

## Section 4

### Treating menopause symptoms



If you feel like you need help to manage your symptoms you can get support through your local GP practice. This will help you to make the decisions about your treatment that are best for you.



Sometimes, just knowing what to expect and how to manage menopausal symptoms can help.

There are different ways to manage menopausal symptoms, including:



- eating a healthy, balanced diet and exercising regularly. Staying a healthy weight and exercise can help with some menopausal symptoms



- cognitive behavioural therapy (CBT). A type of talking therapy that can help with low mood and anxiety



- hormone replacement therapy (HRT) – tablets, skin patches, gels and implants that help with menopausal symptoms by replacing hormones



- vaginal cream, tablet, lubricants or moisturisers for vaginal dryness.

You may be referred to a specialist if:



- you experience difficulty controlling your symptoms
- you experience side effects from treatment
- you have a medical history that may mean you cannot take HRT.



Your GP may refer you to see a menopause specialist if they think it is necessary.



Your decisions about treatment may change. If a treatment is not working, you can try something different. You can always get a second opinion if you are not sure about the options offered.

Before speaking to someone you could try:



- taking notes of your symptoms and how or when they are affecting you



- going over what you want to talk about with a friend.

## Hot flushes and night sweats



We all wake naturally through the night. Usually we just roll over and go back to sleep. If you have hot flushes and night sweats because of menopause, you are more likely to wake up and struggle to get back to sleep.

There are a few simple things that may help:



- keeping your bedroom cool at night – 16 to 18°C may seem cold but is good for sleeping. You can also keep your window and bedroom door open to let the air flow



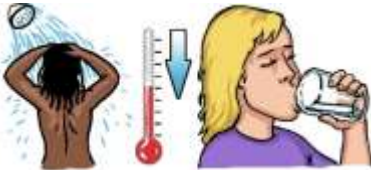
- wearing loose, cotton pyjamas or night clothes. This can help you feel cooler than other materials. Try using cotton sheets and a light blanket rather than a heavy duvet



- wrapping an ice pack in a tea towel and slipping it under your sheets. This is the opposite of a hot water bottle



- exercising regularly. Activities like walking, running and dancing reduce symptoms.



- taking a cool shower, using a fan or having a cold drink



- cut down on caffeine, alcohol and spicy food. They cause hot flushes



- giving up smoking will help reduce hot flushes as well as your risk of developing serious health conditions.

## Mood changes



Some women experience changes like low mood and anxiety during the menopause.



Things you can do to improve your mood may help, such as:



- getting plenty of sleep
- exercising regularly
- relaxing activities like yoga and tai chi



- using mindfulness. This is keeping your mind on here and now and not worrying about other things



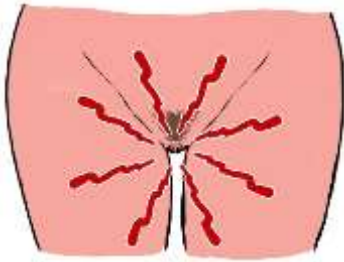
- Counselling.

If you have been diagnosed with depression, medicine is also available, including HRT and antidepressants.



Other treatments like cognitive behavioural therapy (CBT) can help with low mood and anxiety. CBT is a type of talking therapy and your GP may be able to refer you, or you can use our online mental health self-help guides.

## Vaginal dryness and discomfort



If your vagina becomes dry, painful or itchy your GP can give you treatment. This can be put directly into your vagina.



The cream will increase moisture in your vagina which will make walking, exercise and sex more comfortable.



Wearing cotton underwear and only washing your vagina with water will help keep your vagina healthy.



You will usually need to keep using treatment. Your symptoms can return when treatment stops.



You can also use over-the-counter treatments.

## Reduced sexual desire



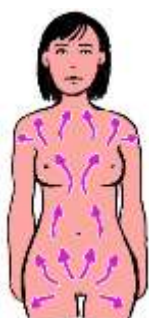
All women experience menopause differently. Many women experience changes in their sex life.

Menopause can affect sexual desire and sex drive.

There are lots of reasons why you might not want to have sex during menopause. This might include:



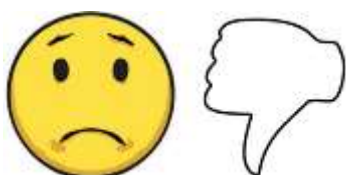
- vaginal dryness and discomfort that makes sex uncomfortable or painful



- lowered sex drive because of hormone changes



- night sweats that affect your sleep and energy for sex



- emotional changes that can make you feel too stressed or upset for sex.





With all symptoms of menopause it is important to get advice. There is a lot that can be done to help. Do not be afraid to speak to someone at your local GP practice. There are treatments that can help your sex life.

## Hormone Replacement Therapy (HRT)



HRT replaces the hormones that are missing. If you have a womb you also need medicine called a progestogen to protect the lining of the womb.



HRT is very good at helping with symptoms. It is available as tablets, skin patches, a gel or spray or sometimes implants.



You should talk to your GP about whether HRT is right for you. You might not be able to take HRT if you are having some kinds of cancer treatments.

## Complementary therapies



Some products are sold in health shops for treating menopausal symptoms. These herbal remedies include evening primrose oil, black cohosh, angelica and ginseng.



If you are thinking of trying herbal remedies, speak to your pharmacist or GP for advice. Natural does not always mean the treatment is safe or good.