

Inside**Out**<sup>®</sup>

# Understanding Perimenopause, Menopause and the impact on Mental Health



**Recently, celebrities such as Gwyneth Paltrow, Andrea McClean, and Davina McCall have been encouraging dialogue around the physical and emotional symptoms many women suffer from during perimenopause and beyond.**

In this leaflet we bring you an overview of the main symptoms to be aware of and the impact of these on working women. We also offer some strategies for businesses to implement and provide some personal treatment options which sufferers might want to consider.



# Perimenopause vs Menopause

The terms 'perimenopause' and 'menopause' can confuse you because the symptoms are very closely related and present across the same age range. Menopause refers to the end of the menstrual cycle, whereas perimenopause refers to the period leading up to menopause. There are some clear differences between the two.

## What is Perimenopause?

Perimenopause is the period around the cessation of monthly menstrual bleeding. It is a period of transition from being reproductively fertile to a non-fertile menopausal state. There are no clearly defined time-limits to perimenopause but in most women it lasts for around four years. However, in some individuals, it can stretch beyond eight years. The end of perimenopause is after one year without menstruation. Perimenopause is the period when the regular circular rhythm of monthly hormonal changes begins to go out of sync. The rate of oestrogen decline increases throughout the perimenopause and this hormonal imbalance is the result of perimenopause symptoms. Patients present with irregular menstruation, and can vary from heavy bleeding to scanty bleeding during perimenopause.

In addition to irregular bleeding, patients may experience hot flashes, poor sexual drive, worsening premenstrual syndrome, vaginal dryness, watery vaginal discharge, mood swings, and loss of sleep. These features can be considered as early signs of menopause. Diagnosis of perimenopause is done by a medical practitioner via assessment of symptoms. Blood tests to assess serum levels of hormones have been shown to be of limited value.

## What is menopause?

Menopause, or sometimes referred to as 'the change', is when a woman's periods stop due to hormonal changes. This may be due to natural reasons but can also be caused by surgical procedures e.g. oophorectomy (removal of the ovaries), hysterectomy (removal of the uterus), or medical treatments like chemotherapy. This usually happens between the ages for 45 and 55, however it can happen earlier for some. Other women may experience early menopause.

The menopause is a natural and unavoidable life transition for every woman; and should be spoken about more commonly and openly. Each woman will have a unique experience of menopause. Many women wish to fully understand the menopause process and treatment options available to them so they can be in control and make empowered decisions that are right for them and their families. To do this, they also need access to relevant and current information.

This leaflet summarises the key facts, figures and symptoms women may experience so that we can all have a part in driving forwards awareness and a compassionate approach.

Approx.  
**13m**

women in the UK are either perimenopausal or menopausal



Symptoms can last beyond 8 years

Over  
**60%**

of women experience symptoms resulting in behaviour changes

**1/4**

will experience severe debilitating symptoms

Approx.  
**1/2**

of menopausal women say they feel depressed

**1/3**

women say they suffer with anxiety



Women commonly complain of feeling as though they are going mad

Approx.  
**2/3**

women say there is a general lack of support and understanding

# Signs and symptoms

Approximately

**8/10**

women experience one or more negative symptoms, which can be physical and psychological.



## Physical Symptoms



Hot flushes — short, sudden feelings of heat, usually in the face, neck, and chest



Night sweats



Itchy skin



A reduced sex drive (libido)



Vaginal dryness and pain, itching or discomfort during sex



Headaches/migraines



Palpitations – heartbeats that suddenly become more noticeable



Joint stiffness, aches, and pains



Reduced muscle mass



Osteoporosis – reduced bone density



Recurrent urinary tract infections (UTIs)



## Psychological Symptoms



Emotional changes, such as low mood, anxiety, panic attacks



Problems with memory and concentration.



Difficulty sleeping – this may make you feel tired and irritable during the day.



Loss of confidence in body image, or competence to do things.

Research has shown that about 23% of women will experience mood swings during menopause. When we talk about menopausal mood swings, this refers to the mood swings which occur more commonly during perimenopause. During this time, women may suffer severe mood swings and may experience anxiety and depression for the first time in their lives. These mood swings can be caused by a variety of underlying changes in hormones, for example short term surges of and overall reduction of oestrogen levels, or a reduction in progesterone and testosterone levels.

These hormone fluctuations can cause low mood or anxiety symptoms as they surge and decline. In addition, physical symptoms such as sleep impairments, hot flashes and clusters of other symptoms can produce a reduced quality of life which can exacerbate low mood.



# External impact

Having one or more of these symptoms can have a significant impact on a woman's relationships and work life.



## Relationships

Apart from the debilitation menopause symptoms can cause, concurrent with this stage of life, women may also face relational challenges such as bereavement, separation, 'empty nest syndrome', caring for ageing dependants, any of which may compound stress and low mood. Relationships with intimate partners may change as libido, mood and physical symptoms fluctuate. This may cause feelings of isolation, withdrawal, resentment and anger as partners of menopausal women struggle to understand what is happening as they try to cope with fast-moving, often overwhelming symptoms. Friendships and work based relationships may also suffer as a consequence of menopause related physical and emotional symptoms.



## Work-life

In some women, the menopause can considerably impact their ability to work within their current environment or practices, such as routine hours and juggling the complexity and demand of their roles whilst experiencing symptoms. Lack of support available within the workplace is often cited as a reason why some women give up their current employment or leave work altogether. Many working women with symptoms state that they struggle on regardless as they believe they have no other alternative.

Although some workplaces offer flexi time and hybrid working, some workplaces are still having difficulties offering these adjustments for any of their employees. Despite there being some menopause 'champions' businesses of all sizes face issues with implementing menopause support and not knowing where to start presents challenges.

Where possible supporting and creating a positive and open environment between an employer and someone affected by the menopause can help prevent the person from:

- Losing confidence in their skills and abilities.
- Feeling like they need to take time off work and hide the reasons for it.
- Having increased mental health conditions such as stress, anxiety and depression.
- Leaving their job.

Not everyone wants or feels able to talk about their menopause at work. Many women report finding it uncomfortable, believing that discussing their experiences might impact on their careers or relationships negatively. This is where provision of access to quality information with ideas for self-help or external support can be invaluable.



### Accessing Support

For women who are really struggling with one or more severe and chronic symptoms, they should seek medical advice from a qualified medical practitioner in the first instance where they may be offered tests and medicines to help alleviate symptoms such as HRT, and psychological support through counselling.

If you want to try to manage perimenopause and menopause without formal interventions, here are some top holistic health tips you might want to try for some of the main symptoms.





### For hot flushes;

- Wear light clothing.
- Keep your bedroom cool at night.
- Take a cool shower, use a fan, or have a cool drink.
- Try to reduce your stress levels.
- Avoid potential triggers, such as spicy food, caffeine, smoking and alcohol.
- Take regular exercise.
- Lose weight if you are overweight.



### For emotional symptoms;

- Access self-help info for low mood/anxiety online via a discussion forum, blogs, podcasts, websites.
- Read or listen to books.
- Exercise moderately – try things that are relaxing such as yoga or tai chi.
- Get plenty of rest and have good sleep hygiene so you can recharge yourself at night.
- Undertake mindfulness, advanced relaxation and meditation to give your mind a break from stress and anxiety.
- Talk – explain how your symptoms affect you with your significant others, seek advice from female family members or friends who have been through similar experiences.



### For bone, muscle, and brain health:

- Keep well hydrated with caffeine-free, non-alcoholic drinks.
- Take vitamin D and calcium supplements to assist with energy levels and bone density.
- Take iron tablets to stave off anaemia if your periods are heavy and erratic.
- Take B vitamins to maintain hair, immune system and brain health.
- You need B vitamins and protein to make good neurochemicals, so make sure you have plenty of both to keep these in good supply.



## Professional Emotional Support

**Both therapy and coaching can provide continuity and access to a confidential space enabling women to explore their experience of menopause and the impact it has on other areas of their lives. Professional emotional support can help each individual to identify their own wellbeing needs, actions and solutions by tapping into their own personal emotional resilience, as well as utilising external resources such as relational, social, practical and medical support if required.**

Mental wellbeing experts can offer alternative options e.g. mindfulness and CBT and can help signpost individuals to other professionals and support groups should the need arise. Mental health support can raise self-awareness so that women can focus on what they need to manage for their menopause, their lives and therefore are able to take control over their futures.

Insight from our company-wide wellbeing surveys can provide data on the impact of menopause on employees. Expert guidance from our 'menopause' therapist and coach can help employers identify what they are able to offer menopausal women in order to help them remain in work and be productive. This joint approach provided by an external support provider is known to have a positive effect on the physical and mental wellbeing of the employee and therefore on the working environment itself.

Furthermore, employers and employees can benefit from InsideOut's training programmes such as one hour specific menopause awareness webinars for all employees to half day training on strategy and policy development and implementation.





## Medical Support

**Many women are being failed by their GP due to lack of knowledge around symptoms and treatments:**

- Women are being incorrectly diagnosed as depressed and given anti-depressants.
- Approximately 38% of women seek help from a GP.
- One quarter of those who visited a GP say the possibility of the symptoms being menopause related is missed.
- One third of women who visited a GP were not made aware of hormone replacement therapy (HRT)
- Many women are mistakenly denied HRT due to existing or family health concerns
- Many women are unaware of NHS menopause clinics



**For more tips or advice and signposting to professional help, try visiting The British Menopause Society or download the InsideOut App.**

Sources of information: <https://www.imsociety.org/education/world-menopause-day/>

# Platform options



## Bespoke Package

Whether you're looking for a preventative mental fitness programme or early intervention talking therapies and coaching, we've got your back. We can tailor our platform's features to meet your needs.



## Holistic Care

Health is holistic. All elements are interlinked. By addressing physical, mental, nutritional and financial health we empower employees to take control of their holistic wellbeing.



## Personalised

Integrated interactive tools and exercises, personalised to the employees' needs help to minimise symptoms and prevent chances of relapse.



## Evidence Based

We work with leading industry experts. Using a unique range of evidenced based, clinically backed interactive tools we cater for anyone wanting to improve or maintain their mental wellbeing.

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#itsoktonotbeok

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can help support you and your  
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