

# Managing your menopause 3-stage process



Everyone's experience of menopause is different. We experience different symptoms, have different views or philosophies around how we'd manage them and different medical histories too.

**This workbook is to help you work out what's right for you and plan your next steps.**

Throughout this pack, we sometimes use the terms 'women', 'female' and 'her'. However, we recognise that people from different communities can also experience menopause or symptoms as a result of hormonal changes.

**Disclaimer:** The information, including but not limited to, text, graphics, images and other material contained in this workbook are for informational purposes only. No material is intended to be a substitute for professional medical advice, diagnosis or treatment. Always seek the advice of your GP or other qualified healthcare provider with any questions you may have regarding any medical condition or treatment and before undertaking a new health care regimen.

# What is the menopause?

Menopause is defined as a biological stage in life that occurs when hormones change and eventually menstruation stops. Usually it is defined as having occurred when you've not had a period for 12 consecutive months (for those reaching menopause naturally).

Menopause usually occurs between 45-55. The average menopause age in the UK is 51, however it can be earlier naturally or due to surgery, illness or other reasons.

**Perimenopause** is the time leading up to menopause when you may experience changes and menopausal symptoms. This can be years before menopause and, on average, lasts for 4 - 8 years.

**Postmenopause** is the time after menopause has occurred, starting when a you have not had a period for 12 consecutive months and for the rest of your life.

When we talk about menopause in this guidance, we are referring to any of these stages.

## What are the symptoms of menopause?

Hormonal changes can result in a wide range of symptoms, both physical and psychological. In research, the ones women have said affect them most at work include:

- Difficulty sleeping, insomnia or fatigue
- Hot flushes during the day or night
- Low mood, depression or changes in mood
- Nervousness, worry or anxiety
- Reduced ability to concentrate or focus
- Problems with memory recall
- Migraines or headaches
- Aches and pains
- Irregular and/or heavy periods
- Urinary issues, e.g. increased frequency

## Thinking about long-term health, too

As hormone levels change, extra care of health and wellbeing are important. For example, oestrogen plays a vital role in maintaining good bone, cardiovascular and brain health. After menopause, bone and heart health risks increase.

# Managing menopause symptoms and long-term health

Managing menopause is a personal choice. Some prefer a natural approach, others a medical approach, or for some it can be a combination of the two. Benefits, risk and medical history also need to be taken into account.

## Talking to your healthcare practitioner

We always recommend you go to your healthcare practitioner if you're experiencing menopausal symptoms or want to discuss long term health.

They can discuss options with you, including hormone replacement therapy (HRT), and advise on any lifestyle changes which could help. They should also be able to advise you on complementary treatments, including herbal remedies.

A little preparation will help you get the best from your appointment, particularly if you're feeling nervous or forgetful. Use the symptoms tracker in this document and follow the 3- stage process on the next page.

Record your symptoms and detail your menstrual cycle history. Healthcare practitioners in the UK use the NICE (National Institute for Health & Care Excellence) guidelines to help women manage their menopause - it's a good idea to [read through these too.](#)

Research the facts on up-to-date, trusted websites, and think about ways you would like to manage not just your menopause symptoms but your long-term health. There are resources at the end of this document.



# Managing your menopause: 3-stage process



## Stage 1

- Be clear about how menopause is affecting you.
- What symptoms are you experiencing and when? Which are your worst symptoms
- Prioritise what you want to focus on.
- This is the basis for deciding how you want to manage your symptoms and helps with getting the right support.

## Stage 2

- Focus on your personal philosophy for managing menopause.
- This is your unique journey, there is no right answer there is just a right answer for you.
- You may also want to combine more than one approach and your philosophy may change over time.

## Stage 3

- What action are you going to take?
- What support do you need?

# SYMPTOMS

0 = NO PROBLEM | 1 = MILD SYMPTOMS | 2 = SEVERE SYMPTOMS  
3 = EXTREMELY SEVERE SYMPTOMS

<b>PHYSICAL SYMPTOMS</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>3</b>
Hot flushes/Night sweats	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Sleep problems	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Skin (dryness, itching or acne)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Aching joints	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Weight gain or bloating	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Fatigue	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Heart palpitations	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Changes in periods	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Breast tenderness	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
UTI, urinary frequency & leakage	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
<b>PSYCHOLOGICAL SYMPTOMS</b>				
Worry or anxiety	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Lower self confidence	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Mood swings	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Memory problems	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Low mood or depression	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Panic attacks	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Easily tearful	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Decreased ability to concentrate	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Brain fog	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Inability to multi task	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

## Stage 1:

- What are your symptoms?
- Do you experience these symptoms more at certain times?
- Prioritise the top 3 or 4
- How do they affect you at home and at work?



## Stage 2:

- What is your personal philosophy to manage symptoms and long-term health?
- Do you prefer the medical, complementary or lifestyle approach, or a combination?
- Decide who you are going to talk to and when.
- Establish who can help you at home and at work.



# What next?



## Stage 3:

- What do you plan to do to:
  - Learn more about menopause (if you need to)?
  - Manage your symptoms and long-term health?
  - Who are you going to talk to? And by when?
  - Who can help you (at work, at home)?

# How to talk to your manager about menopause

Research tells us that people can find it hard to talk to their manager about how menopause is affecting them. However, your manager is there to help you be at your best at work. To help you both, preparation is important. This will result in a much better conversation and outcome for both you and your employer.

**Prepare for your meeting.** Keep a diary of your menopause symptoms and how they're affecting you. Think about what practical support might help, being flexible and ideally coming up with some different options. These may be for a short period of time while you work out how to manage your symptoms with your healthcare practitioner. Check out what support is available in your organisation. Search your organisation's intranet or if there's nothing's there, talk to HR.

Keep a diary of your menopause symptoms and how they're affecting you. Think about what practical, reasonable adjustments might help, being flexible and ideally coming up with some different options. These may be for a short period of time while you work with your medical professional to alleviate your symptoms.

**Book a meeting** so you'll have time and privacy to talk and you will be more likely to get your points across.

**Explain your situation clearly.** Talk about how menopause is affecting you at work, what you're doing to manage your menopause and what your manager could do to help. Discuss what the support you would like and timescales. Just knowing someone understands and is there to listen can help.

**Agree with your manager what you can both do.** They may need time to think about the best support. Remember, this may have been on your mind for a long time, but it may be the first time your manager has heard about it. Allow them time to digest the information and seek advice if necessary.

**Do you want the conversation to be confidential?** Some of us are happy talking about menopause openly, others are not. Talk to your manager about whether you want the conversation to be kept confidential or if you're happy to discuss it with colleagues. It's your choice.

**Follow up.** At the end of the meeting put a time in the diary to meet again, whether that's to agree a way forward, to monitor progress or update. Menopause symptoms can change over time.

Above all, it's in both your best interests to find a good solution. All anyone wants is for you to be fit and well and do your job to the best of your ability.

Menopause can be isolating if you don't talk to someone but remember many are experiencing this at work, so you most certainly are not alone.



# How to talk to your healthcare practitioner about menopause

If menopausal symptoms are getting in the way of you enjoying life, it's time to talk to your healthcare practitioner. Here are some helpful, straightforward tips to help you get the best from your appointment.

**Don't wait until symptoms feel unbearable.** Often people feel they must 'put up' with menopausal symptoms, but if they are affecting you then there are things you can do and support available.

**Read the NICE guidelines.** These are used by healthcare practitioners in the UK to determine diagnosis and treatments to offer. The [guidance](#) for patients are really useful to read before you see your healthcare practitioner so you know what to expect.

**Prepare for your appointment.** Keep a list of your symptoms, your menstrual cycle, hot flushes, how you're feeling, any changes you've noticed. Write them down and take them to your appointment.

Prepare notes on any preferences you have about how you manage symptoms too e.g. if you'd like to try hormone replacement therapy (HRT) or not. It's more likely that together you'll find the right solution faster.

**Ask the receptionist who is the best to talk to about menopause.** It might not be your usual doctor or it could be someone who has had special training e.g. the practice nurse.

**Ask for a longer appointment if you think you need it.** Some practices do offer this.

**At your appointment** talk through your preparation: your symptoms and personal preferences. Discuss your options and your healthcare practitioner's advice and recommendations.

**Don't be afraid to ask for a second opinion** if you don't feel you've received the help you need. Don't be put off, you know how you're feeling and how it's affecting you. [You can read the NHS England's principles of shared decision making here.](#)

**Ask if there is a menopause clinic in your area.** If there is and you think this would be helpful, ask for a referral.

**Take your partner or a friend with you.** They will know how the symptoms are affecting you, could support you at the appointment and also find out how to continue supporting you.

**Remember, your healthcare practitioner is there to help and support you, and you should feel comfortable and confident in talking to them about your symptoms and what kind of help you need. Don't think you have to struggle through menopause when there is help and support available.**

## Where to go for further information ...

### General menopause information:

[Nice Guidelines](#)

[British Menopause Society](#)

[Women's Health Concern](#)

[Henpicked - Menopause Hub](#)

### Guidance:

- Menopause Factsheets from Women's Health Concern: <https://www.womens-health-concern.org/2016/04/new-factsheets-menopause-related-issues/>
- Talking to your GP: [How to have a good conversation with a GP: top tips](#)
- Benefits & risks of HRT: [Women's Health Concern factsheet](#)
- Cognitive Behavioural Therapy and menopause: [Women's Health Concern factsheet](#)
- Information on hysterectomy: [Women's Health Concern factsheet](#)
- Premature Ovarian Insufficiency (POI) information and support on very early menopause: <https://www.daisynetwork.org>
- NHS guidelines for taking vitamin D: <https://www.nhs.uk/conditions/vitamins-and-minerals/vitamin-d/>
- Complementary/alternative therapies: [Women's Health Concern factsheet](#)
- [Henpicked Menopause Lunch & Learn Series](#)

### Infographics:

- [HRT Myths Uncovered - Primary Care Women's Health Forum](#)
- [Understanding the Risks of Breast Cancer - Women's Health Concern Infographic](#)
- [Know your menopause poster](#)

### Further reading:

[Menopause - the change for the better - Henpicked](#)

[Men... Let's Talk Menopause - Ruth Devlin](#)

[The one stop guide to menopause - Kathy Abernethy](#)

