# Episode 2 – Bye Bye periods

**Announcer:** This conversation has been made possible by the New South Wales Government's Menopause Awareness Campaign.

**Sarah White:** Hello and welcome. I'm your host Sarah White from Jean Hailes for Women's Health. When people think of menopause, they think of hot flushes, but there are so many other symptoms. In this series, we hear from you the things that are bothering you, the things that are confusing, and things you didn't know were symptoms at all.

Join us as we work through the Menopause Symptom Checklist.

Our guest today is Dr. Sara Whitburn, a GP who specialises in women's health. Now, Dr. Sara, it's no surprise at all to have a question about periods when we're talking about menopause, so let's listen to this one.

**Listener Question:** Recently, I've been getting these really heavy periods, and then don't get them for three months. Should I be worried?

**Sarah White:** Well, should you be worried?

**Dr Sara Whitburn:** So changes in periods is definitely part of the perimenopause and menopause.

**Sarah White:** So can I just stop you a moment there? So perimenopause, can you explain what that is to me?

**Dr Sara Whitburn:** So perimenopause is sometimes called ‘premenopause’, and so—

**Sarah White:** That makes sense.

**Dr Sara Whitburn:** Yeah. So what we're really talking about is the time that you get symptoms until you get that last period, which is the definition of the menopause.

**Sarah White:** That makes sense. So it's the period that's leading up, but you still get symptoms in that period.

**Dr Sara Whitburn:** Absolutely.

**Sarah White:** So now let's go back to periods, Dr. Sara. Heavy periods and then they stop, what would you do?

**Dr Sara Whitburn:** So, changes in periods, so that's heavy periods or irregular periods, is very common during this time. What's happening is that our hormones are being, are fluctuating. They're going up and down. When we go through this time, our ovaries that make our eggs, our ova, are starting to have less eggs and our body recognises that. And so it tries to encourage the ovaries to make more eggs or, or to use those last eggs. And so the hormones are going up and down as the body responds.

So it's a, it's a time of variation. And the way we can see that is because that can really impact how often we have periods and it can impact the heaviness of the periods.

**Sarah White:** And when is heavy too heavy? Do we know?

**Dr Sara Whitburn:** Yes, if it's new for you, and some of the ways I define ‘heavy’ is to talk a little bit about what it's like for that person. So I might ask them about the products they use. Have they gone from perhaps just using a pad to having to what I call ‘double up’, so a tampon and a pad. I ask about accidents or flooding, so especially if somebody wakes up in the morning and they found that they flooded through their products and their clothes and it's on the sheets, to me that sounds heavy. If they're finding that they're getting, and sorry to say this, but clots, so if they're seeing that they're passing a flow that is heavier than what they're expecting. I'm really looking out for changes and I'm looking out for what sounds like a lot of blood being managed by that person.

**Sarah White:** And so if you are in this period of perimenopause that you think you might be and you suddenly get heavy periods and then they stop for a little while, you just accept that as part of the deal, or do you have to worry about anything else?

**Dr Sara Whitburn:** I think it's important to come and talk to your health professional. There are some other causes for heavy bleeding that we'd want to make sure that we investigate.

But if you've seen your health professional and they've excluded some of those more serious causes, then yes, this stopping/starting, heavy/light can be definitely part of the perimenopause.

**Listener Question:** I haven't had my period in over a year. Am I menopausal?

**Sarah White:** Dr. Sara? Yeah. I feel like I can answer this one.

**Dr Sara Whitburn:** Well, I hope so because I'd really like people to be able to feel that they can answer this one. Yes, if you are in the right age group between 45 to 55 and you haven't had a period for a year, you're menopausal.

**Sarah White:** Hmm. Okay, so you've mentioned an age range in there. What happens if it's outside the age range?

**Dr Sara Whitburn:** So there's different categories for the menopause. As I've talked about, 45 to 55 is the average age. There are some people who would have what's called an ‘early menopause’, so that's about 5% of people, and that's 40 to 45.

There are people who have no periods under 40. Now that might be that somebody's having what's called a ‘premature menopause’, but that's where, the age group where there can be other causes for not having a period, and so it'd be important to go and see your health professional to investigate why you haven't had a period.

**Sarah White:** But if I'm in that 45 to 55, I'm pretty safe to assume that it is the menopause and I don't have to worry anymore.

**Dr Sara Whitburn:** No, but if you'd like to come and talk about what's happening or if you have any concerns, then absolutely do come and see your health professional.

**Sarah White:** That's it from us today. We know menopause can be tough, but it's worse when you don't talk about it. To support conversations with your doctor, your colleagues, your family and friends, you can download the Menopause Symptoms Checklist on the Jean Hailes for Women's Health website, and the New South Wales Menopause Toolkit.

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Information about the podcast

This podcast series has been made possible by the NSW Government's Menopause Awareness Campaign. For help talking about menopause, download the [Perimenopause and Menopause Symptom Checklist](https://www.jeanhailes.org.au/resources/perimenopause-and-menopause-symptom-checklist) and take it with you to your next medical appointment. For more information visit: <https://www.nsw.gov.au/women-nsw/toolkits-and-resources/perimenopause-and-menopause-toolkit>

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Information about Jean Hailes for Women’s Health

Jean Hailes for Women's Health is a national not-for-profit organisation dedicated to improving the health of all women, girls and gender-diverse people. For free, evidence-based and easy-to-understand health information, visit [www.jeanhailes.org.au](http://www.jeanhailes.org.au).

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