

Homeopathy and the menopause



What is the **menopause**?

Menopause is the time when, as part of the natural ageing process, a woman's periods stop. This 'change of life' generally occurs between the ages of 45 and 55 years, but can happen earlier or later than this for a variety of reasons. Medically a woman is described as 'postmenopausal' when her periods have stopped completely for one year or more.

What happens **during the menopause**?

As your body approaches the menopause the ovaries gradually become less active, producing less oestrogen and progesterone. As the level of these hormones falls, the menstrual cycle is disrupted. Exactly how the periods are affected varies from one woman to another; some women find they have less bleeding and longer gaps between each period, while others experience heavier, longer-lasting periods. This transitional phase, when many women seek healthcare advice, may be referred to medically as the 'perimenopause'.

How do I know whether **I am going through the menopause**?

When the levels of oestrogen and progesterone fall during the menopause, this automatically causes the level of follicle-stimulating hormone (FSH) to rise. Your GP can arrange for a simple blood test which measures your FSH level, confirming whether or not you are going through the menopause.

What symptoms **might I experience**?

Many women sail through the menopause symptom-free or experience only mild symptoms, but some women experience debilitating symptoms that interfere with their lives. Menopausal symptoms may begin up to five years before the periods finally stop and usually last for one to two years. Most commonly these include hot flushes, night sweats, headaches, mood swings and lower sex drive.

“Homeopathic treatment can help with hot flushes and sweats, tiredness, anxiety, sleeping difficulties, mood swings and headaches.”¹

What is **HRT**?

Most symptoms experienced during the menopause are linked to the lower levels of oestrogen and progesterone in the bloodstream. Hormone replacement therapy (HRT) provides artificial forms of these hormones in the form of pills, patches or creams. Replacing your natural hormones with artificial ones may seem a logical solution to menopausal symptoms, but recent research has shown that this is not a risk-free option.

What's the problem **with HRT**?

HRT was originally developed to help women experiencing debilitating menopausal symptoms, but later became much more widely used when doctors began prescribing it for *healthy* postmenopausal women to protect against osteoporosis and heart disease. As more and more women used HRT for longer periods of time, there was growing concern amongst doctors about its safety.²

Two large studies have since demonstrated the dangers of HRT and led to significant changes in the way it is prescribed.

A major US research project involving over 16,000 women looked at the effects of the most commonly used form of HRT – pills known as 'combined HRT'.

“Overall the health risks of taking the most common form of HRT outweigh the benefits.”³

In 2002 this trial had to be stopped early because of the health risks to the women involved. The researchers concluded that although this form of HRT gives protection against osteoporosis and bowel cancer, these benefits are outweighed by an increased risk of breast cancer, uterine cancer, heart attack and stroke.³

In 2005, results of the NHS-led 'Million Women Study' confirmed the link between breast cancer and combined HRT, with researchers estimating that 20,000 cases of breast cancer over the last decade have been due to HRT use. It was also found that oestrogen-only HRT carries a significant risk of endometrial cancer.⁴

The government's medicines watchdog (MHRA) now advises that when HRT is prescribed 'the minimum effective dose should be used for the shortest duration' and that 'because of the associated risks' HRT should no longer be used routinely for preventing osteoporosis in women over the age of 50.²

Homeopathic treatment for the menopause

Homeopathy is a system of medicine which involves treating the individual with highly diluted substances, given mainly in tablet or liquid form, with the aim of triggering the body's natural system of healing. Based on their individual symptoms, a homeopath will match the most appropriate medicine to each patient.

Homeopathy can be used to help with both the physical and emotional symptoms of menopause. For example, homeopathic treatment has been shown to be effective for hot flushes and sweats, tiredness, anxiety, sleeping difficulties, mood swings and headaches. In a study carried out at an NHS Well Woman clinic in Sheffield, 81 per cent of 102 patients reported improvement of these menopause symptoms after homeopathic treatment.¹

Diet and exercise are important too

As the body changes through menopause, it's important to make appropriate changes to your lifestyle. After menopause there is a loss of bone density (increasing the risk of osteoporosis) and a woman's risk of heart disease increases. It therefore makes sense to adjust your diet and exercise regime to promote healthy bones and lower

the risk of heart disease. Your homeopath will be able to offer advice in this area or refer you on to the appropriate nutrition and exercise specialists.

What is homeopathic treatment like?

When you see a homeopath it's their job to get a thorough understanding of your health and the exact symptoms you are experiencing, so that they can find a homeopathic medicine which matches you and your symptoms as precisely as possible. During this confidential, in-depth 'case-taking' process your homeopath will consider all aspects of your health including your past medical history, diet, lifestyle and personality type, as well as current health problems.

“ 81 per cent of 102 women at an NHS Well-Woman clinic in Sheffield reported improvement of menopause symptoms after homeopathic treatment. ”¹

How to find a qualified and registered homeopath

Registered members of the Society of Homeopaths (identified by the designation RSHom after their name) have met required standards of education, are fully insured and have agreed to abide by the Society's Code of Ethics and Practice.*

To find an RSHom in your area you can access our register online at www.homeopathy-soh.org or contact the Society office on 0845 450 6611/01604 817890

* This does not apply to Registered members practising overseas. For further information, please visit our website.

Nothing contained in this leaflet should be taken as individual medical advice or as a substitute for consulting your homeopath or healthcare practitioner

References

1. Relton C, Weatherley-Jones E. Homeopathy Service in a National Health Service community menopause clinic: audit of clinical outcomes. *Menopause Int*, 2005; 11(2):72-3
2. *Hormone replacement therapy (HRT) - latest data from the Million Women Study and Women's Health Initiative trial*: MHRA statement, 19 April 2007. www.mhra.gov.uk
3. Writing Group for the Women's Health Initiative Investigators. Risks and benefits of estrogen plus progestin in healthy postmenopausal women: principal results from the WHI randomized controlled trial. *JAMA*, 2002; 288: 321-333
4. Million Women Study Collaborators. Endometrial cancer and hormone-replacement therapy in the Million Women Study. *Lancet*, 2005; 365: 1543-51

Other leaflets available include:

- Homeopathy Simply Explained
- Homeopathy in Pregnancy and Childbirth
- Homeopathy for Men
- Homeopathy for Babies and Children
- Homeopathy for Stress, Anxiety and Depression

For a copy of these leaflets, please contact the office at the address below.

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