



From Perimenopause to Postmenopause: Educating Clients on Whole-Body Skin Changes

by Melissa Mercado, LE

Menopause is often discussed quietly, if it's discussed at all. Many clients enter this stage of life feeling unprepared, confused, or frustrated by sudden changes in their skin and body. They may blame aging, products, or themselves, without realizing that hormonal shifts are a primary driver behind what they are experiencing.

Skin professionals are uniquely positioned to educate, normalize, and support clients through menopause and the years leading up to it. Preparing clients early, even during perimenopause, allows professionals to adjust treatments, recommend supportive homecare, and help clients feel confident rather than unprepared.

Menopause is a transition that impacts the entire body. Understanding how these changes show up, and how to address them safely within one's scope, is essential to your overall skin care practice.

THE DECLINE OF ESTROGEN

The defining characteristic of menopause is a decline in estrogen, a hormone that plays a vital role in skin health. Estrogen influences collagen production, hydration, barrier function, wound healing, and elasticity. Estrogen receptors are abundant throughout skin, meaning hormonal shifts directly affect how skin looks, feels, and functions.

During and after menopause, many clients experience accelerated collagen loss, reduced natural oils and hydration, increased transepidermal water loss (TEWL), thinner, more fragile skin, and heightened sensitivity and reactivity.

These changes can begin during perimenopause – years before menstruation stops – often catching clients by surprise. While the face is usually the first area clients notice, menopause affects skin from head to toe.

LOSING FOUNDATION

Collagen gives skin its support and structure and is the most abundant protein in the body. While genetics influence collagen production, the primary factor in collagen decline is age. Collagen levels begin to decrease as early as our 20s, and the quality of collagen also changes over time.

Lifestyle factors can further accelerate this decline. Sun exposure, smoking, excess alcohol consumption, sleep deprivation, and lack of regular exercise have all been shown to negatively affect collagen production and skin integrity. During perimenopause and menopause, when natural collagen loss is already accelerated due to hormonal shifts, these factors can significantly amplify visible skin aging and loss of firmness.

Estrogen is also necessary for healthy collagen production. As estrogen declines, collagen synthesis decreases, resulting in weaker, thinner skin that is more susceptible to bruising, tearing, and injury. This is especially important for professionals providing hair removal or exfoliation services in sensitive areas, as post-menopausal skin is more fragile and requires gentler techniques. A decline in collagen also leads to reduced firmness and elasticity, contributing to fine lines, wrinkles, and skin laxity.

Making Age Just a Number

As collagen and elastin decline, skin gradually loses its structural support, resulting in fine lines, wrinkles, and sagging. Reduced hydration and slower cell turnover further accentuate these visible changes, making skin appear thinner, duller, and less firm. Supporting skin with targeted homecare and in-treatment modalities can significantly improve both appearance and resilience.

At home, clients benefit from consistent use of hydrating and reparative ingredients such as hyaluronic acid for moisture retention, vitamin C to support collagen synthesis and protect against oxidative stress, and vitamin A (retinoids) to encourage cellular renewal and improve texture and tone. These ingredients should be introduced thoughtfully and adjusted based on skin sensitivity, especially during perimenopause and menopause.

In the treatment room, supportive technologies such as LED light therapy can enhance cellular activity, reduce inflammation, and support skin regeneration without compromising a fragile barrier. When combined with barrier-focused facials, gentle exfoliation, and hydration infusions, these treatments can help slow visible aging while maintaining skin comfort and integrity.

ACROSS THE BODY

The Scalp

Hormonal decline reduces sebum production on the scalp, leading to dryness, tightness, flaking, and increased sensitivity. Clients may suddenly experience dandruff-like symptoms, itchiness, or discomfort even if they had never struggled with scalp issues before.

In-spa support may include gentle scalp exfoliation, hydrating masks, calming serums, or circulation-boosting modalities. Avoid aggressive scrubs or overly medicated products unless medically directed.

At-home care should focus on sulfate-free, pH-balanced shampoos, reduced washing frequency, and leave-on scalp hydration using ingredients like hyaluronic acid, panthenol, aloe, or lightweight oils such as jojoba or squalane.

Intimate & High-Friction Areas

One of the most overlooked aspects of menopause is how it affects vulvar and external intimate skin. Estrogen loss leads to thinner tissue, reduced natural lubrication, and impaired barrier function. Increased friction from intercourse, exercise, tight clothing, or hair removal can result in irritation, burning, dryness, or discomfort. Clients may hesitate to bring this up unless the environment feels safe and professional.

In-spa support that is within most aesthetics scopes can include gentle external intimate facials (such as vajacials or bikini facials) that prioritize hydration, barrier repair, and calming. Aggressive exfoliation or strong actives should be avoided.

At-home recommendations should include fragrance-free, pH-balanced cleansers for external use only, soothing barrier creams or serums with ceramides, squalane, hyaluronic acid, or aloe, and avoidance of fragranced wipes or harsh shaving products. Persistent pain, bleeding, or internal symptoms should always be referred to a medical provider.

Body

Post-menopausal body skin often becomes persistently dry, itchy, or crepey due to decreased lipid production and increased transepidermal water loss (TEWL). Clients frequently report itching without a visible rash, tightness after showering, or skin that never seems hydrated.

Professional treatments should focus on hydration and barrier reinforcement rather than heavy exfoliation. Body wraps, hydrating masks, and massage using lipid-rich creams can significantly improve comfort.

At-home strategies include using gentle, non-foaming cleansers instead of traditional soaps, which can strip the barrier. Moisturizing twice daily is ideal, with the most important application being immediately after bathing or showering to seal in hydration. Other suggestions include using creams instead of lotions, avoiding hot showers, and choosing fragrance-free body products.

It is also important to note that excessive or persistent itchiness may be related to histamine responses, allergies, or other systemic health conditions. Clients experiencing ongoing or unexplained itching should be encouraged to review these symptoms with their primary care provider.

Redness, Flushing, & Rosacea-Prone Skin

Many clients experience increased redness, flushing, or rosacea-like symptoms during menopause due to vascular instability, inflammation, and increased skin sensitivity.

Supportive care includes gentle cleansing, barrier repair, anti-inflammatory ingredients such as niacinamide, azelaic acid, licorice root, hyaluronic acid, and green tea, consistent sun protection, and avoidance of common triggers like heat, alcohol, spicy foods, and aggressive treatments.

Increased Sensitivity & Reactivity

Many menopausal clients suddenly react to products they've used for years. A compromised barrier allows irritants to penetrate more easily, and nerve sensitivity may be heightened during hormonal shifts.

This is not the time for aggressive correction. The treatment focus should shift to simplifying routines, reducing active overload, and prioritizing repair before results.

When the barrier is supported, skin becomes more resilient and better equipped to tolerate corrective treatments later.

BEFORE SYMPTOMS ESCALATE

Preparing clients for menopause means proactive education. Simple intake questions about dryness, sensitivity, scalp changes, or discomfort can open the door to meaningful conversations.

Key client education points include:

- These changes are hormonal, not a failure of skin care or aging "wrong."
- Skin needs will change, and adjusting routines is normal.
- Hydration, barrier repair, and comfort become the foundation of healthy skin during this phase.

When clients understand what's happening, they feel empowered instead of discouraged.

THE SKIN PROFESSIONAL'S ROLE

Menopause care is not about treating a medical condition; it's about supporting skin health through a natural life transition. Professionals who understand menopausal skin can build long-term trust and loyalty, create customized treatment plans that evolve with the client, offer solutions clients didn't know were possible, and normalize conversations many clients are afraid to start.

By expanding their view beyond the face and addressing the scalp, body, and intimate skin with knowledge and compassion, skin professionals elevate their role from service provider to true skin health advocate. When professionals are proactive, clients feel seen, prepared, and cared for during one of the most significant transitions of their lives.

Over the past 20 years, Melissa Bivelacque Mercado has worked as a licensed aesthetician, salon and spa manager, day spa owner, aesthetics educator as well as a leader and mentor to many. She is based out of Wallingford, Connecticut and her specialties include body waxing and skin care treatments. In addition to running a successful spa and an advanced training facility, Mercado is the co-founder of the Connecticut Coalition of Esthetics. This coalition fought for and received licensing for Connecticut aestheticians, nail technicians, and eyelash artists in 2020. She is an educator for a handful of professional brands and a moderator for the Esthetician Connection.