



Menopause Educational Pack

› with expert insight by Dr Naomi Potter

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Introduction

The menopause is a natural transition all women will experience – it isn't something that happens overnight, and it happens to everyone at different times.

But what exactly happens to someone's body during the menopause, and what are the most effective ways of getting through this transitional time which can be both physically and mentally draining?

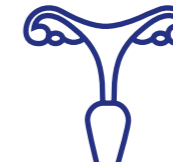
This educational pack, with expert insight from menopause expert Dr Naomi Potter, will give you everything you need to know.

What is menopause?

Put very simply, menopause is when a woman has not had her period for 12 consecutive months. And therefore, menopause itself is actually just one day. What comes before this is a period of fluctuating hormones – oestrogen, progesterone and testosterone – which cause the many symptoms we associate with menopause.

Why does the menopause happen?

“Essentially a woman’s ovaries just run out of steam and over time, their function declines and the period cycle pretty much ceases. As years pass, egg numbers decrease. A foetus will have far more eggs, than a teenager, a 30, 40 year old and so on. And so by the time you’re in your 50s and 60s, you’ll pretty much have no more eggs left.”








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What are the symptoms?

The amount of symptoms vary from one person to the next, but we see there can be up to 62 in total. Just some of the symptoms include:

-  Burning mouth
-  Teeth changing
-  Eyesight issues
-  Tinnitus
-  Breast tenderness
-  Anxiety
-  Depression
-  Libido changes
-  Urinary symptoms



However, symptoms can improve after you've gone through menopause as your body gets used to a state where you can live without oestrogen – but this isn't always the case.

What is perimenopause?

Menopause is not an overnight process – it's a gradual decline and as such the transition period before menopause is called perimenopause. During this time, there are symptoms which may come and go as your hormones fluctuate. The most common symptoms are your periods become irregular but many women experience brain fog, tiredness, hot flushes and night sweats before they notice a change in their periods. Everyone's experience is different.



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How long does the menopause last - and when does it start?

You can have some women who don't have any symptoms whereby their periods stop and it peters out over just a few months. But for others, it can last four years, six years, eight years or even longer. The average age for a woman's period to stop in the UK is 51 but that's not the average age for her symptoms to start. Many women get symptoms in their mid to late 40s. You can still have normal, regular periods and still be experiencing symptoms of perimenopause. However, it can happen much earlier – as early as your 20s and 30s. As it's so variable, that is what can make symptoms harder to spot.

The mental impact

These are probably the most distressing symptoms as they can come out in women who have never had mental health problems before - they can feel like they've lost themselves. Some women may experience anxiety over things they'd never worry about, such as motorway driving and feeling they can't do it anymore.

Other issues may include:

- › not being able to leave the house
- › social anxiety
- › not being able to go to work
- › loss of motivation
- › not wanting to get up in the morning
- › overall loss of 'mojo' and strength

All of those things can be to do with low oestrogen and that's why it can often be misdiagnosed as depression, so some women come away with anti-depressants instead of HRT (Hormone Replacement Therapy).

What are the biggest menopause myths?

Lots of people believe that the earlier you start menstruating, the earlier you will go through menopause, but this is not the case. There are also myths around HRT, such as you can't have it if you're overweight, you're too old, you have migraines, if you've got liver disease, if you've got clotting issues, or if you have high blood pressure, none of which are true, and for some women it can be truly life changing.

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Where can I get help dealing with the menopause?



For more information, visiting your GP should be the first port of call.



Dr Naomi Potter's website (menopausecare.co.uk) also has lots of free information and access to non NHS funded consultations. Other resources include The Women's Health Concern, and the patient branch of the British Menopause Society has free impartial advice.



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www.nhs.uk/conditions/menopause/

