

Menopausal health:

Premature and early menopause

The average age at menopause is 51 years. Menopause before the age of 40 is commonly referred to as premature, although primary ovarian insufficiency (POI) is 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

- Pregnancy test
- Measurement of follicle-stimulating hormone (FSH)

Further investigations

- Chromosomal analysis
- Testing for fragile-X premutation
- Autoantibody screen (adrenal)
- Thyroid function
- Anti-Mullerian hormone
- Ultrasound for antral follicle count and ovarian volume
- Measurement of bone mineral density

Management

- Menopausal hormone therapy, until the average age of the natural menopause
- Combined hormonal contraception
- The above hormonal methods also provide **bone protection**, but both are **contraindicated** in women with hormone-sensitive cancers
- **Bisphosphonates** are not the recommended first-line means of bone protection because of their unknown long-term effects on the fetal skeleton in women desiring pregnancy
- Provision of support
- Referral to specialist menopause, fertility and assisted reproduction professionals should be discussed

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

Further information

European Society of Human Reproduction and Embryology (ESHRE) (2024). Guideline on premature ovarian insufficiency <https://www.eshre.eu/Guidelines-and-Legal/Guidelines/Premature-ovarian-insufficiency>

NICE (2024). Guideline NG23. Menopause: identification and management <https://www.nice.org.uk/guidance/ng23/resources/menopauseidentification-and-management-pdf-1837330217413>