



The Menopause

A simple guide to the
Peri-menopause, Menopause
& life beyond the Menopause



by Eileen Durward



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by Eileen Durward

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Introduction

Hello, I am Eileen Durward and I have been involved in the natural products sector for all my working life.



This information helped a great deal when I went through the menopause as I could almost anticipate symptoms, depending on how my life was going at the time. Having more knowledge allowed me to make the necessary lifestyle and dietary changes to ward off the symptoms.

So here I am today, happy to pass on my personal knowledge and experiences with **A.Vogel Talks Menopause** (avogel.co.uk/menopause), to help those who are still unsure of what is happening to them. Every week, I receive hundreds of questions on the menopause, from women and, occasionally, men!

This book is a reflection of the questions we face each week. I hope that it will be helpful to women approaching the menopause as well as those going through this sometimes confusing and difficult stage of life.

I hope you will enjoy reading my little book and that it answers your questions. However, I realise that the menopause is a never-ending story so if there is something that I have not covered here please do get in touch with me and I will be happy to help you.

Happy reading.

Eileen Durward

A.Vogel Menopause Expert

avogel.co.uk/menopause

A white smartphone is shown from a side-on perspective, displaying a mobile version of the A.Vogel Talks Menopause website. The screen shows a green header with the A.Vogel logo and navigation links for 'Our story', 'Get health advice', and 'Discover our products'. Below the header, there are two images: one of a woman laughing and another of two women laughing together. At the bottom of the screen, there is a review section for the website. The review title is 'A.Vogel Talks Menopause', followed by the text 'Find out all you need to know about the menopause and how to cope with those dreaded symptoms!', a 5-star rating icon with '8.9 (24) rate | comments', and a short description: 'The menopause is a natural process women go through and it is a normal part of life. It can also be a daunting and confusing experience for many women who are unsure if their symptoms are menopausal or even normal. Here at A.Vogel Talks Menopause, our menopause expert, Eileen Durward explains what the menopause is, offers solutions to common symptoms and reassures us that we can get through the menopause naturally.'

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What is the Menopause?

The menopause is a mystery to many women and we are rarely prepared for it.

In many ways the subject is still a bit taboo—most of us wouldn't think to read up on it or ask questions of those who have gone through the menopause. We have very little idea of what might happen, how long it may last and how it can affect us. And, for many women, the menopause can arrive quite suddenly and without warning, throwing us into the unknown.

My aim for this book is to demystify the menopause and explain in simple terms what may happen to you and how you can help yourself through this stage of life as easily as possible.

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There are three main parts to the menopause. As you will see, these are not so clearly defined but, nevertheless, it is useful to explain what they are.

Peri-menopause

Menopause

Post-menopause

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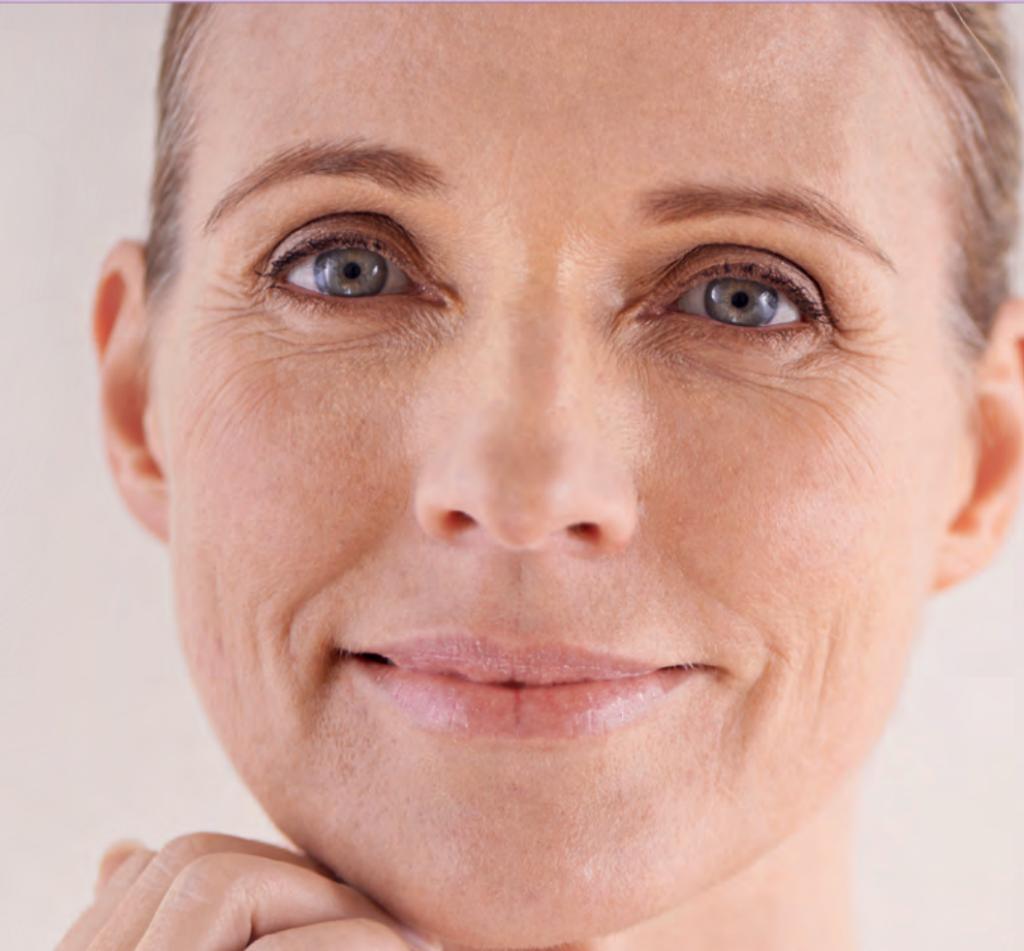
This is the first phase during which your hormonal balance begins to change. It usually starts a few years before your periods stop for good. Many women will begin to experience menopausal symptoms at some point during the peri-menopausal phase.

This is defined by doctors as the moment when your periods have stopped for good. However, as you won't know that you have had your last period until you have gone for some time without one, the medical definition is not really so useful. A woman is said to have reached the menopause if she has not had a period for 1 year. During this stage, the female hormones continue to fall, and this is the reason for the appearance of menopausal symptoms.

After 2 years without a period you are considered to be in the post-menopausal phase. By this point, the hormones will have settled into a new balance and most women will find that symptoms experienced will have tailed off. However, a few may experience continuing symptoms during this phase of life, sometimes for a quite a few years after the menopause.

In practice, women generally use the term 'menopause' to cover all these phases. We have adopted the same use in this book.

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If you are younger than 45 and experiencing menopause symptoms, get checked out by your doctor. Your symptoms could be related to other causes such as low iron, poor thyroid function or lack of vitamin D.

What happens in the Menopause?

In simple terms, the menopause is the time when your main female hormones, oestrogen and progesterone, decrease. This takes place slowly, over a number of years, until your periods stop for good. The menopause marks the end of a woman's fertile period of life.

When does it start?

The average age of the menopause is between 45 and 55 years. Some women may start earlier, especially if close female relatives also started early; and a few women later. Smoking, obesity, ethnic origin and some chronic health conditions can be factors triggering an earlier menopause.

How do I know if I am in the Menopause?

This can be a really tricky question to answer as the experience will be different for every single woman – you will have a unique menopause!

However, the first thing you notice is usually a change in your periods. They may become lighter or heavier, earlier or later, shorter or longer, or go missing – and in any possible combination.

Other women may find that menstrual periods stay regular but they start to experience menopausal symptoms such as hot flushes, low mood or joint pain.

So, if you are within the average age range and experiencing menopause-like symptoms, it is more than likely that you are on your way!

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The menopause is a natural process and a normal part of life. It is not an illness.

You can ask your doctor to test your hormone levels but these blood tests are not particularly accurate, especially if you are still getting periods of some kind.

How long does the Menopause last?

This is another difficult question. Again, it varies tremendously from one individual to another. The length of time between the moment your hormones first start to change (and you may not even be aware of this) until you have been two years without a period could last anywhere from 3 to 7 years.

Does every woman get symptoms? I have heard that I will have a terrible time!

Most women will go through the menopause with only a few symptoms and some really lucky ones will not have any at all! However, a small number of women can experience deep hormonal shifts and these can cause issues in the menopause, sometimes severe enough to need medical attention.



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Preparing for the Menopause

We know that the healthier and fitter you are, the less chance there is of having a difficult time when going through the menopause. So diet, exercise and lifestyle are really important factors and the younger you start getting yourself ready, the better!

Diet and the Menopause

You will have heard the phrase ‘You are what you eat’. Well, in my experience, this is particularly true of the menopause. Certain foods are more likely to improve your oestrogen levels than others. Drinking enough water to keep hydrated and keeping your friendly bacteria and liver happy are also important aspects to consider during this time of life.

In fact, these are so important that I have given each of them their own chapter in my book.

Exercise

Falling oestrogen levels can affect muscle tone, so it is a case of use them or lose them!

Weak muscles may affect posture, adding pressure to your joints. In addition, your metabolism usually slows during this time of life and weight gain is often much easier, and what you gain is harder to lose.

Regular exercise can influence all of these issues. But, how much exercise should you do?

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A good tip to judge the level of exercise you should engage in is that if you feel good, energised and lifted afterwards it is doing you good; if you feel shattered or exhausted or you hurt everywhere, then you are doing too much!

Sometimes cutting down heavy exercise and changing to more gentle but effective types such as yoga, swimming or walking will keep your fitness level up until your energy levels improve.

Rest and relaxation

One of the most important steps you can take for yourself in the menopause is to make time for yourself. It is also, probably, one of the hardest!

As women, the menopause should be a time when we rest and allow our bodies to adapt to all the hormonal changes going on. But do we do this? No!

The majority of women going through the menopause will find themselves at a particularly busy point in their lives, looking after family and working. This can be hard to cope with during the menopause, especially if you have to deal with symptoms as well. Your body can end up totally fatigued and your emotions shredded.

Please make 30 minutes a day for relaxation a priority! Having a cup of tea and reading a magazine doesn't count: you need to totally shut yourself off, so listening to a relaxation CD or doing meditation is what is needed.

Research has shown that this can reduce symptoms quickly – and it's free!

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Diet & the Menopause

The hormonal changes in the approach to the menopause, and the menopause itself, both stress the body tremendously and your nutritional needs go sky high. So having a good, varied diet will help to provide your body with what it needs and boost its ability to withstand symptoms during this stressful time. In my experience, taking good care of your diet and keeping well hydrated are perhaps two of the most important things you can do to help yourself through the menopause.

What should I eat?

- At least 5 portions of **fruit and vegetables** – the fresher the better as fresh means more nutrients
- **Lean protein** of some kind – your protein needs tend go up so make sure that you are getting plenty: meat and fish if you are not vegetarian or vegan, nuts and seeds, eggs, low fat cheeses (in moderation), and fermented soya foods such as tempeh. If your diet is restricted, it may be a good idea to add a protein powder shake every day to top up your protein, but do make sure that it doesn't contain sugar or artificial sweeteners. Your local health food shop should have good ones
- **Wholegrains** such as quinoa, millet, brown rice, and oats – fibre is important to help with digestion and elimination. Constipation or sluggish bowels can make symptoms worse! However, a diet full of

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carbs can be counterproductive. A high carb diet may contribute to weight gain, so if this is an issue then decrease your carb intake for a couple of months to see if it helps

- **Good fats** such as olive oil, coconut butter and oily fish – the right fats are very important as they are needed for joint health, brain function (especially memory) and beautiful skin
- Lots of plain **water**.

What should I avoid?

- **Sugar** and other sweeteners such as sucrose and any foods containing refined sugar – these contribute to weight problems which are more common in the menopause as your metabolism can slow down anyway
- **Coffee** – like sugar, this triggers the nervous system causing flushes, palpitations, dizziness and sleep problems. Apparently, six hours after a cup of coffee 50% of the caffeine is still in your system, so if you have a late afternoon cup this can hinder you getting off to sleep! Decaf coffee is not recommended either, as other chemicals in the coffee besides caffeine can cause problems. Try caffeine-free **Bambu**
- **Wheat** is best avoided if possible, as it can cause bloating, wind and constipation. If you must have it in your diet make sure it is wholemeal. The same goes for pasta – and also avoid white rice, which has little nutritional value
- **Alcohol** – this affects the nervous system and robs us of vital minerals such as magnesium, which is much needed for mood, relaxation and sleep.

This foundation diet will work well with whatever food avenue you wish to go down: meat eater, vegetarian or vegan. All you need to do now is add in your favourite healthy foods! Just remember that variety is really important. Don't eat the same foods every day; the bigger the range of foods you have the more vitamins and minerals you are likely to get.

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- Too much **salt** is not good for you, as I'm sure you know. It can also trigger flushes and may contribute to high blood pressure, which often appears during the menopause. Try **Herbamare** salt: this contains a blend of organic herbs and vegetables mixed with sea salt
- **Dairy products** are best avoided but this can be difficult. If you need this class of foods in your diet make sure it is organic (really important) or go for sheep's or goat's milk. And consume in moderation

What about eating out, parties, holidays etc.?

If you normally follow a healthy diet, then straying from the path now and again is fine. Although you might find that symptoms may worsen for a day or so, having the odd treat is very important too!



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Why plenty of water is a must in the Menopause

As adults, 75% of our bodies consist of water. Neglecting our water intake can cause a whole raft of symptoms and some of these may look suspiciously like menopausal symptoms. For instance:

- **Joints** – dehydration can cause joint inflammation and pain
- **Skin** – imagine a lovely, juicy, ripe plum: the skin is firm, plump and soft. Now imagine a prune: the skin is rough, wrinkly and tough. That's dehydration for you! Dehydration can trigger itchy skin too
- **Mood** – dehydration can cause mood swings, anxiety or panic attacks, and palpitations resulting from stress
- **Memory** – dehydration can affect brain function, causing fuzziness and forgetfulness
- **Headaches**
- **Constipation and bloating** – dehydration slows down gut motility and elimination
- **Hot flushes** – dehydration can affect the nervous system, which in turn triggers hot flushes. Water is doubly important here because if you are sweating with each flush this will dehydrate you even further, causing a vicious cycle
- **Fatigue** – dehydration can affect our energy levels
- **Bladder problems and infections** – dehydration can irritate the bladder because urine becomes thicker and more concentrated
- **Night palpitations** – these can actually be caused by dehydration, especially if you have night sweats.

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Drinking water can be so hard

Now you would think that drinking water would be easy-peasy, but many of us find this task difficult for various reasons, including not liking the taste of water.

Tea, coffee, alcohol or fizzy drinks don't really help hydration – they flush water out of your body giving the opposite result, so drinking lots of these definitely won't help! Trying to fit drinking water into the working day can be hard – so I have come up with a little plan that I find helps me.

My Plan of Action

You should be aiming to drink 1.5 to 2 litres of water a day and, although that sounds a lot, breaking it down will make it more manageable:

- First trick is to start the day with a glass of water as soon as you get up. Have it warm to help kick start your metabolism
- Drinking little and often is much better for you than gulping down big glasses of water all at once
- I have a really pretty 1 litre bottle that I fill when I get into work. I sit it in front of me so I see it all the time. I aim to have it finished by the time I leave work at 5pm. Just a little bit of water in a glass every now and then and I don't really notice I am drinking it
- Have one last glass of water early in the evening and that is you done!

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Friendly bacteria and the Menopause

What you eat influences the type of bacteria you have in your gut and, as you will see, this can have a huge impact on how you go through the menopause. You will know that we have hundreds and thousands of different kinds of bacteria in the gut. Scientists have now worked out that individual groups of bacteria have very specific duties to perform including supporting the immune system, manufacturing nutrients from the food we eat, helping with elimination of waste matter, dealing with pathogens (disease-causing germs) and also helping to balance our hormones.

So why are friendly bacteria important in the Menopause?

What we now know is that in the gut, bacteria can feed on substances called lignans, present in some foods. In doing so, they 'manufacture' phytoestrogens and these can be absorbed into your bloodstream to act like your body's own oestrogen!

Lignans are present in many natural foods, including vegetables, fruit, healthy grains, nuts and seeds, and legumes

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such as lentils and beans. So, if you have healthy bacteria and eat healthy foods, you are getting a regular 'dose' of phytoestrogens that help to support your hormones and keep your oestrogen levels balanced.

But – and this is a HUGE but – you can eat all the lignan-rich foods in the world, but if your friendly gut bacteria are absent, these foods will not help you at all.

Potential hazards for good bacteria are listed on the next page – as you can see there are many things that may damage and destroy our lovely little helpers.

So what can you do to help yourself?

The friendly bacteria inside you prefer a specific gut environment. If this changes, even slightly, the good guys go and baddies move in – baddies that can cause bloating, wind, constipation, Candida and other digestive disorders.

The gut is a little bit like a garden: in order to grow beautiful flowers you need to weed and fertilise the soil and get it just right. Similarly, your gut needs to be just right for the good guys.

One of the best ways to do this is to take **Molkosan**: this contains concentrated whey and is rich in a substance known as L+ lactic acid, which the friendly bacteria inside you just love. If you take a probiotic, it will also help to get these supplements working better.

I often recommend Molkosan and a good probiotic as a starting point when getting to grips with menopausal symptoms. Research has shown that having good bacteria in the gut has a positive effect on mood, immune function and general health, so it is well worth encouraging them to hang around!

Your diet in the menopause is really, really important. Eating plenty of natural foods will not only feed the good guys, but also help them to provide you with the phytoestrogens that are vital in the menopause.

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Friendly bacteria are also really important for vaginal health in the menopause. An imbalance or lack of good bacteria can contribute to vaginal dryness, irritation and infection. So, a double reason to keep the good guys happy!

Friendly bacteria are not helped by:

- Antibiotic use – even from years and years ago
- Stress
- Digestive problems such as IBS
- Smoking
- Alcohol
- Processed foods
- Sugar
- Caffeine
- Food poisoning

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Love your liver!

I bet you are thinking: “*What on earth has your liver got to do with the menopause?*” Well, surprisingly enough, this organ can play a huge part in how you fare through the menopause and giving it a big bit of TLC can work wonders! Renowned naturopath Alfred Vogel once said that “The liver is the regulator of your health and you are only as healthy as your liver.”

The liver and the Menopause

It won’t be obvious to you, but your liver performs over 500 different biological functions. Let’s look at some of these a little more closely to see how the liver affects the menopause.

- **Making and storing fuel for energy** – Falling hormone levels really stress the body and this uses energy. Fatigue is a common menopause symptom and many women do feel that their ‘get up and go’ has well and truly gone!
- **Keeping your blood glucose at the right level** – Fluctuating blood sugar levels can trigger flushes, palpitations, dizziness and headaches.
- **Cleaning the blood** – Your liver works 24/7 in protecting the body from all sorts of toxins ingested through food and drink, things you put on your skin and from the air you breathe. If the liver is under pressure it can’t work efficiently, and the body will then offload toxins through the skin, causing rashes, itching or spots. Too many toxins whizzing round your system can also contribute to joint or muscle aches, fuzzy thinking and lots of other niggly problems.
- **Making bile for digestion** – Bile is not only important for the digestion of the fats you eat; it also helps the gut move. Lack of bile

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disturbs the normal digestive process, impeding the absorption of food and leading to bloating and wind.

- **Storing vitamins** – The liver helps to store many substances including vitamins A, D, K, B12 and iron. Lack of these can contribute to common menopausal symptoms such as tiredness, osteoporosis and feeling irritable or moody.
- **Synthesising hormones** – When your hormones have done their job they are sent to the liver to be ‘deactivated’ so they can no longer have any effect. If the liver is struggling, this may not be done efficiently enough and can contribute to hormonal imbalances or sudden spikes and dips in hormone levels. These fluctuations can trigger some sudden menopause symptoms.

Function of some vitamins

- **Vitamin A** is needed for eyesight and promotes strong bones and healthy skin, hair, teeth and gums
- **Vitamin D** is needed for strong bones and teeth
- **Vitamin K** is needed for proper blood clotting and helps reduce excessive menstrual flow
- **Vitamin B12** is needed for maintaining a healthy nervous system, improving memory, concentration and balance, relieving irritability and increasing energy
- **Iron** is needed for preventing fatigue, promoting resistance to disease and supporting good skin tone

How can I look after my liver?

Having a good healthy diet, lots of water and regular, efficient bowel function are really important. The biggest enemies of the liver are: sugar, caffeine, processed foods, white bread, pasta, etc. and alcohol, so do try to avoid these!

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What else can I do?

You could try Milk Thistle. This often comes in combination with herbs such as **Artichoke and Dandelion** – herbs with a long history of use in supporting liver function.

Taking this for a month in spring and autumn as a form of 'detox' is best, but whenever you do it your liver will be grateful.



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Please be aware that the menopause can weaken your whole system in general, so if you had any health issues before the menopause you may find that they get worse. Conversely, some health conditions can also make menopause symptoms worse.

Common Menopause symptoms

There are many known symptoms of the menopause and, in this book, I examine the ones we are asked about most often and give you some tips on how you can help yourself. Symptoms appear in alphabetical order.

Acid Reflux

We have found that this symptom is actually quite common in the menopause but is often being misdiagnosed. Falling oestrogen can affect the production of acid in the stomach, leading to acid reflux or indigestion or feelings of fullness after most meals. This can be very uncomfortable.

Unfortunately, as this isn't usually recognised as a menopause symptom, women are being put onto antacid medications which often don't really help. Also, these medications, if taken long term, can affect the absorption of both calcium and magnesium. This can lead to bone problems such as brittle bones/osteoporosis which women are more prone to in the menopause anyway. Also low magnesium can cause all sorts of issues in the menopause such as low mood, anxiety, poor sleep, stress palpitations, muscle cramps or nerve pain. Taking calcium and/or magnesium tablets is not going to help here, as low stomach acid will prevent proper breakdown of the tablets; so you would need to take liquid-based ones to be of any benefit.

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Indigestion and acid reflux can often respond well to the herb Centaury, and watching how you eat can make a difference really quickly. Remember to chew each mouthful about 20 times (the better you chew your food in the mouth the less work the stomach has to do! And chewing triggers the production of enzymes that prevent reflux). Also sit down properly to eat, rather than eating on the run or with food on your lap – this squashes the stomach so it can't work properly. Eat really slowly too and don't jump up as soon as you have finished eating, which can 'switch off' your digestive process, adding to the problem. Don't drink lots whilst eating, as this can dilute your gastric juices and make the stomach acid weaker and less effective. Have only a small amount of plain water if needed.

Anger

It's amazing how many women contact me, worried because they find themselves getting really angry or losing their temper quickly or even physically hitting out. It can be very distressing, especially if they are normally even-tempered.

As well as oestrogen and progesterone, women also have a small amount of testosterone. If testosterone rises (or there's more of it in ratio to 'female' hormones as they fall) it gives us more 'male qualities' such as reacting quickly to our feelings of irritation, anger and impatience.

Try to avoid caffeine, fizzy drinks and foods containing high quantities of salt and sugar, as these can often trigger your nervous system into over-reacting to certain situations. You may also find Stress Relief Daytime can give you some calmness.

This is a two-sided coin though, and high testosterone can often give menopausal women drive, focus, determination, and an enjoyment of thrill-seeking. So if you suddenly find yourself skydiving you now know why!

Anxiety or panic attacks

Menopausal anxiety and panic attacks are usually caused by changes in oestrogen levels.

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To help yourself, you could consider taking a supplement containing **soy isoflavones**, which are a good source of phytoestrogens. It is important to focus on eating regularly as low blood sugar levels may worsen anxiety – have something, however small (e.g. a banana, dried fruit or nuts), every 3 to 4 hours, chewing well to improve the absorption of the nutrients they contain.

Remember to drink plenty of water as dehydration may make you feel more prone to panic. Avoid caffeine if you can, as this substance lowers the threshold for panic attacks, as do foods containing lots of sugar.

To help yourself further, start practising simple breathing exercises several times daily. Just something as easy as counting to 3 whilst you breathe in and 4 as you breathe out will be very helpful – you may be surprised at how good this is at averting panicky feelings.

Get some gentle outdoor exercise into your schedule every day – just 10 to 20 minutes of gentle walking can make you feel heaps better. Hormones circulate in the bloodstream, so keeping active is a good fix.

Check that your diet contains wholegrains, dried fruit, nuts, seeds and green vegetables as these are sources of magnesium, which is very stabilising to your nervous system. A magnesium supplement will help, as will calming herbs such as **Valerian** and **Avena sativa**.

Relaxation is vital to help reduce anxiety, so don't forget that 'me-time'!

Bladder problems and cystitis

Are you running to the toilet a lot? Getting recurrent bladder infections or having the odd little 'leak'? Falling oestrogen levels can affect the bladder in several ways.

Firstly, it weakens bladder muscles making bladder control more difficult. This can result in the need to go more frequently or you might find that you leak if you cough, sneeze, strain, run or laugh.

High levels of bad bacteria in the vagina may also be a factor as these baddies can travel up your urethra and into the bladder, making you more prone to cystitis.

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There are several things you can do. First, if you have a bladder infection, use the herb **Uva-ursi**, traditionally used for minor bouts of cystitis.

If your bladder is 'weak' and prone to infections, a daily dose of Cranberry can help when taken on an on-going basis.

I would also suggest a probiotic to help support friendly bacteria in your vagina. This is really important if you have had antibiotics for your bladder or other infections. This class of medicine can kill off friendly bacteria, leaving you more prone to repeat infections.

Not drinking enough water can make bladder problems worse. Keeping well hydrated will avoid your urine becoming concentrated and acidic, a state that increases bladder irritation and the need to go more often.

Whilst keeping your fluid intake up throughout the day, avoid irritating drinks such as coffee, tea, fizzy or sugary drinks and go for herbal teas, water or coffee substitutes. Stress can also irritate the bladder, so if you are stressed and/or anxious you may find **AvenaCalm** helpful.

Lastly, Kegel exercises can often help a weak bladder – just Google for instructions.

Bloating

Bloating is a common menopausal symptom and can be caused by several factors.

Falling levels of oestrogen slow down the digestive process and this is the principle reason for feeling bloated. In addition, the way carbohydrates are broken down in your gut can be disrupted – what is not absorbed starts to 'ferment' with the production of excessive gas.

Cut down on white bread, pasta, cakes, biscuits and also white rice. Your bowel should be moving at least once per day, if not twice. If not, you may find that a constipation remedy such as **Linoforce** can help to get things moving again.

If you experience bloating and constipation for more than a few weeks it is important to get this checked out by your

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doctor in case there is any other underlying cause. This is especially important if symptoms arrive suddenly.

Blood Pressure

We know that blood pressure can often rise in the menopause, mainly due to falling hormones. It is usually symptomless so it's very difficult to know if this is affecting you. This is one of these situations where you should make a point of getting your blood pressure checked regularly.

High blood pressure can often be caused by stress and anxiety, two other common menopause symptoms; so it is beneficial to try and keep these under control if possible.

Bone health/Osteoporosis

Falling oestrogen levels can be a factor in the gradual weakening of bones during the menopause.

Calcium moves in and out of our bones daily. If this two-way traffic sees more calcium moving into our bones, they remain strong. If not, then our bones will gradually weaken, leading to conditions such as osteoporosis. Bones become more fragile and susceptible to fractures.

Other factors that may influence the strength of your bones include:

- **Getting out and about** – your body makes vitamin D when your skin is exposed to sunlight. Low levels of this vitamin means that you don't use the calcium in your diet adequately
- **Weight-bearing exercise** – the more active you are, the stronger your bones will be
- **Your digestion** – as you age, your ability to break down food and absorb the important bone minerals, calcium and magnesium, declines. So even if you are eating plenty of foods containing these substances, your body may not be utilising them properly
- **Your diet** – a diet rich in fresh food will be rich in the calcium and magnesium you need to support your bones
- **Stress** – most of us are in some state of stress or another! Stress burns up magnesium and also hampers our digestive processes.

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If your doctor just wants to put you on HRT for your bones alone, do ask how it is going to help, what the risk factors are and what happens to your bone health when you come off the HRT.

So, what can you do to help keep your bones strong and healthy in the menopause?

- **Diet** – this is so important for all aspects of the menopause. Make sure that you are eating lots of calcium and magnesium-rich foods, such as nuts and seeds, dried fruits, dark green leafy vegetables and a variety of fruits. Fish with really soft bones, such as sardines, can be beneficial; and fish oils are also great for the memory, skin and joints!
- **Avoid dairy foods** – many women ask if they should be increasing their dairy intake to get extra calcium. In short: no! Dairy is high in calcium but very low in magnesium. You need a healthy balance of both for good, strong bones
- **Check that you are getting enough vitamin D**
- **Exercise** – weight-bearing exercise is vital for keeping your bones strong so do make sure you keep as active as your energy levels will allow
- **Keep stress to a minimum** – I know, easier said than done, but stress is so bad for the menopause in general and may also trigger a number of specific symptoms, ranging from flushes to joint pain
- **Take a good quality magnesium supplement** – stressed menopausal women are likely to benefit from this mineral for a variety of reasons, from relieving stress to improving muscle tension and bone density. A liquid magnesium product will work faster than a tablet
- **Try a phytoestrogen supplement** rich in isoflavones, which can gently raise and balance your own oestrogen levels.

Some women ask if taking HRT can help to protect the bones. In theory yes, as HRT will keep your oestrogen levels up and reduce the likelihood of osteoporosis whilst you are taking it. However, if you

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don't look after all these other aspects of your health you could still be vulnerable. The main drawback of HRT for the bones is that when you have to come off it, you will quickly lose this protection and your bone density will be back to where you started within a year. If you haven't been looking after your bone health through diet, exercise, etc. you can very quickly end up with problems.

Breasts

Breast or nipple tenderness is a common symptom of the menopause. Symptoms usually appear at the peri-menopause when levels of oestrogen start to fluctuate.

If you are still getting 'normal' periods, try the herb **Agnus castus**. If, however, your periods are getting further apart or go missing then using soy isoflavones for their phytoestrogen action will be helpful. Some women find having a cup or two of nettle tea can also be helpful, although we don't really know why.

Dehydration and constipation can be contributory factors so do make sure that you have plenty of plain water every day. Tea, coffee, fizzy or sugary drinks can make symptoms worse so are best avoided!

Lastly, have you had yourself measured properly for bra size? During and after the menopause, breast size and shape can change quite dramatically, and an ill-fitting bra, especially if you wear under-wired ones, can cause breast pain too! Most big department stores offer a free service, so it would be worth checking this out.

Please do remember to get any breast changes checked out by your doctor. This is particularly so if you notice any discharge from your nipples.

Breathlessness

This is one of the less common symptoms of the menopause, but worrying nonetheless. We know that falling oestrogen levels can affect the hydration of mucous membranes in the body such as the

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vagina and mouth, but this drying effect can also affect the lungs. If the mucous membranes of the lungs are affected, wheeziness, breathlessness and even decreased lung capacity can occur. These symptoms can often be misdiagnosed as adult asthma, so if you have any breathing issues it is important to speak to your doctor and let them know that you are in the perimenopause or menopause, as this needs to be taken into account.

You may find taking a Sea Buckthorn Oil supplement can help with this along with a phytoestrogen such as Menopause Support if it is appropriate.

Breathlessness can also be a symptom of anaemia, so if you have had really heavy periods or flooding, or know that you are prone to low iron levels, get your iron levels checked (not just your blood levels but also your stored iron – ferritin).

Cholesterol

This can be a big issue in the menopause due to several factors:

- Falling oestrogen levels can affect digestion and absorption of fats
- The menopause can cause liver stress, which in turn can decrease the effectiveness of the liver in dealing with fats
- The stress on the nervous system can disrupt sleep which, in turn, can cause cholesterol levels to rise. Night sweats can disrupt sleep too, with a similar effect.

It is important to keep an eye on your diet, choosing healthy fats and avoiding saturated fats, poor quality oils and margarines. You may find herbs such as Artichoke can help to control cholesterol, and doing some gentle liver support work regularly can be of benefit.

If you have been on statins for high cholesterol for a while, bear in mind that having low levels of cholesterol can affect hormone production just at the time when you need more! So statins may not be helping your menopause symptoms.

Crying all the time for no reason

This is quite a distressing one, as you can suddenly find yourself crying or sobbing your heart out and you have no idea why. You may also

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find that you can cry at the drop of a hat at things that would never have bothered you before. You may also find that you get so much more sensitive to what others say to you and you get really upset when there is really no reason to.

You may also find that you are getting fearful for your friends or family or the fate of the world in general.

This is caused by sudden fluctuations of oestrogen, affecting your mood. You may find extra magnesium and B vitamins can help to support your nervous system, and a phytoestrogen such as Menopause Support can help to gently raise oestrogen levels.

This is a difficult one to control as these episodes can come on with no warning at anytime, anywhere, so all you can really do is try to do some deep breathing to control the situation and, if this happens in front of other people, to make an excuse to leave them until you feel better. Some women find that they have to stop watching the news on TV or reading newspapers as they find them too distressing.

This is usually just a phase in the menopause and does pass. However, if you find yourself in the depths of despair or life feels really bleak then it is important to see your doctor.

Depression

For some women the hormonal changes in the menopause can be so severe that they start to experience depression, paranoia or even feelings of suicide. In such cases it is really important to talk to your doctor. Over-the-counter herbal remedies are unlikely to be strong enough to help here.

Some women feel low in mood or 'down in the dumps' but describe this state as being depressed. If this is the case with you, go to the section on low mood and mood swings.

Digestion

Some women find that their digestive system goes to pot with symptoms of indigestion, wind or even IBS.

Often, just tweaking your diet and eliminating sugar, caffeine and high carbohydrate foods can make a huge difference. You

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may find **Digestisan** or **Molkosan** helpful, but if your symptoms don't improve, seek medical advice.

Dizziness

Dizziness and vertigo are both very common during the menopause. Taking **Ginkgo biloba** may help, as it improves circulation, particularly to the head. You may also find simple breathing exercises useful – they are easy to do during spare moments and improve the flow of blood to the head.

Dehydration and low blood sugar levels may also be causes of dizziness to consider, so remember: plenty of plain water and eat little and often.

If your dizziness persists, make an appointment with your doctor to rule out the possibility of low blood pressure or anaemia. Even mild anaemia can make you feel dizzy and light-headed and this is more of a possibility if you have heavy bleeds. If so, consider taking a natural iron tonic.

Dry eyes/mouth

Falling oestrogen can dry out the mucous membranes of the mouth and eyes so you may find taking a Sea Buckthorn Oil supplement beneficial.

It is important to get dry eyes checked out by your optician and dry mouth by your dentist just to rule out any other health issues.

Emotions going all over the place

I like to call this the 'Mentalpause' because that's exactly what the menopause is – a journey through both physical and emotional extremes, with most of us not having a clue as to what is happening!

Oestrogen is a mood enhancer and falling levels can have a huge impact on how you feel. Low mood, anxiety, mood swings, anger, frustration, impatience, absent mindedness and even depression can hit really quickly.

Suddenly, your 'usual self' disappears and it often feels like you have been taken over by some stranger who acts completely

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differently. This can be a real shock to your friends and loved ones, as the person they knew suddenly starts to snap and snarl, and work colleagues start to give you a wide berth! Some women decide to completely change their lives, even walking out of their relationship and leaving everyone stunned.

The hormonal changes in the menopause can stress the body tremendously. You are, in effect, coming off the hormones you have been used to for many years and this decrease leads to withdrawal symptoms just as if you were stopping smoking or coming off drugs of any kind.

Looking after yourself well is really the key here, so have a good diet, lots of water and plenty of rest and relaxation! If you feel that your loved ones are getting the rough end of the stick then it is really important to let them know why you are like this. Once they know it is not you, but your hormones 'talking' they will be in a better position to understand and support.

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Fatigue

As already mentioned, hormonal changes during the menopause put tremendous strains on the body and this alone can lead to fatigue.

Check to make sure that you are eating a good, varied diet with plenty of fresh food and lots of water – dehydration can cause fatigue and a fuzzy head and if you are getting hot flushes it's doubly important to keep drinking water!

Rest and relaxation are vital – if you are feeling fatigued your body is basically telling you to slow down and rest!

Fatigue can also be caused by other factors such as low iron levels, low vitamin D or low thyroid levels, so it would be a good idea to ask your doctor to test for these just to rule them out.

Gums and teeth

Falling oestrogen can affect the mucous membranes of the mouth, causing receding, swollen or bleeding gums. You may find the supplement CoQ10 helpful – your local health shop will be able to advise you on the best dose for this.

I would also suggest using organic toothpastes, as the usual ones have all sorts of nasty chemicals in them such as fluoride, SLS, and parabens which can all irritate sensitive gums. One of my favourite tips when having gum problems is to use a **Neem-based toothpaste**.

Some women find that their teeth start to ache – receding gums may loosen teeth so if this is the case it is important to see your dentist and let them know that you are in the menopause.

You may also find **Urticalcin** helpful, as this is traditionally used to help the absorption and uptake of calcium, which is good for strengthening teeth and bones.

Hair loss, thinning hair or brittle hair

This can be a symptom of falling oestrogen levels. It may also be

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due to low iron levels caused by heavy bleeds in the run up to the menopause, especially if your periods were historically quite heavy or if you have not been paying enough attention to your diet.

Remember, your nutritional needs go up during this part of your life and if you are not eating enough nutrient-dense foods, your hair and nails are usually the first to suffer! Low protein intake can be another problem, or having too much caffeine or fizzy drinks.

Consider taking a supplement to support healthy hair such as **Hair Complex** and have a good look at your diet to see if it could be better! Drink plenty of plain water because dehydration doesn't help hair growth either.

It takes about 3 months for new hair to start growing. If, after this time, you don't see improvements it might be sensible to ask your doctor to check for low thyroid function.

Hair growth – facial

Excess facial hair suggests that your hormones are starting to change and your androgen levels are rising relative to oestrogens. This doesn't always happen during the menopause, but obviously it does for some women.

You could go to your doctor and ask about taking an androgen-blocking medication. Or you could check out a good acupuncturist, as they can balance your hormones more naturally.

The other thing you should do is be very careful about your intake of refined sugar. This is because refined sugar can make the problem worse if you still have your ovaries as it affects your insulin sensitivity and that messes up your hormones.

Swap refined sugar snacks like cakes, biscuits and chocolate for dried fruit, which is full of good nutrients.

Headaches

Headaches are really common in the menopause and are often caused by fluctuating oestrogen levels. You may find **soy isoflavones** helpful for balancing your body's own oestrogen levels.

I would also suggest an extra magnesium supplement – try

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magnesium liquid for swift effects. Stress and dehydration can also be contributory factors, so remember the water! Tea, coffee and fizzy drinks can make this worse so are best avoided in the menopause.

Headaches can, however, be caused by other factors not associated with the menopause, so if you are getting headaches every day or regularly then do get this checked out by your doctor as well.

Hot flushes and night sweats

If this is your main symptom then you can usually sort it out using an **extract of sage**.

Menoforce tablets are a good one-a-day sage remedy for relieving hot flushes and night sweats. If you are only getting day flushes then take it with your breakfast. If you are getting night sweats only, then take with your evening meal. If you are getting both day and night sweats, and your sleep is getting interrupted, then take the tablet at night. We have found that easing night sweats leads to a better night's sleep and, as you are more rested the next day, your day-time flushes may ease off as well.

Caffeine sometimes triggers flushes, so keep caffeine intake (coffee, tea, fizzy drinks) to a minimum, and ensure that you are drinking plenty of water to rehydrate yourself. Dehydration can cause feelings of anxiety, which then makes flushes worse. It's worth checking if anything else seems to trigger the flushes – some women find that spicy foods or sugary foods will affect them.

In addition, stress may cause flushes to come along more frequently, as adrenalin levels influence circulation as well as sweat glands. Simple breathing exercises (e.g. counting to 3 on the in breath and 4 on the out breath) several times a day can often help.

If you feel a flush coming on, taking slow, deep breaths can stop it getting worse. Drink some water and give yourself a minute or two. Or put your feet up for five minutes.

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These next two often come together

I am fed up with my partner/family friends/work.

This is a very puzzling and often frightening aspect of the menopause and many women will experience this at some point.

Why does this happen? Well, we produce a hormone called oxytocin and this is basically our ‘love hormone’. We are flooded with this when we give birth and it is nature’s way of making us care about and love our baby, as well as other people. Unfortunately, it is closely tied to oestrogen, so when our oestrogen levels start to fall so too can our oxytocin levels.

This can almost release us from our ‘caring mode’ as women. We can suddenly get fed up with looking after other people, especially if we get no thanks or recognition. We can feel less attached or in love with our partner. We may not be bothered about meeting with friends or going out; and sometimes all we want is to be left alone. We can suddenly find that we no longer enjoy our work or hobbies or life in general.

It can also be very worrying for close family as they suddenly see someone they don’t know anymore; and it can put a strain on close relationships.

What can you do about this one?

Firstly, don’t act hastily; I have had messages from women who have suddenly walked out on family or jobs only to regret it later. If you really feel unhappy about relationships, either at home or work or with friends, then take your time to decide what to do. Look at all the options and also realise that this may just be a phase and that you will come through it fine. Maybe see this as a chance to put yourself first for a change and do some of the things you have always dreamed of doing! Just watch that you don’t start feeling guilty about not caring so much, this can add lots of stress!

I don't know who I am anymore.

This is another distressing phase and many women can feel lost,

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adrift or they feel they 'are a different person' or their 'real me' has disappeared.

This is another aspect of low oestrogen affecting how you feel about yourself and the world around you. You may suddenly find yourself behaving or thinking differently, getting more emotional or unemotional, getting fed up with life or not having any motivation, not wanting to socialise or spend time with friends or family. You may find that you get angry or impatient or you start shouting at people or losing your temper really quickly, or even being horrible verbally to your nearest and dearest. And of course afterwards comes the guilt, which will stress you even further!

How can you help yourself here? it is a difficult one but balancing your oestrogen levels and taking extra magnesium and vitamin B to support your nervous system can be of benefit. Practising deep breathing can help you feel more in control and you may find either Stress Relief Daytime or Female Essence can reduce the anxiety that often accompanies these situations.

Itchy skin

Itchy skin is a surprisingly common menopausal symptom.

We are not sure why the skin itches during this stage of life. Stress can make symptoms worse by triggering the production of histamine, making the skin even more prone to itching and rashes.

Dehydration and constipation can be contributory factors too, so do look at your diet and make sure that you are drinking plenty of plain water every day. Proper hydration is good for the skin and also reduces the negative effects of stress and histamine.

Try a **soy isoflavone** supplement for its phytoestrogenic action. You may also find that using **Neem Cream** helps to soothe the itch. Some women report that a couple of cups of nettle tea a day can help too, as nettles counter histamine and cleanse the bloodstream.

The skin may be more sensitive at this time, so check the soap, shower gel, body creams and make-up you are using and

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consider swapping them for natural, organic alternatives. The majority of washes, soaps and cosmetics contain a whole heap of chemicals and these may be contributing to the problem.

Joint/muscle aches and pains

Falling oestrogen levels can affect the hydration in your joints, ligaments and tendons. So, the menopause may be associated with:

- **Joint pain and inflammation**
- **Joint stiffness and loss of movement** – sometimes this is most obvious when you get up in the morning, but eases as you start to move about
- **Creaking joints** when you bend your knees or flex your fingers
- **Change of posture** – this is really quite an important point and often ignored! If your joints, ligaments and tendons are affected this can alter your whole posture, pulling on your muscles and causing both joint and muscle aches at the same time. This can happen to any group of muscles but mainly the back, shoulders and hips. Muscle changes in the shoulders can also trigger tension headaches, or migraines. There is also the theory that strained muscles in the back or change of spinal alignment could lead to hot flushes, so if both of these symptoms started around the same time they may be connected!
- **Change of posture in the neck and shoulders**, which may affect the support of the breast muscles too, causing breast ache
- **Weight gain** occurs in some women and this in turn will put more pressure on the joints
- **Loss of bone density**, leading to osteoporosis that may in turn affect posture
- **Hot flushes and night sweats** – these may dehydrate you and may be a major contributory factor to your joint pain.

Falling oestrogen can also affect the uptake and utilisation of magnesium, which is vital for proper muscle function. Low magnesium may lead to:

- **Muscle aches and pains**
- **Muscle fatigue**, which makes it more difficult to exercise as your

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muscles will start to ache more quickly

- **Muscle cramps**
- **Mood and sleep pattern.**

So what can you do to help in this situation?

- Guess what? Water! Drinking plenty of plain water is vital for so many menopause issues including keeping the joints well hydrated. It is really amazing how many women have got back to me saying that drinking more water has reduced their symptoms really quickly!
- If your joints are sore or creaky when you get out of bed and ease off as the day goes on, it may mean that you are dehydrated during the night. A small glass of plain water about an hour before bed can help – this is more important if you are getting night sweats as these will dehydrate you further
- Although joint and muscle aches tend to put you off exercise, it is really important to keep active for several reasons. Firstly, exercise will strengthen the muscles that support the joints, making symptoms less likely. Secondly, exercise will help to control your weight. If your joints or muscles are sore, the best types of exercise are yoga, swimming and (depending on which joints are affected) cycling
- Check your diet – caffeine, fizzy drinks, citrus fruits, vegetables from the Deadly Nightshade family (potatoes, tomatoes, aubergines and peppers), and high salt and sugar foods can all trigger inflammation in the joints, and sometimes just cutting these out can make a huge difference
- Try anti-inflammatory herbs such as **Devil's Claw**. This tends to work quickly on relieving pain all over the body. For the small joints you could apply **Arnica Gel** topically
- Take a magnesium supplement to help with muscle aches and cramps. A liquid one would be best but you could also take a magnesium citrate capsule or use a magnesium skin spray on the affected muscles. Make sure that your diet is high in magnesium-rich foods such as nuts, seeds, dried fruits and dark green leafy vegetables

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- I would recommend getting a check up with a Chiropractor or Osteopath, as they can detect if any joints are out of alignment and also recommend exercises to help
- The Alexander Technique can teach you how to hold your posture correctly and can be very effective at alleviating joint pain
- If you have back/shoulder ache along with sore breasts, get measured professionally as a badly fitting bra (especially if you are on the ample side) could be a factor!

Loss of confidence

This is quite a common experience amongst menopausal women.

Descriptions I have come across include an inexplicable fear or a feeling of creeping unease, making women start to lose confidence in areas where they were previously secure. The physical reason (and it's a physical thing: it doesn't start in your head) is the amount of oestrogen in your body.

Your adrenal glands, which support your nervous system, have to make up the shortfall of oestrogen, and because of this your nervous system becomes a little more jumpy and sensitive. As there is no actual reason for this in terms of threats (no one is threatening you, nothing is going wrong), your mind starts looking for causes and it's easy to become insecure.

Once you know that it is a physical phenomenon and there is a practical reason for it, it becomes slightly easier to deal with. The following programme can help improve confidence levels.

- **Water.** This is extremely simple but very important! Your nervous system is particularly jumpy if you are dehydrated.
- **Make a big effort with your diet.** The more fresh fruit and vegetables you have, the more nutrients will get into your system and the better fed your adrenals will be. These glands hate caffeine and refined sugar, but love fruit, vegetables, dried fruit, wholegrains, nuts and seeds which are all stabilising and supportive for your whole body. Also, the **vitamin C** these foods contain is wonderful for your skin, and will give you a happy glow.
- **Another thing that's completely free and very easy is breathing exercises** – do something simple like breathing in for

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a count of 3 and out for another count of 4, but do it for a few minutes several times a day. You'll be surprised how much better that can make you feel.

Loss of libido

Many women find that one of the more distressing symptoms of the menopause is that libido or sex drive goes out of the window.

This not only dampens confidence and self-worth but can have a huge impact on any relationship. Partners can start to feel unloved or ignored, and this may lead to arguments that can cause further distress.

The factors that can make your libido disappear include:

- **Falling oestrogen levels** – this can reduce arousal, reduce vaginal moisture (making intercourse painful), reduce the pleasure factor and also reduce orgasm response
- **Stress** – who's not stressed?
- **Fatigue** – remember that falling hormones can be a huge drain on your energy reserves
- **Being busy** – most women at this stage are working and have family to look after and probably don't get a moment's rest, so when are they going to fit in some lovemaking?
- **Poor sleep** – getting night sweats can disrupt sleep, making you more and more tired and moody as time goes on
- **Weight gain and change of body shape** – this can happen in the menopause and some women don't want to let their partner see them naked
- Some women just end up not fancying their partner any more. Unfortunately I don't have a remedy for this one!

There are several remedies that can help to boost your libido:

- There is new research on the herb **Ginkgo biloba**. Although only at the initial research stage, a study has shown that the herb seems to have some benefit in this area. We know that Ginkgo increases blood flow and relaxes smooth muscles, both of which are important for female sexual response. Researchers found that the herb has a positive effect on sexual desire in menopausal and

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post-menopausal women. Ginkgo also has the added benefit of helping with memory and general circulation, both of which can be affected by the menopause!

- **A fermented soy supplement** can be used to help gently raise and balance oestrogen, so could help when low oestrogen issues are the problem
- **Flower Essences** can often be helpful when emotional issues are behind low desire. I often recommend **Female Essence** – for just being a woman and all that it entails! **Mood Essence** is for low mood and **Relaxation Essence** for when you feel run ragged!

One really important point to remember is that your partner may not be clued up with the menopause and how it can affect you, so do talk to them about how you feel.

Low mood and mood swings

This is really common during the menopause and most women will experience changes in mood at some point!

Oestrogen acts as a mild antidepressant and generally makes us cheerier. With less of it around, we can feel emotionally vulnerable, weepy, angry or irritable, even though our brain tells us that there is no real reason for us to feel this way.

There are several things you can do to make yourself less vulnerable. Firstly, take a **soy-based isoflavone** for its phytoestrogenic action.

Secondly, consider taking **St. John's wort** if you are not on any other medication. This is a mild plant-based remedy for low mood that many women find very supportive during the menopause.

Thirdly, exercise makes you produce more natural antidepressants in your own body, so although it's usually the last thing you feel like doing when your low mood strikes, take a 10 to 20 minute walk or a quick jog around the block. Even 5 minutes with a skipping rope will make you feel a lot better.

If you get used to doing a small amount of exercise most days you will be better protected against low mood.

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Memory loss/poor memory

Most women will experience this at some point in the menopause. I do believe that as women today we have so much to think about in our daily lives, that, like an over-worked computer, our memory banks sometimes just 'crash'.

I know that it can be very embarrassing, especially when this happens in front of other people, but try to relax and do some slow, deep breathing, as this can often get your thoughts back. You may find the herb **Ginkgo biloba** helpful here especially if you get a fuzzy-head feeling as well.

Stress and anxiety can be a big factor too, and coupled with falling hormone levels at this time, can result in negative effects on memory and concentration. I would suggest a magnesium supplement to help support the nervous system, as well as Ginkgo biloba to help improve focus.

Migraine

Migraines are common in the menopause as fluctuating oestrogen levels influence the normal function of blood vessels, leading to spasms and a migraine.

Stress and dehydration are contributory factors, so make sure that you have plenty of plain water every day and cut out the tea and coffee.

In the meantime, you may find a soy isoflavone supplement and an extra magnesium supplement helpful. It is thought that high magnesium levels may reduce the likelihood of migraines but approximately 600mg a day may be needed to be of any benefit for this.

Nausea

Nausea is a common symptom in the menopause and can be caused by several factors. Fluctuating oestrogen levels can be a trigger (a bit like morning sickness in pregnancy) and falling oestrogen levels also affect the digestion, leading to a stressed liver, which in turn can cause nausea.

Try **Milk Thistle Complex**, and you could add in a soy

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isoflavone supplement, which is known to help balance oestrogen levels.

Nausea can be caused by other factors, such as low blood sugar or dehydration, so do make sure that you are eating a good diet, with healthy snacks between meals, and remember the water!

Palpitations

Palpitations are another common symptom in the menopause.

Falling hormones puts stress on the nervous system, making it much more sensitive and reactive to both physical and emotional stress. This makes it more likely that palpitations will be triggered. It is also thought that falling oestrogen can affect the 'electrical system' that controls the way the heart beats.

There are several things that may help here. If you do feel stressed or anxious then a stress remedy such as **AvenaCalm** or **Stress Relief** may help. I would also suggest a magnesium supplement and a vitamin B Complex to help support and calm the nervous system.

Dehydration and low blood sugar levels can also be significant factors so make sure that you are drinking plenty of plain water throughout the day and don't go more than a few hours without eating something – go for healthy snacks such as nuts and seeds, dried fruits or plain yogurt. Caffeine can trigger palpitations so is best avoided.

It is always a good idea to get your palpitations checked out by your doctor just in case they are unrelated to the menopause.

Periods

A change in the pattern of your periods is often the first sign that you are starting the approach to the menopause. Changes in your hormones will affect the monthly cycle and your periods can become light, heavy, long, short, late, early or missing, and in any

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combination!

You can get one set of symptoms then a few months later something completely different can happen.

Missing periods

You may find that you miss a period, then get one or two back, then miss several and so on before, eventually, your periods stop for good. This can take up to several years. A few lucky women can find that their periods just stop without warning and that's it!

So, what should you do? There is really nothing specific: this is just your hormones winding down naturally.

Heavy periods

Periods can still be regular but start to get heavier and heavier, or you may find that you miss a few then the next one you get is really heavy.

Having even a few episodes of heavy periods can cause anaemia, which in turn can lead to fatigue, low mood, poor sleep, muscle or joint aches, flaky nails and brittle hair. Taking a gentle iron tonic would be a good idea.

If your heavy periods persist, get checked out by your doctor.

Periods getting further apart

Instead of being regular your periods start to come later and later. One or two periods might be missed, and then they stop. This is just the way your hormones are naturally winding down so you don't need to do anything.

Periods getting closer together

You may find you get a period, then 2 weeks later another one. These are often heavy and can last up to seven days or more at a time.

Periods coming with this pattern can cause anaemia too, so a gentle iron tonic would be a good idea. Some women find the herb **Agnus castus** helpful. If they start to get really heavy or end up running into each other then please see your doctor.

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Flooding

This is a term that is used for really heavy periods. You may need to change sanitary towels or tampons very frequently or find that you are bleeding so much that you stain your clothes.

Go to the doctor immediately: this must be treated!

Although relatively common, it is not good for you. As well as causing anaemia, flooding can cause dizziness and weakness. Many women contacting us do the right thing and go to their doctor only to be told that "it is fine and not to worry".

This may well be the case, but if flooding continues, please don't accept this. If you were bleeding this way from any other part of your body you would be rushed to hospital! If the doctor still refuses to help, go to Accident & Emergency.

Short periods

Instead of your periods running the usual length of time, you may find they only last a few days. These tend to be light but some women find that they can start to get really heavy.

If your periods are light there is no need to do anything. If they are heavy then a gentle iron tonic would be a good idea. If they are really heavy, follow the advice above re doctors/A&E.

Long periods

You may find your periods start to run for longer than normal. These can be light or heavy or a combination, usually starting light then getting heavier and heavier. Again if they are getting heavy go for an iron tonic or to the doctor if it's a case of flooding.

Spotting

This can happen in between periods or instead of a period, lasting a day or going on for weeks. If the spotting is accompanied by pain, especially if you are between periods, or it goes on and on, check it out with your doctor.

Painful periods

Some women find they suddenly start to get painful periods when they have not had them before, and some women who have painful periods find that they get worse. Often, if you have missed a few periods then you can get one that is painful too.

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A daily magnesium supplement can often calm this down, and if the painful periods are also closer together you may find the herb **Agnus castus** helpful.

However, if the pain is severe or affecting your daily life, do get it checked out by your doctor.

Phantom periods

Even though your periods are missing you may still get the usual symptoms and it almost feels like one is coming on. Although your hormones are falling, the monthly cycle is still there in the background. Hormone levels are not high enough to trigger a bleed but still high enough to give PMS-like symptoms.

This is common at the start of the menopause so you don't really need to do anything. If symptoms trouble you, a magnesium supplement and a vitamin B Complex may help. However, if you experience severe period pain or find that your daily life is affected, get checked out by your doctor.

Periods come back after being missing for a year

Some women find that they go without a period for a year or so and suddenly, they return. This may be a single period, or a few months' worth.

This pattern is usually caused by a 'last fling' from your hormones and factors such as stress, illness, strenuous exercise, dieting and change of diet (especially if you improve it) may contribute. Even starting a new relationship can 're-boot' your hormones!

It is relatively common, but remember that you are considered to be through the menopause after 2 years of not having a period. If you get a period back you have to start counting from the beginning again, sorry! It is best to get this checked out by your doctor as well.

Periods come back after 2 years or more without any other symptoms

Same as above but it is really important to check with your doctor.

Periods have changed colour or smell different or you are getting clots.

Many women find that their menstrual blood looks different, maybe

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darker and thicker, or lighter and thinner, and it can smell different. Blood clots may also be present.

This is common and usually just part of the hormonal changes going on. However, you can also be more prone to vaginal infections so if these symptoms are accompanied by pain or discomfort, get yourself checked out. The same with clots if they are big or you are getting lots of them.

If any of these symptoms are worrying you in any way at all, please go to see your doctor. It is amazing how many women contact us with on-going symptoms and they just don't want to 'bother' their doctor when they could, more than likely, be sorted quickly!

Pregnancy

If you haven't had a period for 2 years then you are pretty much safe from becoming pregnant. Before this we would always advise you to take contraceptive precautions, as pregnancy is still possible.

You will find that some authorities state that you are infertile after 1 year, but we find that many women have more periods after a year of not having any, so we prefer to play safe and go with 2 years!

Prolapse

Falling oestrogen can weaken the pelvic floor muscles – important for holding up the bladder, bowel and reproductive organs.

This weakness can allow one or more organs to 'shift' or sink because of gravity, putting pressure on the walls of the vagina. Symptoms include a 'dragging feeling' in your genital area or pelvis, or a feeling of constant discomfort.

Practising Kegel Exercises every day can often keep this at bay, but if you get any of these symptoms it is important to see your doctor.

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Painful sex

Low levels of oestrogen can cause a reduction of the protective mucus present in the vagina. This can give rise to pain during sex because of a reduction in the elasticity of the vagina.

Sometimes you can also find blood after intercourse as the fragile vaginal wall can tear. Sea Buckthorn Oil capsules can be helpful to restore the balance of moisture, although it can take 4 weeks or so to start showing benefits. You may also find soy isoflavones helpful in gently raising and balancing oestrogen.

However, if the pain continues, it is best to check with your doctor just to rule out infection or a prolapse.

Skin – dry or spotty

Unfortunately, changing oestrogen levels can have a significant impact on our skin, making it drier and more sensitive. There are several things that you can do to help yourself.

Water is really important, as it keeps the skin hydrated and plump, so make sure that you are drinking plenty of plain water every day. Coffee, tea, and fizzy or sugary drinks all dehydrate the skin so are best avoided.

As with itchy skin, make sure you are having a good varied diet with plenty of fresh ingredients as these will help to feed the skin. Check that you have not become sensitive to your usual body care products and consider changing these to natural, organic formulations.

This may be caused by a stressed liver, so taking a liver supplement such as **Milk Thistle**, as well as a skin-supporting remedy such as **Viola tricolor**, may help.

Sleep

Sleep disturbances are really common during the menopause.

Changing oestrogen levels can affect the sleep pattern on and off during this time of life. I would usually suggest trying **Dormeasan**, a combination of Valerian and Hops, traditionally used to help with sleep. It can be taken when needed, 30 minutes before going to bed.

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Also, watch what you eat in the evening. You may find that avoiding heavy meals late at night helps you sleep better, so consider making lunch your main meal with a lighter evening meal 3 hours before bed time.

Caffeine often affects sleep, so keep coffee, tea and fizzy drinks to a minimum. Ensure that you are drinking plenty of water to rehydrate yourself. Dehydration can cause feelings of anxiety, which can disrupt sleep.

Stress

This can be a huge issue for some menopausal women.

Falling hormones have the effect of stressing the body, sometimes without us even knowing. If you add in day-to-day stresses, especially if these are on-going, eventually your nervous system just crashes.

This situation can trigger menopause symptoms – many women can find that they are going through the menopause just fine until they get stressed; then they suddenly get symptoms. Stress can also make existing menopause symptoms worse. If any of this sounds familiar, I recommend that you look back to when the pattern of your symptoms changed. Very often you will find a clue to the cause!

Getting plenty of relaxation is vital and you may also find one of the stress remedies such as **Stress Relief Daytime** or **AvenaCalm** will help. Check you are not drinking too much caffeine and have a quick look at your diet to make sure that you are getting plenty of magnesium-rich foods.

Sugar cravings

This is a really common problem. It seldom has anything to do with weak will-power!

As your hormones change towards the menopause, tremendous strain is placed on the nervous system. In order to try and keep your body in balance, it uses up loads of the magnesium. Now, magnesium is an important nutrient for many normal body functions including good mood, relaxation and

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sleep. Low levels will make you crave sweet things.

In the ancient past, when there was no refined sugar available, fruits and berries would have been eaten to plug this craving. The interesting thing is that these foods are rich in magnesium. So this scenario is just our body trying to get the nutrients it needs at this time. Unfortunately today when we get these cravings we reach for foods full of refined sugar instead of fruits and berries.

You should find that taking a magnesium supplement helps calm things down, and having a diet focusing on protein and lots of vegetable and fruit will reduce your cravings further. High sugar foods will make you crave more and more sugar. Of course, this also contributes to weight gain.

Urine – does it smell or look different?

Changing hormone levels may affect the smell and colour of your urine. But this could also be the result of something as simple as dehydration, so remember your 1.5 litres of water per day.

Cystitis can also change the smell or appearance of urine so if you have symptoms such as pain on urination or needing the toilet frequently, consider the possibility of a bladder infection. Have it checked out if you are worried or if symptoms persist.

Vaginal dryness, itchiness or soreness

Changing levels of oestrogen can reduce the amount of protective mucus secreted in the vagina, resulting in symptoms such as itching, irritation and infection. Sometimes you may also notice a change in smell as well.

This reduction of mucus can also alter the acidity in the vagina, leading to an imbalance in the friendly bacteria, which can cause such problems too.

You could try a **soy isoflavone** supplement for its phytoestrogenic action. Sea Buckthorn Oil can also be used to help restore the mucus balance. Both of these supplements can be taken together. Daily Kegel exercises are a good idea as they help to improve the blood flow to the pelvic area.

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If you have had antibiotics, especially just before or during the menopause, this may be a factor in low friendly bacteria so I would recommend **Molkosan** and a probiotic supplement for a couple of months.

If this symptom is persistent, it is best to check with your doctor just to rule out any infection or the possibility of a prolapse.

Weight gain

This is probably one of the more distressing symptoms of the menopause and will affect a lot of women. There could be a number of possible reasons for this:

Are you stressed or leading a busy lifestyle?

Leading a very hectic life, perhaps the kids are still at home, a busy job and other people to look after? The stress of hormonal changes and coping with day-to-day general stress produces a chemical called cortisol. This not only makes you crave sweet foods but, if activated regularly, will slowly build fat around the waist and this is very hard to shift through diet and exercise alone.

Many women who suffer this type of weight gain then go on a strict diet, which will cause big dips in blood sugar levels making them crave more sugary foods. Contrary to belief, conventional low-calorie diets will not usually work here but could in fact lead to more weight gain!

Dealing with the underlying issue of stress is vital as this can lead to other health issues including digestive disorders and joint pain, and can also worsen hormonal imbalances. It may help to take **Stress Relief Daytime**, or if low mood is an issue, **St. John's wort**.

Many women find taking a good magnesium supplement can be of great benefit too.

Are you doing some kind of exercise?

Lots of women say that no matter how much they exercise they still put on weight. Regular exercise is really important to keep your

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metabolism working well but remember not to go overboard. The menopause uses up lots of your energy and if you exercise too much, your body thinks that there is an energy crisis going on and will actually turn down your metabolism in order to conserve it!

Are you eating enough?

Not eating enough nutrient-rich foods or going on diets can actually lead to weight gain in the menopause!

Are you eating those 5 portions of fruit and vegetables a day or are you snacking on lots of carbohydrate foods, sweets or cakes? Low mood, fatigue and stress (remember the cortisol) have a way of making us crave these foods for a quick sugar hit.

So ditch the naughties and revamp your diet. Many women going through this phase actually need more protein, so look for a diet that promotes healthy eating such as the GI Diet or the Paleo Diet.

Are you drinking enough water?

Dehydration will amplify stress and anxiety symptoms so remember the water and avoid caffeine.

Remember your 'me-time'

It is vital to have some time to yourself every day – it's a Menopause Must! Make it a priority and tell everyone that this time to yourself is necessary for your happy hormones!

So, to simply sum up weight control in the Menopause:

Good diet + sensible exercise + stress relief = reduction of cortisol and easier weight management.

If your weight gain seems sudden and unexplained do get this checked out by your doctor.

Weight loss

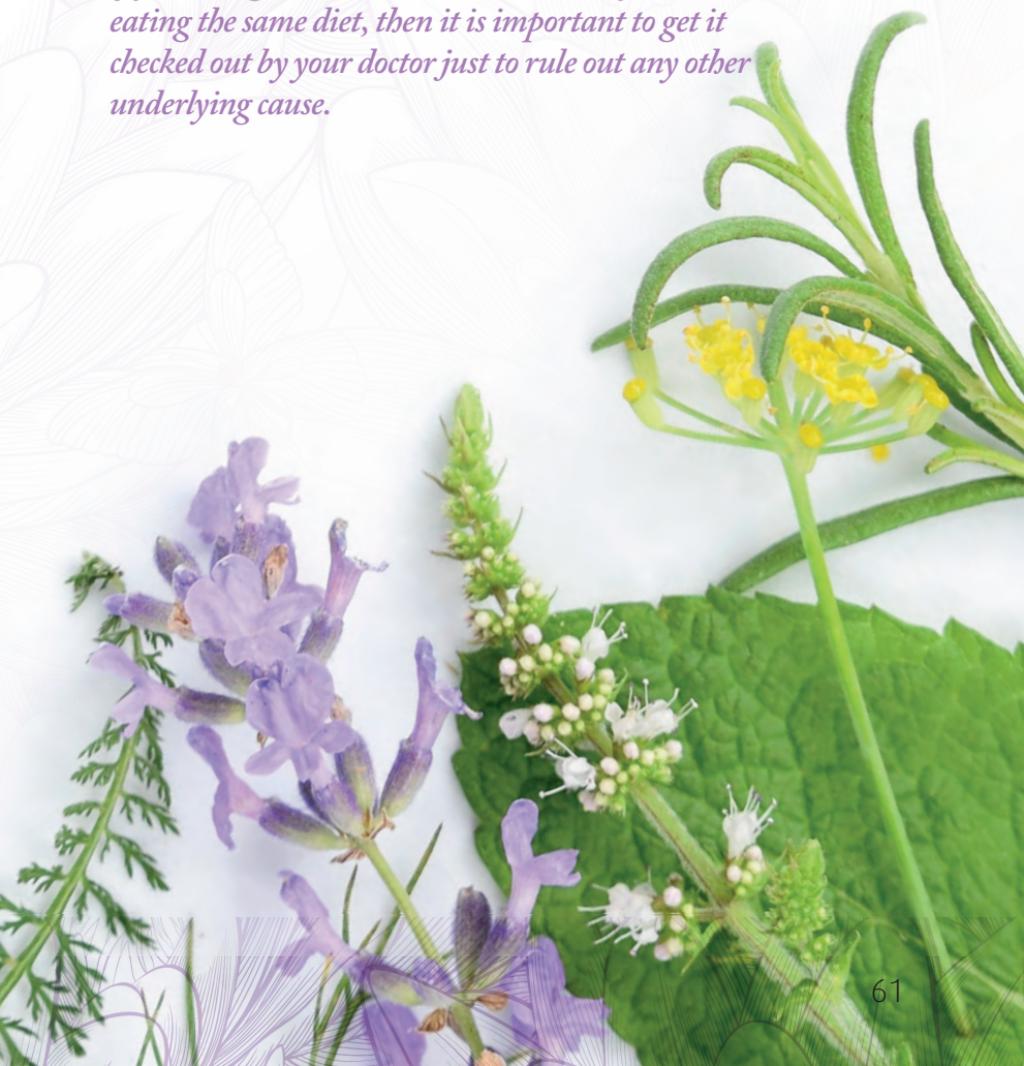
Weight loss is not that common in the menopause, but it does happen in some women – it's all to do with your individual constitution and hormone balance.

If you feel that you have lost your appetite, make sure that

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you are still eating a well-balanced diet. Your nutritional needs increase at this time so if you are not eating well, your symptoms may worsen. You could check out a good protein powder from your local health food shop just to help until your appetite comes back.

If your weight loss has been sudden, and you are still eating the same diet, then it is important to get it checked out by your doctor just to rule out any other underlying cause.



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HRT

Many women are confused about HRT with good reason, as there is a lot of conflicting information around.

I would suggest that if your symptoms are mild or moderate in nature, they are best treated naturally as this will be better for you in the long-run.

However, there are situations where HRT is going to be needed, such as after a total hysterectomy or if the menopause symptoms are so severe that they are making you ill or debilitated.

Common questions

Here are some common questions we face weekly.

I've come off HRT. Why am I experiencing symptoms?

The first thing to understand about HRT is that it doesn't stop your menopause - it only puts it 'on hold' so that you don't experience menopausal symptoms.

Meanwhile, your own hormones will continue to fall naturally over time and when, eventually, you have to stop the HRT, you will be going from a high hormone level (from the HRT) to your own natural levels which will be low.

You will then go through a menopause, albeit an induced one and this hormonal fall can cause all the usual menopause symptoms.

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Coming off HRT can trigger withdrawal symptoms that can mimic menopausal ones, and it can be a miserable time until the body re-balances itself. Sometimes this can take several years.

I have to come off HRT, what is the best way to do it?

When coming off HRT it is really important to do it slowly – aim to do this over 6 months with your doctor's approval.

When you have stopped HRT, I would suggest a female multivitamin combination with high levels of B vitamins and a separate magnesium supplement to help support your system generally.

Acupuncture can be really effective for balancing your hormones whilst coming off HRT, and is worth looking into.

You may also find taking **Menopause Support** helpful at this time, as it is known to gently raise and balance oestrogen and can be taken as you reduce the HRT.

Avoid foods that stress the nervous system such as caffeine, foods high in sugar and salt and processed foods. Try to drink plenty of plain water daily. Regular relaxation is really important as it helps to strengthen the nervous system and the stronger this is, the less likely you are to get symptoms.

I am on HRT but I'm still getting some symptoms

HRT is supposed to stop menopause symptoms so if it is not doing this or even making symptoms worse it is really important that you let your doctor know. There are various forms of HRT and it may be that the one you are on is not the best one for you.

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Hysterectomy and the Menopause

This is another area that causes confusion in women.

There are two main types of hysterectomy operations and the one you have will determine what kind of symptoms you may get and when.

Total hysterectomy

This operation will remove both the womb and the ovaries, and will plunge you straight into a full menopause regardless of what age you are, even if you are well below the usual menopause age.

Most women in this case will be offered HRT (unless the operation was due to any kind of hormone-triggered condition such as cancer), as the sudden drop in hormones will quickly cause menopause symptoms such as flushes, joint pain, low libido, dry vagina, etc., which HRT can reduce.

At some point in the future you will probably be advised to stop the HRT and this is when problems can arise. Most women find that they start to get menopause-like symptoms again. Please follow the suggestions for coming off HRT outlined in the previous pages.

If you have not been given HRT after your operation it can be really tough to cope afterwards, and natural remedies will usually not be strong enough to help much. In this situation, the more you can do to support your body generally, the better.

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Partial hysterectomy

This operation will remove the uterus but leave the ovaries intact. With this kind of operation, most women will get the menopause at roughly the same time they would have done had they not had the operation. This is because their ovaries are still able to produce hormones and go through the normal menopausal process of producing less and less around the age of 45-55 or so. You can therefore treat all the symptoms naturally if you wish, as long as they are not too severe.

The confusing issue is that, because you are not getting any periods, you can't use changing/missing periods as a guideline to when things start to change. Instead you need to rely on spotting some of the other usual symptoms such as flushes, joint pain, low mood, etc.

Common questions

I had a total hysterectomy but now feel as if I am going through the Menopause again

We do get a number of women who have had a complete hysterectomy early on in life and subsequently come off the HRT but, as they approach the usual age for starting the menopause (roughly 45 to 55), feel as if they are having another menopause, with various menopause-like symptoms manifesting.

This can happen because small quantities of hormones produced outside of the ovaries fall at this time of life. Symptoms may also be the result of low iron levels, poor thyroid function and low vitamin D levels.

Low iron is possible at any time, especially if you have a restricted diet; and disturbed thyroid function is common around the forties and fifties. It's sensible to check for these with your doctor.

I am going to have a hysterectomy. Is there anything I can do to help myself beforehand?

We do know that the fitter and healthier you are, the more likely you are to recover quickly, so preparing for the operation is a good idea.

Start a few months beforehand if possible. Make sure that you

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have a good varied diet with plenty of water, and work on your physical fitness – even a 15 to 30 minute walk a day can make a big difference. I would also suggest a good female multivitamin supplement.

Make sure that you have discussed the operation fully with your doctor and that you understand what is going to happen afterwards, especially if you are having a total hysterectomy. Faced with the operation and all that it entails, women often forget to ask basic questions of their doctor or consultant at the time, and not really knowing what is going on only adds to the general stress.

Being clued up and knowing what to expect can make it easier to adapt afterwards. A good idea is to make a list of all the questions you can think of before you go so that you are more likely to get everything covered! For example, discuss whether you are going to have HRT or not.

The operation is not only a physical one but has many emotional issues attached to it as well, so it is important to have someone to talk to about it. Ask your doctor if there are any local support groups or an experienced nurse with whom you can have a chat.

I am having a total hysterectomy but don't want to go onto HRT or can't have HRT. What can I take?

This is really difficult as the operation will bring on a very sudden menopause if you don't have HRT to counter the dramatic drop in hormone levels. Most natural remedies are unlikely to be strong enough to cope with the symptoms.

Being as fit and healthy as possible is important and can help up to a point. Acupuncture can be supportive, so is worth looking into. Ask your doctor if there is an NHS registered acupuncturist in your area or attached to your local hospital and request a referral.

Phytoestrogenic herbs such as fermented soya (if appropriate) may help to ease things a little, but this is not guaranteed. You could seek the advice of a Medical Herbalist as they can prescribe herbs not available over the counter and they could formulate a personalised treatment plan for you.

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If you can take HRT it is best to go for it to start with to help your body readjust. So many women try to do without HRT and find that they are still struggling months, even years down the line. You could ask to go on a low dose and take it until you feel more balanced, then come off, as already advised, really, really slowly. This can mimic a more natural menopause, making symptoms less dramatic.

I had a hysterectomy a few months ago and still feel awful. What can I do?

Bless us all, but we women do sometimes push ourselves too hard. A hysterectomy is a major operation and can take an incredible amount out of you.

But, what do most women do? They push to get back to their usual routine as quickly as possible, not realising that their body has been seriously stressed and needs time to rebalance. Rest and recuperation are vital at this point so please don't skip them! Looking after yourself well can make a huge difference further down the line.

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Post-menopausal years—is there life afterwards?

Yes, Yes, Yes!!

You are normally considered to be through the menopause when you have not had a period for 2 years. During this time, your hormones should have found a new balance and your body will likely have learnt to cope with this new low level.

Many women feel just as good, if not better, after their periods have stopped – no more monthly blues, feeling low, bloating, etc., and as long as they continue to take care of themselves problems should not arise.

Unfortunately, some women do find that even after this time that their 'menopause symptoms' are not shifting and are wondering why.

Common questions

Why am I getting symptoms as my periods stopped years ago and I thought I was through the Menopause?

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The myth is that once your 2 years are up, all symptoms suddenly disappear. This is not always the case.

Going through the menopause, even an easy one, stresses the body's nervous system, particularly the adrenals. If you then couple this with external stresses of day-to-day life, poor nutrition, lack of exercise, holding down a job and family life (many women going through the menopause have elderly relatives to care for and maybe have to babysit their grandchildren too), it is not surprising that the body is under so much pressure that eventually something gives.

This compounded stress, over time, leads to what naturopaths call 'Adrenal Fatigue' with symptoms such as hot flushes, low mood or depression, poor sleep, sore joints, digestive problems, itchy skin, headaches, nausea – just to name a few!! Sounds very similar to the menopause, doesn't it?

So, you need to do plenty of restorative work on the body, eat good food, maybe take some supplements, herbs and, guess what, relaxation!

Be aware that all these symptoms can also be a sign of low iron levels or low thyroid function, so if your symptoms have been going on for a while do see your doctor.

Will my sex life suffer after the Menopause?

No, it shouldn't do. I know a lot of women do suffer from symptoms such as low libido and vaginal dryness, but these can be remedied with herbs and supplements and you can even get natural lubricants from your health shop.

Acupuncture can often work really well for this, too. Some women find that, much to their partner's surprise, their libido goes up! Many women find it liberating not to have to worry about pregnancy any longer.

The condition of my skin, hair and nails has got worse. What can I do?

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As the hormonal balance changes during this stage of life, your skin, hair and nails may not appear as healthy as they once were.

However, there is another factor – your digestive system slows as you age and with this, the absorption of nutrients. These are the main reasons why the quality of your skin, hair and nails may decline at this time of life. So, help yourself by eating well and managing stress.

Make sure you follow the good digestion rules: chew thoroughly; sit up when you eat (not slumped in front of the telly or at your desk!); don't jump up after a meal; relax for a little while to allow your digestive system to do its job properly (if you jump up and busy yourself your digestion can stop mid-track, hampering absorption); and make sure that your bowels work daily.

You may find taking a soy isoflavone supplement beneficial – this can be taken after the menopause to maintain a healthy oestrogen level, which can have a beneficial effect on all areas of your health.

Once through the menopause there is no reason why you cannot have a happy, energetic, full life, but as I always say you do have to work at your health but it is so worth it!

Do I still need to exercise?

Yes, this is even more important after the menopause. Exercise will help to keep your joints mobile, muscles strong, weight under control, good lung function, good circulation and maintain a healthy heart!

You really need to focus on exercise at this stage. Many women find that their energy and zest for life comes roaring back, and keeping fit and having a good diet will keep you healthy well into old age.

Many gyms and health centres are now realising that 'young at heart' women are really looking at fitness seriously and are holding classes for these age groups, so you don't have to compete with youngsters, which can be a bit off-putting. These gyms often give you a quick health check to establish your level of fitness, which is a good idea as well. So go for it!

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So that's it, the end of my first book! I hope you have found the information, advice and reassurance you were looking for.

What I want you to remember most of all is that the key to an easier menopause is maintaining good overall health – and this doesn't have to be complicated!

Start by eating lots of fresh fruit and veg, fibre and complex carbohydrates, cut out caffeine and sugary foods, drink plenty of plain water and get some gentle daily exercise. If you need a helping hand there are loads of herbal remedies available for different symptoms and problems. But most importantly, remember to take plenty of time to relax.

If you need any more information, you'll find loads of great resources over at **A.Vogel Talks Menopause** (avogel.co.uk/menopause), including articles, blog posts, videos and a Q&A service. The Q&A service and comments sections on my videos are a great way to ask your questions, share your own experiences and read other women's stories, so make sure to get involved!



I think it's really important to break the menopause 'taboo', so go and talk to people about it – your friends, your family, your partners, and even the women you come across at **A.Vogel Talks Menopause**. All women go through it, so there's no point struggling on alone!

If you have any more questions I'm happy to help!

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All the best,
Eileen Durward
Menopause Expert





Brewster Place, Irvine KA11 5DD UK

Telephone: 01294 277344

www.avogel.co.uk