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## **Menopause**

### **What is menopause?**

Menopause is a natural life stage for women and people who menstruate when periods stop and they are no longer fertile. The time leading up to menopause is called perimenopause and a person is post-menopausal one year after their last period.

The average age of menopause in the UK is 51. It is a few years earlier for menstruating people from minority ethnic backgrounds. The normal age range for periods to stop is age 45 to 55. Around 1 in 100 women experience the menopause before 40 years of age. Periods usually start to become less frequent in the months or years before they stop altogether. Though sometimes periods can stop suddenly. Every woman is different.

It is after accompanied by a wide variety of symptoms such as flushes, sweats and mood changes. It can also cause vaginal and vulva dryness and soreness and can affect sex drive. It can also affect sleep and sleep quality. Most women will experience symptoms of menopause. Some symptoms can be severe and significantly impact on day-to-day activities. These symptoms can begin months or even years before your periods finally stop and last on average 4 years after your last period. For advice on how to manage symptoms see below.

### **Menopause and your mental health**

Mental health can be affected at menopause. Mood changes such as feeling low, anxious, irritable and/or tearful are common. Fluctuating progesterone, oestrogen and testosterone levels can be responsible for many psychological symptoms including panic, anxiety and poor concentration.

Pre-existing mental health conditions such as depression, anxiety, bipolar disorder and schizophrenia can become worse at menopause even if they were well managed prior to menopause.

### **Self-help Advice**

- Eating a healthy balanced diet, regularly exercising and maintaining a healthy weight can improve some menopausal symptoms.
- Hormonal Replacement Therapy (HRT) can relieve menopausal symptoms. In brief, HRT replaces oestrogen. Oestrogen levels affect menopausal symptoms. By the time you reach menopause your body is producing deficient levels of oestrogen. HRT can be provided through tablets, skin patches, gels or implants. HRT can help relieve

menopausal symptoms such as hot flushes, joint pains, brain fog, mood swings and vaginal dryness. Ask your GP about HRT.

- Cognitive Behavioural Therapy (CBT) is known to be helpful in managing low mood and anxiety. CBT is a type of talking therapy which teaches coping skills. It helps people understand that what they think, how they feel and how they act all interact. It is a common treatment for people experiencing a range of mental health problems. If you are able to access the internet there are free CBT course for managing menopause symptoms on our Melo website. If you cannot access the internet and live in the ABUHB area most GP surgeries have a Psychological Wellbeing Practitioner, who can help you access other forms of CBT and/or support.
- If you have access to the internet, the Balance website (<https://www.balance-menopause.com>) contains the world's biggest menopause library, with medically approved content. It includes details of the free Balance App and advice for employers/work settings. It also contains information and advice for partners of people experiencing menopause.
- If you have access to the internet, the Melo website contains information, advice, free resources and courses on the menopause. See details of the Melo website below.
- There may be a Menopause Café or support group in your local area. Ask at your local library or your GP surgery.

**If this advice hasn't been helpful and you need help managing your symptoms then visit your GP.**

If you live in the Aneurin Bevan University Health Board area the Health Board offer a specialised menopause clinic. This is for women with a complex medical history, women experiencing difficulties with side-effects of HRT or are finding it difficult to find a suitable treatment for their menopausal symptoms. This clinic will only accept a referral from your GP or hospital.

## Accessing Menopause information online

There are digital resources on the Melo website.

If you or someone you know can access information online, please visit

<https://www.melo.cymru/topic/menopause>

for further information and advice on Menopause.

