

HELPING SOMEONE ELSE MANAGE THE MENOPAUSE

Why does anyone else need to worry about it?

Women often go through the menopause at a time when not only their own lives are changing, but so are the demands and pressures for everyone around them. This can mean it is difficult for family, friends and colleagues to appreciate and understand the difficulties some women experience with the menopause.

To show your concern for someone you know who is going through the menopause here are some things to think about:

Although many women will have a trouble free menopause that is not the case for everyone. Don't compare one woman's experience with another.

Women may find it difficult to recognise that some of what they are experiencing is due to menopausal symptoms and so may not be able to explain it to others.

You may see changes when a woman is going through the menopause. Some women may become tired and forgetful or find it difficult to cope with things they normally have no problem with. Many of these changes will be out of the woman's control. Your help, support and understanding can prevent them becoming a problem.

Different women will choose different ways of managing the menopause.

Is there anything I can do to help?

- ◆ Help out when needed. Don't overload her when she may be feeling tired.
- ◆ Listen to her. It is easy to dismiss any problems or complaints a woman has as due to the menopause. Many problems are more likely to be about the other worries and concerns that affect women at this time in their life like family and work pressures. Take the time to listen to her and if something can be done, help make it happen.
- ◆ Some women find it difficult to come to terms with no longer being able to have children. It is important to acknowledge feelings like this.
- ◆ Encourage her to have time for herself that is not about home or work. Personal time can help to recharge her batteries and get things in perspective. This is a benefit to everyone.
- ◆ Remember not all women can or want to take Hormone Replacement Therapy (HRT).
- ◆ Encourage her to seek medical help for any distressing symptoms.

WHERE TO GET MORE HELP

Getting local support

Your Doctor or Practice Nurse will be able to give you advice about the menopause and your general health. Keep up to date with your cervical smears and your Practice Nurse will be able to show you how to examine your breasts. Between the ages of 50 - 65 you will be offered free mammograms. The appointment will be sent via your GP surgery.

Speak to your local Pharmacist to get more information about Hormone Replacement Therapy.

NHS Direct

Tel: 0845 4647

www.nhsdirect.nhs.uk

Other useful contacts:

Menopause Matters

www.menopausematters.co.uk

National Osteoporosis Society

www.nos.org.uk

Women's Health

www.womenshealthlondon.org.uk

Menopause Support

www.menopausesupport.co.uk

Broadway
Barnton
Northwich
Cheshire
CW8 4LF

Phone: 01606 544241

Web: oakwoodmedicalcentrebarnton.nhs.uk

Oakwood Medical Centre

GUIDE TO THE MENOPAUSE



**This leaflet provides basic
introductory information on:**

- ◆ Understanding the menopause
- ◆ Managing the menopause
- ◆ Helping someone else manage the menopause
- ◆ Where to get more help

UNDERSTANDING THE MENOPAUSE

What is the menopause?

The menopause is the point at which a woman has her last period. It is difficult to predict exactly when this is, but generally when a woman has not had a period for 2 years the menopause is complete. Leading up to this time a woman may get menopausal symptoms even though she is still having periods. Women have a menopause because the ovaries have stopped producing eggs and the hormone called oestrogen.

How will I know that it has started?

Most women will have their last period between the ages of 45 and 55, but in some cases it can happen earlier or later. The signs and symptoms leading up to the last period will be different for different women. Some will have no signs except that their periods have stopped. There can be other reasons for periods stopping and women with concerns should speak to their doctor. The menopause can occur in much younger women, but this is less common.

If a woman has had a hysterectomy, even if she still has her ovaries, she may experience menopausal symptoms earlier than expected. Women who are having or have had any medical treatment which means they do not have periods, may not know they are approaching the menopause. The hormone oestrogen plays an important role in keeping bones strong. After the menopause bones can become gradually weaker, more brittle and more liable to break. This is called osteoporosis. Oestrogen also gives women some protection against heart disease.

Hormone Replacement Therapy (HRT) has been shown to reduce the risk of osteoporosis and so reduce the risk of weakened bones breaking. HRT may also reduce the risk of heart disease. All women may want to speak to their practice nurse or doctor about the risks of osteoporosis and heart disease, especially women who do not have periods and may not know the menopause is approaching.

What are the signs and symptoms?

The signs and symptoms will vary for everyone and all women approach the menopause differently. Some common signs and symptoms are:

- ◆ Irregular periods
- ◆ Periods stopping
- ◆ Hot flushes/night sweats
- ◆ Finding problems difficult to cope with



- ◆ Feeling irritable and weepy
- ◆ Memory loss
- ◆ Mood swings
- ◆ Vaginal dryness
- ◆ Urinary problems/infections
- ◆ Headaches
- ◆ Loss of sex drive
- ◆ Change in sleep patterns



Some women will be able to manage their signs and symptoms and some will want help and support.

Can I still get pregnant?

Yes you can. You do not suddenly become infertile. You need to continue to use contraception for a period of 1 year after your last period if you are over 50 and 2 years after your last period if you are under 50. If during this time your regular method of contraception fails, you can get emergency contraception from your doctor, local family planning clinic or accident and emergency department. If you are on the pill and have concerns about if this will affect your menopause, ask any questions you may have at your next pill check.

MANAGING THE MENOPAUSE

Is it the menopause that is the problem?

Women in their 40's and 50's often have many pressures on them such as work, children, parents. It is important to think about whether a symptom or problem is due to the menopause or due to another health problem or event in your life. It may help you to write a list or talk to someone to tease out these other factors.

Why can't I think straight?

Sometimes the pressures of life and the uneven hormone balance of the menopause can affect your memory and your emotions. It may help to keep lists of things you need to remember and try not to take too much on. If you are feeling unable to cope or generally low and depressed, try to talk to someone and get some 'time out' for yourself. This might help you to see things in perspective.

Can my general health make a difference?

If you are generally well and content you are less likely to have problems during the menopause. Any changes you can make to improve your general health, like a healthy diet or taking more exercise, can help.

What about Hormone Replacement Therapy?

You will probably have heard a lot about HRT. HRT has been shown to reduce the risk of osteoporosis and heart disease and is one way you can choose to help manage the menopause. You can only get HRT on prescription from a doctor, so discuss the pro's and con's of HRT with your doctor. You can also find out more from your practice nurse, local pharmacist, NHS Direct, or from the other contacts on the back of this leaflet.

What about alternative therapies?

There is an increasing interest in alternative therapies, but very little research evidence. NHS Direct will be able to give you the latest information.

What about cervical screening and mammograms?

Even when your menopause is complete you will still need regular cervical smears. All women should check their breasts regularly—your practice nurse can show you how to do this. If you are over 50 regular mammograms (breast screening) is also important.

What if I want more help?

Many women may experience very few problems during their menopause. It can be the start of a new and positive phase in your life, but help is available if you are finding things difficult. You might want to:

- ◆ Talk about it with someone you feel comfortable with. Try not to let things build up.
- ◆ Read the information given on the websites listed on the back of this leaflet.
- ◆ Talk to your doctor, practice nurse or local pharmacist about HRT.
- ◆ See your practice nurse about the menopause and general health advice.

If you want to talk to your doctor or practice nurse it may help to:

- ◆ Spend some time beforehand thinking clearly about what is worrying you.
- ◆ Be clear about what your symptoms are and how long you have had them.
- ◆ Don't be afraid to write a list and take it with you if it helps or to ask questions.
- ◆ If there is anything you are not happy with ask again. **Your worries are important.**