



Bristol Menopause  
& Wellwoman Clinic

# Understanding POI





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## Premature Ovarian Insufficiency (POI)

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Primary ovarian insufficiency is a condition where the ovaries lose their normal function before the age of 40. This can result in reduced production of hormones such as oestrogen, irregular menstrual cycles, and early menopause symptoms. POI affects approximately 1 in 100 women under the age of 40 and can have significant impacts on fertility and overall health.

Unlike natural menopause, which typically occurs around age 50, POI can happen in women as young as their teens or twenties.

## Causes of POI

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**Genetic Factors** – Some women inherit genetic mutations or conditions that affect ovarian function. For example, Turner syndrome, Fragile X syndrome, and certain genetic mutations can lead to POI.

**Autoimmune Disorders** – In autoimmune POI, the body's immune system mistakenly attacks ovarian tissue, impairing its function. Conditions like autoimmune thyroid disease or Addison's disease can be associated with POI.

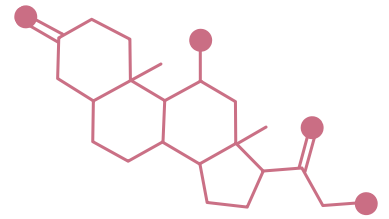
**Medical Treatments** – Treatments such as chemotherapy, radiation therapy for cancer, or surgeries involving the ovaries can damage ovarian tissue and lead to POI.

**Environmental Factors** – Exposure to toxins, such as cigarette smoke may increase the risk of POI.

**Idiopathic** – In many cases, the exact cause of POI cannot be identified and is termed idiopathic.

**Infections** – Rarely, certain viral infections, such as mumps, can impact ovarian function.

*“THIS CONDITION AFFECTS 1 IN  
100 WOMEN IN THE UK” (NEWSON,  
2016)*



## Symptoms of POI

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The symptoms of POI are similar to those of natural menopause, but they occur much earlier. Common symptoms include:

- **Irregular or Missed Periods:** The most common symptom is a change in menstrual cycle regularity. Periods may become infrequent or stop altogether.
- **Hot Flashes and Night Sweats:** Sudden feelings of heat, usually in the upper body, often accompanied by sweating and sometimes followed by chills.
- **Vaginal Dryness:** Reduced oestrogen levels can cause vaginal tissues to become thinner, drier, and less elastic, leading to discomfort during intercourse.
- **Sleep Disturbances:** Difficulty falling or staying asleep, often due to night sweats or anxiety.
- **Mood changes:** Women with POI may experience mood swings, irritability, anxiety, or depression.
- **Decreased Libido:** Lower oestrogen levels can affect sexual desire and response.
- **Cognitive Changes:** Some women report memory problems or difficulty concentrating.
- **Difficulty Conceiving:** POI significantly reduces the number of viable eggs, making natural conception difficult.

## Diagnosis of POI

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Diagnosing POI typically involves a combination of medical history, physical examination, and laboratory tests:

**Medical History:** Reviewing symptoms and any relevant personal or family history of POI or autoimmune disorders.

**Physical Exam:** Checking for signs of low oestrogen levels and other symptoms associated with POI.

**Pelvic Ultrasound:** Imaging the ovaries to assess their size and check for the presence of follicles.

The Diagnosis of POI may include looking at:

- o **Follicle-Stimulating Hormone (FSH):** Elevated FSH levels on two separate occasions 6 weeks apart, can indicate POI.
- o **Oestrogen Levels:** Low oestrogen levels are a common indicator of decreased ovarian function.
- o **Anti-Müllerian Hormone (AMH):** Low levels can suggest reduced ovarian reserve.
- o **Thyroid Function Tests:** To check for associated autoimmune conditions.

## Treatment Options

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While there is no cure for POI, several treatments can help manage symptoms and reduce the risk of long-term health complications:

### **Lifestyle Modifications:**

- **Diet:** Eating a diet rich in calcium, vitamin D, and other nutrients to support bone health.
- **Exercise:** Weight-bearing and strength-training exercises to maintain bone density and overall health.
- **Smoking Cessation:** Avoiding smoking to reduce the risk of bone loss and cardiovascular disease.

### **Hormone Replacement Therapy (HRT)**

- **Oestrogen Therapy:** To replace the estrogen that the ovaries are no longer producing, helping to alleviate symptoms like hot flashes and prevent bone loss.
- **Combination Therapy:** Adding progesterone to protect the uterine lining from overgrowth, which can reduce the risk of endometrial cancer.

### **Calcium and Vitamin D Supplements:**

- To support bone health and prevent osteoporosis

### **Emotional Support:**

- **Counseling:** To help manage the emotional impact of POI, including issues related to fertility and self-image.
- **Support Groups:** Connecting with others who have POI for shared experiences and emotional support.

### **Fertility Treatments:**

- **Fertility Counseling:** To explore options and support decision-making.
- **In Vitro Fertilization (IVF):** With donor eggs, for women who wish to conceive.

## Long Term Health Risks

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Women with POI need to be aware of and manage potential long-term health risks associated with low oestrogen levels:

- **Osteoporosis:** The risk of osteoporosis increases due to lower bone density from reduced oestrogen levels. Regular bone density scans and proactive bone health management are important.
- **Cardiovascular Disease:** Reduced oestrogen levels can increase the risk of heart disease, so maintaining a heart-healthy lifestyle is crucial.
- **Mental Health:** Women with POI may experience higher rates of depression and anxiety, so monitoring mental health and seeking support is important.
- **Reproductive Health:** For women wishing to have children, exploring fertility options early can be beneficial, as POI significantly affects fertility.

## Lifestyle Changes to Support Menopause Transition

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**Limit Caffeine and Alcohol** – These can trigger hot flushes and disrupt sleep, so moderation is key.

**Balanced Diet** – Consume a diet rich in fruits, vegetables, lean proteins, and whole grains to support overall health and manage weight.

**Regular Exercise** – Engage in regular physical activity like walking, swimming, or yoga to maintain bone density, muscle strength, and mood stability.

**Stay Hydrated** – Drink plenty of water to help reduce bloating and manage hot flushes.

**Manage Stress** – Practice relaxation techniques such as meditation, deep breathing, or mindfulness to manage stress and improve mental well-being.

**Sleep Hygiene** – Maintain a regular sleep schedule, create a comfortable sleep environment, and avoid screens before bedtime to improve sleep quality.

**Hormone Therapy** – Consult with a healthcare provider about hormone replacement therapy or other treatments to manage severe symptoms.

## **Lifestyle Changes to Support Menopause Transition**

Support Network – Connect with friends, family, or support groups to share experiences and receive emotional support.

Quit Smoking – Smoking can exacerbate menopause symptoms and increase the risk of osteoporosis and heart disease.

*Understanding and navigating the menopause transition can be challenging, but with the right knowledge and lifestyle adjustments, women can manage their symptoms effectively and maintain a healthy, fulfilling life.*





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