

Talking to Your Doctor About Menopause

If you're experiencing symptoms of the menopause that are negatively affecting your life, it's a good idea to see a doctor or other healthcare professional for advice and support.

There is no need to feel embarrassed about discussing intimate or personal details with your doctor. In fact, it is important that you do, so you can both find the best solutions and treatments to help you through the changes you're experiencing.

When booking an appointment, do ask for a doctor who has an interest in Women's Health and the menopause. You may feel more comfortable requesting to see a female doctor.

This resource is designed to help you prepare for a discussion about the menopause and to help you find solutions to the impact it may have on your physical and mental health.

Before you go

- **Start keeping a diary of when you have a period.** Your doctor will use your menstrual patterns to help diagnose the menopause.
- **Make a list of all your symptoms,** how frequently they're happening and how they're affecting you, so your doctor can get a clear picture of how you're feeling.
- **Book a double appointment** if you think you might need more time, and are allowed to do so.
- **Don't put off going.** Menopause symptoms can persist for a long time, so if you're struggling, don't wait to see if they get better on their own.
- **Think about what you would like to happen next.** If you believe HRT is a potential treatment option for you, tell your doctor. They can explain your options and provide support and advice.

During your appointment

- **Your doctor may ask you about things that might not at first seem relevant**, like your diet, alcohol intake, and stress levels. Lifestyle factors have been shown to affect menopause symptoms, so this information is important.
- **Be honest.** Your doctor will have treated many women going through the menopause and won't be shocked at anything you say. Even intimate problems such as vaginal irritation and leaking urine are very common and nothing to be embarrassed about.
- **You should be part of any decisions made about your care.** Your doctor will discuss all the available options, but you have the final say.
- **Discuss complementary or alternative therapies with your doctor**, as they can sometimes interfere with prescribed medicines.
- **Voice your concerns.** If something is worrying you, now is the time to mention it to your doctor – even if it's not directly related to the menopause.
- **Tell the doctor about any medications you're taking**, especially hormone treatments like the contraceptive pill, which you might be taking for heavy periods, or hormone blockers used to treat endometriosis.
- **Don't feel rushed into making a decision.** If you're not sure which solution to opt for, go away and take some time to think about it.
- **Ask for a second opinion if necessary.** If you feel the consultation does not go well, you have the right to seek a second opinion from another doctor.

Blood tests are no longer used for diagnosing the menopause in women over 45.

What happens next?

- Although you are transitioning through the menopause, it is still possible to fall pregnant. Continue to **use contraception** until your doctor confirms that it's no longer necessary.
- Read through any information leaflets from your doctor to understand your **options**.
- Think about making **positive lifestyle changes** like stopping smoking, reducing alcohol intake, and improving your diet. Exercise plays an important part in staying healthy after the menopause, so start increasing your weekly activity levels.
- If you are starting any treatments, follow your **doctor's instructions** carefully.

If you have Premature Ovarian Insufficiency, or have experienced early menopause due to medical treatments, like chemotherapy or radiotherapy, your doctor may refer you to a specialist for additional support.

Conversation starters

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I am a woman in my late 40s to early 50s; is the menopause something I need to start thinking about? How will I know when it has started?

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I've been feeling a bit down lately, and irritable with my family. I'm not sleeping very well, either. I think I might be starting the menopause.

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I've been having hot flashes that are stopping me working and keeping me awake at night. What can I do to get them under control?

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Sex has become uncomfortable and sometimes painful. A friend told me she experienced the same when she went through the menopause. Do you think I could be going through the menopause too?