

# Let's talk about Menopause

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## **Menopause**

Definiton:

- ▶ Meno: Menstruation
- ▶ Pause: Stop
- ▶ A year without a period
  
- ▶ This doesn't cover the change in hormones that also occurs: loss of oestrogen
- ▶ Average age 51
- ▶ Can have surgical or medical menopause
- ▶ Symptoms start in perimenopause – usually in 40's, you can start treatment at this stage
- ▶ In perimenopause hormone levels fluctuate rather than steady drop – hard to measure and can lead to symptoms.

## **Why talk about menopause?**

- ▶ 50% of the population are affected - all women!
- ▶ Around 80% of women have symptoms, 25% experience severe symptoms
- ▶ There are health risks associated with hormone deficiency
- ▶ Perimenopause/menopause has an effect on personal life, relationships and the workplace

## **Symptoms**

Variable from person to person

Include:

- ▶ Hot flushes
- ▶ Night sweats
- ▶ Mood swings
- ▶ Tiredness
- ▶ Poor sleep
- ▶ Poor concentration
- ▶ Lack of libido
- ▶ Heavy periods
- ▶ Muscle and joint pains
- ▶ Hair and skin changes
- ▶ Depression, anxiety and irritability
- ▶ Memory problems
- ▶ Worsening headache and migraines
- ▶ Vaginal dryness, itching or soreness

- ▶ Pain during sex
- ▶ Urinary symptoms – frequency and incontinence

### **Health risks of menopause**

Osteoporosis – thinning of the bones

- ▶ Oestrogen helps keep bones strong
- ▶ 1 in 2 postmenopausal women will have osteoporosis

Cardiovascular Disease

- ▶ Oestrogen helps keep blood vessels healthy
- ▶ Women have 5 x increase risk of heart attack after menopause – most common cause of death in women worldwide.

### **Diagnosis**

- ▶ Usually no tests if above age 45
- ▶ Based on symptoms

### **Management**

#### **Lifestyle**

A time of life to review how to prevent disease

#### **Exercise**

- ▶ Improves physical and mental health
  - ▶ Reduces risk of cardiovascular disease and breast cancer
  - ▶ Improves bone health and muscle mass
  - ▶ Helps maintain a healthy weight
- NHS recommendations for adults:
- ▶ Cardiovascular exercise
    - ▶ at least 150 minutes of moderate intensity activity or 75 minutes of vigorous intensity activity a week
    - ▶ Weight bearing exercise
  - ▶ Muscle strengthening exercise
    - ▶ at least 2 days a week.

#### **Eat well**

- ▶ Balanced diet, eat regularly.
- ▶ Mediterranean Diet
  - ▶ high in vegetables, nuts, beans, fish and unsaturated fats
  - ▶ low in processed foods, salt and sugar.
- ▶ Calcium and vitamin D for bones
- ▶ Low GI diet– help mood swings prevent rapid rises in blood sugar
- ▶ ‘Gut friendly’ food, fibre and pre and probiotic foods to feed the microbiome

#### **Stop Smoking**

- ▶ Smokers have earlier menopause and increased risk of cardiovascular disease and breast cancer

## Reduce Alcohol and Caffeine

- ▶ Can affect symptoms of menopause including mood, sleep and flushes

## Sleep Well

- ▶ Improves physical and mental health
- ▶ Try and keep bedroom cool, have a consistent routine

## HRT

- ▶ Replacing the hormones your body is no longer producing
- ▶ 2 hormones (unless you have had a hysterectomy, then you can take oestrogen only)

## Oestrogen

- ▶ 17 beta-estradiol, derived from Yams.

## Progesterone

- ▶ To thin the lining of your womb and protect it from uterine cancer
- ▶ Levels vary from person to person

## HRT Benefits

- ▶ **Symptoms improve** – can take 3- 6 months
- ▶ Effective for the prevention of osteoporosis
- ▶ In some age groups HRT can protect against heart disease – beneficial when taken within 10 years of menopause or below 60

## What about the risks?

### Breast Cancer Risk

2002 Women's Health Initiative (WHI) Study – Publicised an increased risk of breast cancer and heart disease.

Flaws with this study and how it was reported

What we know now:

- ▶ Reduced risk of breast cancer in women taking oestrogen only HRT
- ▶ No increase in risk if below age 50
- ▶ No increase in deaths from breast cancer with any HRT
- ▶ Micronised progesterone has a lower risk of breast cancer compared with other progestinones
- ▶ Modifiable risk factors often have a greater impact on risk

Link to womens health concern poster looking at factors affecting breast cancer risk:

<https://www.womens-health-concern.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/10/WHC-UnderstandingRisksOfBreastCancer-MARCH2017.pdf>

## Other risks

- ▶ Blood clots – increased risk only with oestrogen tablets. Not if it is given through the skin.
- ▶ Cardiovascular disease – HRT beneficial if given early in menopause.
- ▶ Ovarian cancer – unclear if there is any risk. If so, very small, 1 extra case for every 2,500 women taking HRT for 5 years

- ▶ Risk is individual

## Types of HRT

### Oestrogen

- ▶ Lowest risk with transdermal - through the skin
- ▶ No increased risk of blood clots

#### Gel -Apply daily

- ▶ Oestrogel pump
- ▶ Sandrena sachets

#### Spray

- ▶ Lenzetto

#### Patch

- ▶ Change twice weekly
- ▶ Can get combined patch

#### Tablets

- ▶ Risk of blood clots, can reduce libido

### Progesterone

#### Micronised Progesterone – Utrogestan

- ▶ Body identical
- ▶ No increased risk of breast cancer age >51 in first 5 years of use. On stopping risk reduces immediately
- ▶ No increased risk of blood clots
- ▶ Either take as continuous if periods have stopped – every evening or cyclical - each evening for 2 out of 4 weeks
- ▶ Sometimes used vaginally
- ▶ Mild sedative so take at night

#### Mirena Coil

- ▶ Can also provide contraception for 5 years
- ▶ Thins the lining of your womb so helps with bleeding problems

#### Patches and tablets

- ▶ Combined with oestrogen
- ▶ Synthetic progesterone – slightly higher risk and more side effects

## Side Effects of HRT

- ▶ Breast tenderness
- ▶ Bleeding
- ▶ Bloating and nausea

Tend to settle after 3-6 months

## Testosterone

- ▶ Not licensed for HRT

- ▶ But guidelines mention it for low sexual desire if HRT not effective
- ▶ Not all GPs have specialist knowledge to prescribe
- ▶ Studies show benefits for 'brain fog', vaginal dryness and providing increased cardiovascular protection
- ▶ Need to have adequate oestrogen levels for 3-6 months before starting
- ▶ Need blood tests and monitoring

### **Vaginal Oestrogen**

- ▶ Treats Genitourinary Syndrome of the menopause (GSM)
- ▶ Can take alone or with HRT
- ▶ You do not need progesterone
- ▶ Safe to give long term
- ▶ Don't be alarmed by the warnings in the leaflet!
- ▶ Comes as pessary, cream or ring

### **Vaginal Moisturisers**

- ▶ Can use in addition to vaginal oestrogen
- ▶ 2-3 times a week
- ▶ Can also use lubricants for sex
- ▶ Products available over the counter:
  - ▶ Yes, Sylk, Hylofemme
  - ▶ Coconut oil
- ▶ Oil based can't be used with condoms
- ▶ Avoid perfumed soaps/intimate washes

### **HRT Supply Problems**

- ▶ Increased demand
- ▶ Currently only the manufacturer of Oestrogel reporting problems

### **Yearly prescriptions?**

- ▶ October 2021 - government promised to reduce the cost of HRT
- ▶ Latest news – hopefully from April 2023 a prepayment certificate costing £18.70 would allow as many HRT products as needed over 12 months

### **Complementary and alternative treatments**

- ▶ Cognitive Behavioural Therapy – helps with anxiety and coping with symptoms
- ▶ Acupuncture, Reflexology - Can help with relaxation, no evidence of symptom relief
- ▶ Herbal medicine – many are unregulated, doses variable, can interact with other medications
  - ▶ Black Cohosh, St Johns Wort – limited evidence can assist with hot flushes
  - ▶ Phytoestrogens – studies show no value
- ▶ SSRIs/Venlafaxine – for anxiety and depression. In some improve flushes, fatigue and sleep but should only be given for menopause if not able to take HRT.
- ▶ No evidence of benefit for tailored 'bioidentical hormones'

## **Conclusions**

- ▶ Menopause is inevitable – its impact on your life doesn't have to be
- ▶ It is different for everyone
- ▶ Recognise symptoms could be due to menopause
- ▶ A time to reflect on lifestyle and consider if HRT is right for you
- ▶ Risk is individual but often the benefits of HRT outweigh risks
- ▶ Talk about menopause and seek advice about symptoms from your GP

## **Useful Resources**

Balance – created by Loiuise Newson

[www.balance-menopause.com](http://www.balance-menopause.com)

Balance app

Womens Health Concern – Part of British Menopause Society

[www.womens-health-concern.org](http://www.womens-health-concern.org)

Manage my menopause – tailored questionnaire

<https://www.managemymenopause.co.uk/>

Menopause Matters

[www.menopausematters.co.uk](http://www.menopausematters.co.uk)