



The women's health edition

In this month's newsletter we talk about menopause and mental health, the link between mental and physical health, busting myths about back pain and supporting someone with breast cancer. This newsletter includes information about sensitive and potentially triggering topics.

World Menopause Day is held every year on the 18th of October. The purpose of the day is to raise awareness of the menopause and the support options available for improving health and wellbeing.

Breaking the menopause taboo

Menopause has long been seen as a taboo subject, leading many people to think little more about it than 'women of a certain age' getting hot, sweaty and flustered and reaching for the nearest thing to fan themselves with whatever comes to hand.

In reality, the menopause is much more than that - whilst some women experience a symptom-free menopause, others find it to be a very difficult time, significantly impacting them both physically and psychologically.

Menopause myths

1 The menopause begins for everyone at 50

Whilst the average age for the menopause to start is 51, the menopause actually occurs anywhere from 45 to 55*. Some women even experience menopause before the age of 42, which is considered to be 'early menopause'.

2 The menopause is just hot flushes and night sweats

Although three-in-four women** do experience hot flashes that can go on for years throughout perimenopause and menopause, there are many other mental and physical symptoms that can occur during this time, including:



Anxiety



Depression



Difficulty concentrating



Anger and irritability



Forgetfulness



Mood swings



Muscle aches and joint pain



Reduced sex drive



Weight gain



Menopause myths *continuing*

3 There's no way to treat the menopause

Whilst there is no way to prevent menopause - it's a natural event and usually a transition that women experience as they get older - there are different treatments available that can help women manage the symptoms of menopause.

If you or someone you know does need help to manage symptoms, support can be accessed through your GP practice.

Treatments and lifestyle changes to help manage symptoms may include:

- Hormone replacement therapy (HRT) - tablets, skin patches, gels and implants that relieve menopausal symptoms by replacing oestrogen
- Vaginal oestrogen preparations, lubricants and moisturisers for vaginal dryness
- Talking therapies including cognitive behavioural therapy (CBT)
- Eating a healthy and balanced diet
- Building exercise into a daily routine
- Taking supplements such as vitamin B6 and vitamin D

4 Symptoms will be the same through the entire menopause

Menopausal symptoms may change and evolve for individuals as they journey through the menopause. If they do, you or the person experiencing the menopause may want to consider trying different treatments or coping techniques.

Keeping a diary of menopausal symptoms including how and when they affect you can help you find the best treatment.

5 The menopause is only a 'women's issue'

It's estimated that 13 million - or around one-in-three women - are either currently going through, or have reached, the menopause. For every individual going through the menopause, there will be many who are indirectly affected including:

- Partners, family members and friends
- Colleagues and employers - one-in-10 women who worked during the menopause has left a job due to their symptoms and a quarter of employees experiencing menopause are likely to retire early because of it***
- Economy - a lack of menopause awareness and support is costing the UK close to £10 billion****
- Those who do not identify as female including trans, non-binary and gender fluid people - these are all communities that have suffered in silence when it comes to the menopause.

How to help someone who's managing menopause

We know that many people suffer physical and emotional symptoms with menopause and this can make it a difficult and complex time.

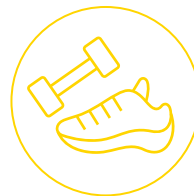
If someone you know is going through perimenopause or menopause, it's useful to know ways you can help them.

the changes they are experiencing. Be patient with those who are going through the transition.



Educate yourself and learn more about menopause

Understanding more about what your loved one or colleague is going through is a really important step. Learn from trusted sources such as the www.nhs.uk, www.themenopausecharity.org, and our mental health experts at Vita Health Group.



Help manage menopause symptoms

Encouragement can help an individual feel uplifted and empowered, particularly if they're struggling with self-esteem and low mood. Invite them to join you in activities such as walks, a yoga or stretch class or cooking a meal together.

Offer to be a sounding board so they can talk to you about the treatment options they've been offered and let them know you can accompany them to healthcare appointments if they'd like a buddy.



Actively listen and be inquisitive

We've already learnt that everyone has a different experience of menopause, so it's important not to make assumptions about what someone is going through. Ask them about their symptoms, how they are feeling and what support they would like from you. Remember, not everyone will be ready or open to talking but letting them know you're there if they need will help to ensure they feel supported.



Encourage an open dialogue about sex

Many people experience a loss of sexual desire or drive during menopause which can be very upsetting for both them and their partner. If you are supporting a partner who's experiencing menopause, it can really help to keep an open and non-judgemental dialogue about sex and be honest about the impact it's having. There are many ways to show love and care towards a partner that do not involve sex.



Be patient

Menopause is a time of change and it may take some people a long time to come to terms with