



Menopause – a summary

Menopause is technically the time of the very last period. In the months or years leading up to this point women's hormones can often swing between extremes. This may give rise to a variety of symptoms which fluctuate. When bleeding stops it means that the female hormone levels are lower. We know that they are low and blood tests are then rarely needed.

Women differ greatly in how their bodies respond to the drop in oestrogen levels. Flushing is regarded as the cardinal symptom but not everyone has this, and it may be sleep disturbance, mood or sexual difficulty that becomes a problem. If whatever it is, impacts on your life and affects your ability to cope and function, then consider coming to talk about it.

Linked with the reduction in oestrogen, women will experience changes in their skin, bladder, bones and blood vessels. If menopause is early, then the changes start early. In relation to bones this leads to an increased risk of fracture at an age when you might expect still to be active. Women who experience menopause below the age of 45 should consider hormone replacement at least until the average age of menopause. Even if symptoms are not greatly troublesome this will reduce risks of osteoporosis, heart disease and dementia.

Many women will be able to manage without HRT if they understand what is happening to their bodies. On the other hand, menopausal symptoms can for some be overwhelming. It comes at a time when there are often other difficulties in life. There is no need to struggle. An appointment provides the opportunity to evaluate and discuss your personal situation. We can talk about what you can do to make it easier to live with. This might include a discussion of options available from the pharmacy or non-hormonal options which can be prescribed. You need to know how, and how well these work before deciding to try them. It is important to explode the myths and misunderstanding surrounding HRT, and understand what really are its pros and cons. We can then work through how these apply to you.

Hormone replacement is a general term and can and should be tailored to the needs of the individual. I believe that a woman deserves accurate and up to date information so that she can decide whether it is appropriate for her.

If you do opt to try hormonal treatment, details of your health profile, previous exposure to hormones and preferences are taken into consideration. Ultimately your decision to use, or continue to use any treatment should be informed and agreed. It should benefit quality of life without adding unnecessary risk, and be reviewed after three months and once a year once settled.