

Hot flushes/Night sweats

One of the most common symptoms of menopause, hot flushes affect around 75% of menopausal women. Hot flushes normally appear as a rising redness on the chest, neck and face and can make you feel very overheated and sweaty.

Essentially, night sweats are hot flushes that occur at night and can disrupt sleep or can lead you to feeling unpleasant when you wake up.

Simple measures may sometimes help, such as:

- wearing light clothing
- keeping your bedroom cool at night
- taking a cool shower, using a fan or having a cold drink
- trying to reduce your stress levels
- avoiding potential triggers, such as spicy food, caffeine, smoking and alcohol
- taking regular exercise and losing weight if you're overweight
- Phytoestrogens are plant-derived hormones that can partially reverse the hormonal changes that occur due to menopause. Soy-based foods contain high levels of phytoestrogens, so eating lots of tofu can be helpful.

Mood swings

With studies showing that mood swings affect 27% of menopausal women, this can feel like a more extreme version of the mood swings you may have experienced during your periods.

Significant hormonal changes can impact your mood. Irritability, depression, and overall moodiness are the most common effects. The following solutions can help:

- Regular, daily exercise, but not too close to bedtime.
- Meditation or yoga.
- Avoid alcohol.
- Keep caffeine consumption to mornings only.
- Eat more fruits and vegetables for a better overall mood.

Certain herbs may also help, but more studies are needed to prove their safety and effectiveness. *Always speak with your GP before taking supplements*

- St. John's Wort
- garden sage
- ginseng
- black cohosh
- dong quai

Vaginal dryness

Your natural lubrication is maintained by your oestrogen levels, so as these begin to drop, you may notice vaginal dryness. This can cause some pain and discomfort, particularly during sex. There are a number of remedies for this, including lubricants and moisturising creams.

- Eating Soya Products, i.e. soya beans, tufu, edamame beans, soya nuts and tempeh. These foods are good sources of protein and phytochemicals called isoflavones. Two specific isoflavones – genistein & daidzen are very similar in structure to oestrogen and mimic the activity of oestrogen in the body and may help reduce menopausal symptoms that occur due to reduced levels of oestrogen, for example, urinary and vaginal problems

Decreased libido

Menopause often causes women's bodies to stop producing testosterone. This hormone is believed to be important in the formation of sexual desire and drive. Testosterone replacement therapy is sometimes used to treat sexual arousal disorders. However, it can have serious side effects. Consult with your doctor to see if this option is right for you.

The following nonmedical treatment strategies may also help:

- lubricants
- sensual massages
- Kegel exercises
- therapy

Though not well studied, the herb yohimbine (yohimbe bark extract) is believed by some to increase vaginal blood flow and boost female libido.

Headaches

These are typically more common for women who experienced them during their periods.

Some simple measures to manage are:

- drink plenty of water
- get plenty of rest if you have a cold or the flu
- try to relax – stress can make headaches worse
- take paracetamol or ibuprofen (always check with GP/healthcare professional first)

However, if headaches persist then you may be suffering from migraines and should visit your doctor.

Breast soreness

Any time in your life when your hormones drastically change can create the same symptoms; this is typically menstruation, pregnancy and menopause. So while breasts can become sore while on your period or pregnant, it can also happen during menopause.

Some herbs that studies have shown may potential relief:

- Black currant oil is extraordinarily high in vitamin C and is also rich in many other nutrients. It may greatly ease breast tenderness.
- Evening primrose oil is used in some European countries to ease breast pain.

Joint pain

Not all joint pain may signal arthritis, but the menopause is a common time for women to develop musculoskeletal symptoms.

- Perform low-impact exercises such as swimming, yoga, and biking. Eat a balanced diet that includes nutrients such as calcium and vitamin D. Take anti-inflammatory medications, such as ibuprofen

Digestive problems

Your digestive system is one of the most sensitive systems in your body and is often the first thing to get disrupted due to any major changes to your body (new medications, new foods, and nervousness). Changes to hormones are another major body change that can lead to stomach upsets such as bloating, indigestion, constipation, diarrhoea and cramps.

There are some home remedies that will generally improve the functioning of your digestive system.

- Chew your food – chewing is the start of the digestive process. If you miss out this vital step, then your stomach will have to work harder and will probably not be able to effectively break down the food
- Give yourself time to eat – eating on the go is bad for your digestive system because energy is diverted from digestion, which does not allow the digestive system to work at its optimum level
- Think about what you eat – some foods are easier for your digestive system to break down than others. Stimulants such as caffeine, alcohol and refined sugar will just add to the strain on your digestion as well as on your nervous system
- Stay hydrated – this is important for your general health, as well as aiding your digestive system
- Use pre-biotics – these increase the amount of good bacteria in the gut in order to improve digestion

Muscle tension

Poor posture is a common cause of muscular pain and spasm. Desk jobs or a sedentary lifestyle can make it all too easy to end up sitting in a slouched position, or thrusting your neck forward to see the computer screen. It can also be linked to stress and anxiety, presenting itself as a feeling of tightness in the muscle.

- Use a chair which provides good support to your lower back
- Ensure that the back of the chair is as close to 90 degrees as possible
- Sit with your legs should be slightly lower than your hips
- If there are armrests, they should be out to the side
- Consider using a footrest if you experience muscle spasms while sitting
- Make sure that any screens you use for work are at eye level

- Take regular breaks to walk around and stretch your legs

Gum problems

Affecting between 10 and 40 percent of menopausal women, gum problems are often accompanied by a metallic taste in the mouth.

- **Look after your gums in the same way you look after your teeth.** You should aim to floss twice daily.
- **Make sure that any gum disease is treated and managed.**
- **Avoid smoking**
- A dentist or even a hygienist can easily manage minor gum inflammation.

Tingling extremities

It's not overly common but a tingling sensation can appear on any part of the body. This is usually in the feet, hands, arms and legs.

- A combination of lifestyle changes and natural therapies is the most effective and safest approach to managing tingling extremities during menopause. A good, **balanced diet, hydration, and adequate sleep** are basic lifestyle measures that can help. Your GP can also recommend other changes that can help to ease tingling extremities.

Itchy skin

Low oestrogen levels can also lead to low collagen levels. Collagen is responsible for keeping skin plump, firm and healthy so with less of it, you may notice that skin can become thin, dry and itchy.

- Try an intensive moisturiser to combat dry skin

Fatigue

One of the more common symptoms of menopause, many women will notice a feeling of extreme tiredness.

- Make time for regular exercise – It can be hard to drag yourself out of bed when you're exhausted, but exercise is one of the best solutions for fatigue
- Develop a good sleep routine – A good sleep routine can leave you feeling more energized. Try to go to bed and wake up around the same time every day, even on the weekends. Avoid caffeine and alcohol close to bedtime.
- Take a meditation break – Stress can sap your energy and interrupt your sleep. One way to beat stress is meditation. To practice one of the most popular forms, mindfulness meditation, sit in a quiet place and close your eyes. Slowly breathe in and out, clearing your mind while focusing on your breath. When negative thoughts try to enter your mind, steer them gently back out.

- Turn down the thermostat at night – Keeping your bedroom cool accommodates your body’s natural temperature fluctuations during the night. Experts say the ideal temperature for a good night’s sleep is around 18°C.
- Downsize your meals – Eating a big dinner too close to bedtime can leave you feeling too full to sleep. Heavy meals also contribute to heartburn, which can also interrupt your sleep

Anxiety

Along with mood swings, menopausal women may notice increased feelings of anxiety. As many as one in three women may experience this during menopause.

• To help calm feelings of anxiety, you could try a herbal supplement, such as Chamomile

Disrupted sleep

During menopause, it seems like you’re always tired. To make matters worse, hot flashes and other symptoms keep you up at night. Consider the following to help you get a better night’s sleep:

- Get regular exercise, but avoid working out in the evenings.
- Avoid taking naps.
- Drink chamomile tea at bedtime.
- Ask your doctor about using supplements like passionflower or valerian.

A good night-time routine is the first step to better sleep:

- Try to develop a relaxing bedtime routine that begins around the same time each evening. For example, take a warm bath, listen to soothing music, read a book, or do other activities that help you wind down. This will signal to your body that bedtime is coming and help you fall asleep more quickly and easily.
- Avoid watching television, using your computer, or checking your phone in bed. You should also avoid working, eating, or even having a heated discussion with your significant other in your sleeping environment. Strengthening the association between your bed and sleep may help you clear your mind at bedtime.
- Think about your bedroom at night. Light, sound, and temperature are some of the most common causes of sleep disruption. Try finding ways to moderate those factors and create a consistently quiet, dark, and cool environment. Is your bed large enough? Do you wake up with a sore neck? A new bed, mattress, pillow, or comforter could make a huge difference.
- If you can’t ignore the noises around you, invest in earplugs, a fan, or a sound machine that produces soothing white noise. Use window shades or blinds to block light from outside and make sure any indoor lights are off. Lastly, keep the temperature of your room consistently comfortable and cool.
- What you drink in the hours before bedtime can make or break your ability to fall asleep. Caffeine and alcohol are two common sleep-disrupting culprits.
- Avoid drinking alcohol within three hours of bedtime, and limit yourself to one to two alcoholic beverages per day.

- Try drinking a small cup of something with a calming effect before bed, such as hot herbal tea or milk. Drinking too much of any liquid before bed may lead to bathroom trips during the night, which can also disrupt your sleep.

Hair loss

While most people are aware that a lot of men lose their hair as they get older, not everyone realises that women get this too. Menopause can act as an accelerator for hair loss, leaving it looking thinner.

- **Reduce Stress** – It's important to keep your stress levels in check to prevent a hormonal imbalance. Reduced estrogen production can affect your brain chemistry and cause mood swings, anxiety, and depression
- **Get Moving** – Exercise is a key component of a healthy lifestyle. You'll feel stronger and happier once you incorporate exercise into your daily routine. It also helps prevent some of the other symptoms of menopause, including mood swings, weight gain, and insomnia. All of these factors are important for maintaining hormonal balance, which promotes healthy hair growth.
- **Eat Well** – Eating a balanced, low-fat diet is your best defence against hair loss. Make sure you include an adequate amount of whole grains, fruits, and vegetables in every meal. It's also important to incorporate mono-saturated oils, such as olive oil and sesame oil, into your diet. Drinking green tea and taking vitamin B6 and folic acid supplements may help restore hair growth as well. Essential fatty acids also play a crucial role in maintaining hair health. These fatty acids can be found in the following foods:
 - salmon
 - tuna
 - flaxseed oil
 - walnuts
 - almonds
- **Hydrate** – Your body needs to be hydrated in order to function properly. Load up on H₂O all day long and pass on juices, sodas, and other flavored drinks that contain more sugar than your body needs. The amount of water needed varies from person to person and depends on various factors, including overall health and exercise intensity. As a general rule, however, you should aim to have eight 8-ounce glasses of water per day.
- **Keep It Natural** – In order to prevent drying and breakage, it's best to stay away from heat tools, such as hair dryers and straightening irons. Extensions and other styling methods can also weaken your hair and cause early hair loss. If you must dye your hair, choose an all-natural hair color. Artificial chemicals found in dyes and perms can compromise your scalp and hair health. When you wash your hair, always use a nourishing conditioner to keep your scalp healthy and promote healthy hair growth.

Memory Lose & Difficulty concentrating

Memory loss/lapses are usually only temporary but occur during menopause. Try some brain training exercises to strengthen cognitive function.

The brain doesn't work as hard during menopause because oestrogen is the hormone that pushes it to burn glucose for energy. With lower levels of oestrogen, you end up with a lack of focus and concentration.

Memory problems are often perceived as occurring with "old age," when in fact hormones can often be the cause. The following can help improve your concentration and fight memory loss:

- Ginkgo biloba has been used medicinally for thousands of years. Modern science has shown that it may be useful in treating problems with loss of memory and dementia. Other recommended herbal supplements include sage and ginseng.
- Taking up a mind-exercising hobby such as sudoku, crosswords, puzzles, or model building can help keep your mind sharp and active.
- Lifestyle changes, such as decreased alcohol and caffeine intake, eating more fruits and vegetables, and getting regular exercise can also help.
- Get adequate sleep to improve short-term memory.

Weight gain

The major change in hormones during menopause can also cause weight gain but this can usually be combated by healthy eating and exercising.

Dizzy spells

Vertigo and feeling dizzy during menopause are thought to be caused by the drop in oestrogen production.

- You may be able to manage your symptoms with lifestyle changes:
- Snack between meals to keep your blood sugar levels stable
- Drink plenty of water to prevent dehydration
- Stand up slowly after you've been sitting or lying down
- Reduce your daily stress

Bloating

This usually occurs right at the start of your menopause and could even be one of the first symptoms you notice. If you're still having periods but are constantly feeling bloated then this could be a hint that your menopause is coming.

You may also experience bloating during menopause because of built-up gas in your gastrointestinal system. This can be related to:

- diet
- exercise
- stress
- smoking
- swallowed air

- another health condition

You can reduce bloating by making various lifestyle adjustments. These changes in behaviour may also help you prevent bloating from occurring.

- **Change your diet:** Avoid foods that cause bloating. These include fatty foods, vegetables known to cause extra gas, and dairy products. Also, skip overly processed foods, which have high levels of sugar and salt.
- **Exercise more frequently:** Try to work out several times a week, and keep your activity varied from cardiovascular exercises to strength-building ones.
- **Skip chewing gum and carbonated beverages:** These can fill up your stomach with air, leaving you with a bloated abdomen.
- **Avoid smoking and alcohol:** These can increase bloating.
- **Drink plenty of water:** You may experience bloating if you don't stay hydrated enough.

There are other ways to prevent and treat bloating that involve over-the-counter and prescription medications: – **ALWAYS SPEAK TO YOUR GP/HEALTHCARE PROFESSIONAL FIRST**

Stress incontinence

A lot of women will already have experience incontinence as a result of childbirth, but this can increase around menopause. However, this could be more related to age than the actual menopausal process.

Brittle nails

Lower oestrogen levels and dehydration can leave your nails feeling brittle and can make them snap or break more easily.

It is important to get enough calcium during the menopause and you should aim to drink 2 glasses of semi-skimmed/skimmed milk a day. Calcium can also be found in dairy products, green leafy vegetables and canned fish such as salmon and sardines

Osteoporosis

Bone density can drop by up to 20% after the menopause, which puts you at risk of osteoporosis. Be sure to look after your bones with a healthy balanced diet which is high in calcium and vitamin D.