than 90 days, it is a good idea to seek professional advice.

- **Duration of flow:** Similarly, there may be increasing variation in the number of days you flow. Duration of flow includes all the spotty days that come at the start or end of your period. If the duration of your flow is greater than 10 days, it could be an indication that you need evaluation.
- **Amount of flow:** You can also expect changes in the amount of flow from month to month. Some periods will be typical for you while others may be lighter or heavier.
 - Very heavy flow, especially if it lasts more than 1 day can be a sign of a problem. If you are altering your plans for the day, needing to double up on protection and still soaking through with blood, or going to sleep with a towel, please call us.

Officially, menopause is defined as “one year without menstruation.” At that point you can feel confident discontinuing birth control. Any bleeding after you have already entered menopause needs evaluation.

We can provide you with a calendar card to track your blood flow. This information, recorded on the card, is a very helpful way for us to figure out if your pattern is in the normal range or is the sign of a problem. If you'd like such a card, please ask us for one.

