

Premature and early menopause

Menopause can occur much earlier than the average age of 51 years. Menopause before the age of 40 is commonly referred to as premature, although primary ovarian insufficiency (POI) is currently considered to be a better term to denote the loss of ovarian function, as it does not specify definitive failure. Menopause that occurs between 40 and 45 years is termed early.

Causes

- Premature or early menopause can occur naturally, with no identifiable underlying cause.
- It may be caused by chromosomal and genetic defects.
- It may be caused by autoimmune disease.
- It may be induced by surgery (bilateral oophorectomy), radiotherapy or chemotherapy.

Assessment

The assessment of women presenting with possible premature or early menopause will include measurement of the following:

- Follicle-stimulating hormone (FSH), with two samples taken 4-6 weeks apart
- Anti-Mullerian hormone
- Inhibin A and inhibin B

Premature ovarian insufficiency or early menopause, if untreated, increases the risk of osteoporosis, cardiovascular disease, cognitive decline, dementia and Parkinsonism, and reduces life expectancy.

Other investigations include:

- Antral follicle count and ovarian volume
- Karyotyping (for diagnosis of Turner syndrome)
- Test for Y chromosome material
- Fragile-X premutation testing
- Autoantibody screen (adrenal, thyroid)
- Measurement of bone mineral density

Management

- Menopausal hormone therapy
- Combined hormonal contraception

Both of the above hormonal methods also provide bone protection, but both **contraindicated** in women with hormone-sensitive cancers.

- Steroid replacement should be used until the average age of the natural menopause.
- Bisphosphonates are not the recommended first-line treatment because of their unknown long-term effects on the fetal skeleton in women desiring pregnancy.

Referral to specialist menopause, fertility and assisted reproduction professionals should be discussed with the patient.

Further information

NICE. Menopause: diagnosis and management <https://www.nice.org.uk/guidance/ng23>

ESHRE. Guideline on the management of premature ovarian insufficiency <https://www.eshre.eu/Guidelines-and-Legal/Guidelines/Management-of-premature-ovarian-insufficiency>