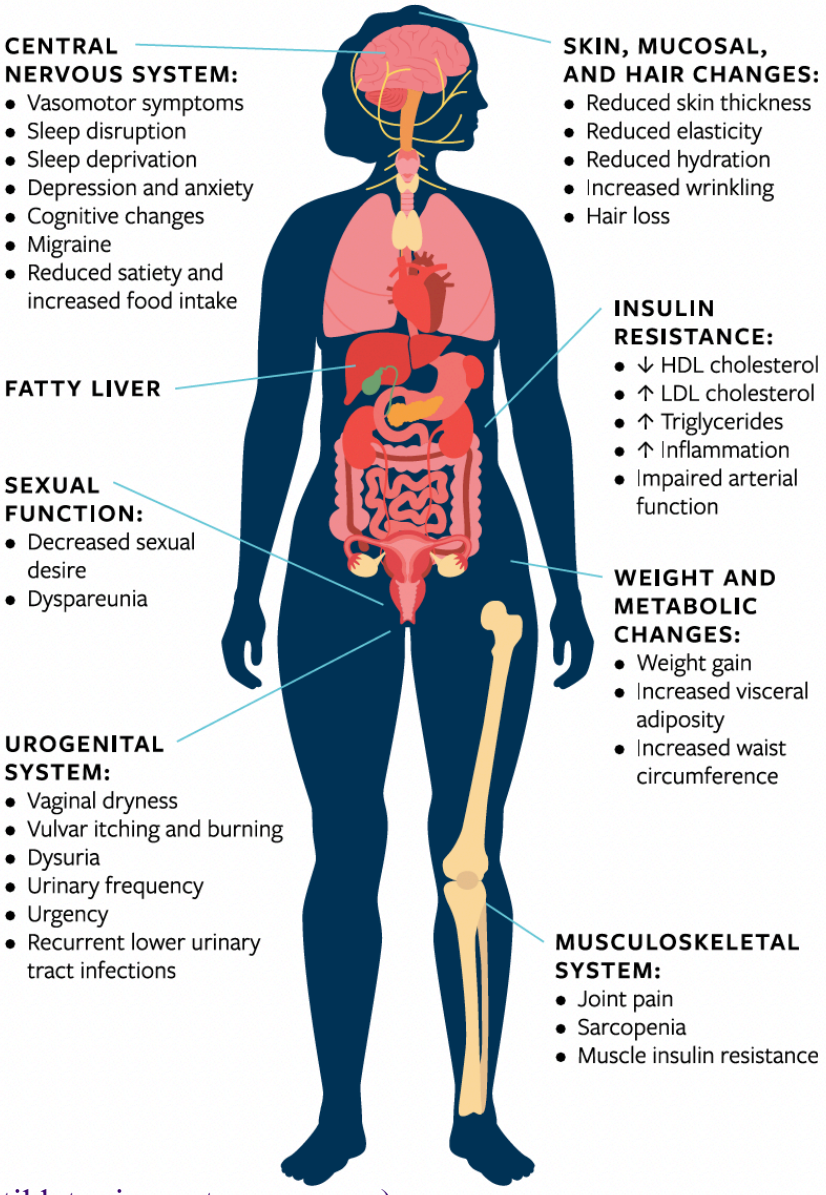
Cheat Sheet: The Anatomical and Physiological Changes of Menopause

Thanks to sex hormones affecting every physiological structure and process in some way, menopause can impact every body system, from a woman's head to her toes. (That said, every woman will experience menopause differently.)

Here's a quick reference list of the common changes.



REPRODUCTIVE SYSTEM

- Lower estrogen and progesterone
- Higher Follicle-stimulating hormone (until later in postmenopause)
- Periods become less frequent and then stop
- Follicle count goes down; ovulation stops
- Breast changes (e.g., change in shape, more tenderness, less elasticity, higher cancer risk)
- Vaginal changes (e.g., dryness and thinning skin, lower elasticity, more pain)
- Urogenital changes (e.g., pain when urinating, urinary tract changes)
- Increased risk of pelvic floor dysfunction (e.g., leaking urine)
- Possible sexual dysfunction (e.g., dyspareunia, decreased libido)

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CENTRAL AND PERIPHERAL NERVOUS SYSTEM

- Cognitive changes (e.g., learning, memory, focus, attention)
- Sleep Changes (e.g., insomnia, night sweats, changes to circadian rhythm)
- Mood changes (e.g., more anxiety, irritability, depression)
- Peripheral nerve changes (e.g., unusual skin sensations, pain and touch sensitivity)
- Migraines and headaches
- Vasomotor symptoms (e.g., hot flushes)

CARDIOVASCULAR SYSTEM

- Stiffer and less elastic blood vessels
- Higher blood pressure
- Higher cardiovascular disease risk
- Increased risk of blood clots

RESPIRATORY SYSTEM

- Higher risk of respiratory infections and COPD
- Lower lung capacity and function

MUSCULOSKELETAL SYSTEM

- Loss of muscle mass
- Loss of bone density
- Slower healing of connective tissues, stiffer connective tissues
- More aches and pains in muscles and joints

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METABOLISM

- Change in glucose metabolism and insulin sensitivity
- Changes in fatty acid metabolism
- Changes in metabolic health

BODY COMPOSITION

- Increased visceral and abdominal adiposity
- Changes in fat distribution
- Possible weight gain

DIGESTIVE SYSTEM

- Changes in digestion and gastric function (e.g., changes in gastric motility, changes in bowel habits, indigestion, constipation, heartburn)
- New food intolerances
- Changes in the gut microbiome
- Increased risk of GI cancers

Inflammation and Immunity

- Higher inflammation and elevated immune response to pro-inflammatory cytokines
- Decreased activity of some immune cell types (e.g., natural killer cells)

SKIN AND MUCOUS MEMBRANES

- Thinner, drier, and less elastic tissues
- Odd or unusual skin sensations (e.g., formication)