

Managing your menopause symptoms – a holistic guide

This leaflet provides information about managing your menopausal symptoms. If you have any further questions or concerns, please speak to the staff member in charge of your care.

What is this guide?

We know that every woman's experience of menopause is unique, and the physical, emotional and psychological changes that arise at this time vary widely in type, timing and severity.

This guide offers a range of holistic, non-hormonal strategies to help manage symptoms and support your overall wellbeing.

There is a lot of information in this booklet, so you may just want to read the sections most relevant to you at this moment. The content page may help with this. You can come back to it any time and read the sections as they become relevant to you.

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Lifestyle changes



Sleep hygiene

Changes to sleep can be a common symptom of the menopause. You may want to consider the following to help:

- Set a regular bedtime to create a consistent sleep routine
- Avoid daytime naps which can interfere with night-time sleep
- Keep your bedroom cool, dark and screen-free
- Consider using a cooling pillow or moisture-wicking bedding to manage night sweats
- A weighted blanket may help reduce restlessness and ease anxiety
- Limit caffeine after midday and reduce alcohol
- Explore relaxation apps like Headspace or Calm
- Magnesium-rich foods (like leafy greens, butts, bananas) can promote relaxation
 - A magnesium glycinate supplement before bed may aid sleep
- Melatonin (low doses) – can be used as a short-term sleep aid
- Cognitive behavioural therapy for insomnia (CBTi) is a proven, effective non-medication approach for sleep problems. It works in helping you change unhelpful thoughts and worries about sleep and instead build healthier bedtime habits
 - [Sleepio](#) – online CBTi course
 - Book – *Overcoming insomnia and sleep problems: a self-help guide to using CBT*, Colin A. Espie



Managing hot flashes

Hot flashes can be a common symptom of the menopause. You may want to consider the following to help:

- Dress in layers so you can adjust easily to temperature changes
- Keep a fan or cooling device nearby to help during hot flashes
- Practice relaxation techniques like deep, slow breathing (around 6 breaths per minute) during a flush to help calm your mind and body
- Cognitive behavioural therapy (CBT) can reduce the frequency and impact of hot flashes by supporting emotional wellbeing and teaching coping strategies
 - See [Women's Health Concern website](#) fact sheet titled '[CBT for menopausal symptoms](#)'
 - Referral via NHS (GP) or privately. If accessing privately see British Association for Behavioural and Cognitive Psychotherapy ([BABCP](#)) website for register of accredited CBT therapists

Resources include

- Books
 - *Managing hot flashes and night sweats: a cognitive behavioural approach to menopause*. Myra Hunter and Melanie Smith.

- *Overcoming Anxiety: A Self-help Guide to Using CBT*, Helen Kennerley.

Exercise

Exercise is especially important during menopause to help reduce the natural loss of muscle mass and bone density, whilst also supporting strength, balance, and long-term health.

- Aim for at least 150 minutes of moderate exercise each week to support heart health, bone strength, mood, and energy.
- Try and include a mix of the following three exercises:
 - o Cardiovascular – e.g. brisk walking, swimming, cycling.
 - o Strength or weight-bearing – essential for maintaining bone density and muscle mass. Aim for strength training 2–3 times per week, aim for 2 sets of 8-12 repetitions of each activity
 - Examples include lifting weights, resistance bands, or bodyweight exercises like press-ups.
 - Everyday movements count too – try standing up from a chair without using your arms
 - o Stretching and balance – e.g. yoga, Pilates, Tai chi or simple flexibility routines help reduce stiffness and improves balance, flexibility, and posture.
- Pelvic floor exercises (e.g., Kegels) can improve bladder control and enhance sexual comfort.
 - o Apps include [Squeezy](#) or [getUbetter.com](#)



Limit Caffeine & Alcohol



- Avoid caffeine after midday as it can disrupt sleep and make it harder to fall or stay asleep. During menopause, alcohol can worsen hot flushes and disrupt sleep quality by reducing REM sleep and increasing night-time waking, it also adds extra calories and can contribute to weight gain. It's best to keep intake to a minimum.
- To help with sleep, consider soothing herbal teas like chamomile or peppermint.



Stop Smoking

- Smoking increases the risk of heart disease, cancer, and osteoporosis, and can accelerate bone loss during and after menopause.
- Nicotine can also worsen hot flushes by affecting temperature regulation and lowering oestrogen levels, making symptoms more frequent and intense.
- Speak to your GP who can offer a range of stop smoking support services, including:
 - o One-to-one support or referral to your [local NHS Stop Smoking Service](#)
 - o Prescription medications such as nicotine replacement therapy (NRT), varenicline (Champix), or bupropion (Zyban).
 - o Advice and follow-up to help you build a personalised quit plan.

- Access to free resources, such as the [NHS quit smoking app](#) or local stop smoking advisors. Call NHS Smokefree at 0300 123 1044 for local support.

Nutrition & supplements

Changes to oestrogen levels can impact on metabolism, bone density and heart health. Considering changes to your nutrition and diet can help with this, reduce the likelihood of developing chronic diseases, and help with managing weight gain, energy levels and hot flushes.

Diet

- Focus on a balanced diet rich in whole grains, lean proteins, pulses, healthy fats (include oily fish, nuts and seeds), fruits and vegetables.
- Avoid ultra-processed foods and refined sugars, as they can worsen inflammation and mood swings.
- Ensure you're getting adequate calcium (700–1200 mg daily), ideally from your diet (see the Royal Osteoporosis Society's [Calcium](#) page for information)
- Take Vitamin D (800-1000 IU daily), year-round to support bone health.
- Aim for 30g of fibre daily (e.g. flaxseeds, oats, legumes) to support gut and hormone balance.
- Aim for 1–1.2g of protein per kg of body weight daily (e.g. 60g protein/day for a 60kg woman – where 60g is equivalent to roughly 2 palm-sized servings of meat) to maintain muscle mass and bone health during menopause.
- Aim to drink at least 1.5 to 2 litres of fluids daily or 35mls/kg (up to 3 litres if overweight) for good hydration, but try to limit fluid intake 1 to 2 hours before bedtime to reduce night-time bathroom visits (nocturia).

Beneficial Nutrients

- Magnesium
 - Support bone and heart health during menopause and can help ease symptoms like muscle cramps, sleep problems, and mood swings.
 - Found in leafy greens e.g. spinach, Swiss chard, kale, nuts e.g., almonds, cashews, Brazil nuts, seeds e.g., pumpkin seeds, chia seeds, flaxseeds, sunflower seeds and bananas.
- Omega-3 fatty acids
 - Can help reduce inflammation, improve heart health, support brain function, and may ease menopausal symptoms like hot flushes and mood swings.
 - EPA (eicosapentaenoic acid) and DHA (docosahexaenoic acid) are the two main types of omega-3 fatty acids and are found in oily fish eg, mackerel, fresh salmon and tuna, sardines, flaxseeds, walnuts).
 - Aim to eat 2 to 3 servings of oily fish per week.
- Phytoestrogens

- Phytoestrogens are plant-based compounds that can mimic oestrogen in the body, helping to balance hormone levels during menopause and potentially reducing symptoms like hot flushes and night sweats.
- Found in flaxseeds, tofu, tempeh, and beans, chickpeas, lentils

If you have a history of breast or other hormone sensitive cancer, consult your doctor before including these, as some may not be recommended.

Gut and vaginal microbiome

During menopause, hormonal changes can affect the balance of bacteria in both the gut and vaginal microbiomes, potentially impacting overall health. A decline in oestrogen can lead to decreased gut bacteria diversity, increasing inflammation, weight gain, and insulin resistance. Similarly, changes in the vaginal microbiome may cause dryness and a higher risk of infections.

- Ensure a healthy gut microbiome, supported by prebiotics (e.g., garlic, onions) which feed good bacteria and probiotics (e.g., yogurt, kefir, fermented foods) which add beneficial bacteria.

Weight gain during Menopause

Many women experience weight gain during menopause. Changes in hormone levels can impact metabolism and lean body mass.

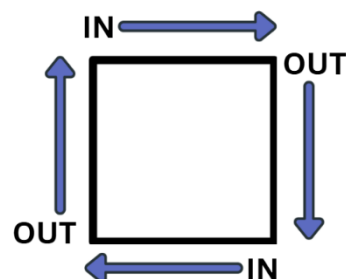
Following the advice contained within this guide may help achieve weight maintenance. Individual dietary advice can be requested from your GP practice's Dietetic teams.



Stress & emotional wellbeing

Menopause can have an impact on someone's emotional or mental wellbeing. You may want to consider the following to help:

- Mindfulness and meditation
 - Explore apps like [CALM](#), [Headspace](#), or [Insight Timer](#) for guided sessions.
- Mindfulness-Based Stress Reduction (MBSR)
 - A structured program combining mindfulness meditation and body awareness that can significantly reduce stress.
 - Explore online programmes such as <https://palousemindfulness.com/>
- Practice deep breathing exercises
 - Box breathing is a calming technique where you breathe in for 4 seconds, hold for 4, breathe out for 4, and hold again for 4, then repeat.



- Paced breathing can help slow your breath to a steady rhythm, try inhaling for 4 seconds and exhaling for 6.
- For further information on breathing exercises see: [NHS inform](#)
- Progressive muscle relaxation
 - Tense and relax each muscle group to release tension, especially before bed.
- Psychological support
 - Including talking therapies and CBT, which can be accessed via your GP or self-referral: [Talking therapies - NHS](#)
- Cognitive Behavioural Therapy (CBT):
 - An evidence-based approach for managing hot flushes, sleep problems, anxiety, and low mood. See resources above.
- Tai Chi or Qigong
 - Gentle movements for relaxation and stress relief.
- Journaling or expressive writing
 - A helpful way to process thoughts and emotions.
- Art or music therapy
 - Creative outlets can be powerful tools for stress management.
- Spend time in nature
 - Lower stress hormones and improve overall wellbeing.
- Connect with others
 - UK support groups like [Menopause Cafe](#) offer community and shared experience
- Apps: [My Possible Self: The Mental Health App](#)



Genitourinary health (vaginal & bladder symptoms)

It's common to experience vaginal dryness, discomfort during sex, or bladder changes after menopause.

- Use vaginal moisturisers (e.g., YES VM or Hyallofemme) regularly to keep tissues hydrated.
- Consider water-based or silicone-based lubricants (e.g. YES range) to make intimacy more comfortable.
- Vaginal oestrogen treatments (creams, pessaries, or rings) can be very effective for dryness and irritation.
 - If you've had breast cancer, these may still be an option — discuss with your specialist.
- Pelvic floor exercises can help support bladder control and vaginal health.



Sex & intimacy

Menopause can affect libido, comfort, and emotional connection.

To support your sexual wellbeing:

- Open, honest communication with partners about feelings and needs is essential.
- Explore different forms of intimacy beyond penetrative sex.
- Prioritise vulval and vaginal care with regular use of vaginal moisturisers and lubricants.
- Understand the impact of mood, body image, and confidence on sexual wellbeing.
- Relaxation techniques can help ease stress and support desire.
- Psychosexual counselling can support you with emotions, body image, and relationships.

Resources:

- Karen Gurney: Clinical psychologist and sex therapist, expert in sexual wellbeing and the science of desire.
 - Book - *Mind the Gap*
 - Shares helpful tips on various podcasts and also the [TED talk 'The surprising truth about desire everyone needs to know'](#)
- Esther Perel: Psychotherapist and expert in relationships and intimacy guidance
 - Book- *Mating in Captivity: Unlocking Erotic Intelligence* – Explores the challenges of maintaining desire in long-term relationships.
 - Podcasts - [Where should we begin?](#) – Features real couples' therapy sessions, providing listeners with a window into the therapeutic process.



Complimentary & natural therapies

Acupuncture

Acupuncture may help reduce hot flushes, night sweats and improve sleep quality. Current guidance does not recommend acupuncture as a routine treatment due to limited evidence, however many women report personal benefit from this therapy.

Aromatherapy

Essential oils such as lavender and sandalwood are known to promote calmness and may help improve sleep quality.

Reiki, Reflexology, or Healing Touch

Therapies can help with stress reduction and relaxation.

Herbal & Natural Supplements

Some women find relief from menopause symptoms using herbal or plant-based remedies. **However, it's important to know that evidence for their effectiveness varies, and some may not be safe for everyone.**

Consult your GP, menopause specialist or qualified medical herbalist registered with the

National Institute of Medical Herbalists ([NIMH](#)) before starting any supplement, especially if you have a health condition, history of cancer or take other medications such as tamoxifen, SSRIs, contraceptives, or blood thinners.

Supported by evidence (Women's Health Concern (WHC) complementary and alternative therapies factsheet www.womens-health-concern.org).

- Isoflavones (soya)*: Plant-based oestrogens may help with hot flushes
- Black Cohosh* – May help ease hot flushes, but there are unknown risks about its safety. It is not advised if you have liver problems, breast cancer or hormone-sensitive conditions.
- St John's Wort* – Can support mood, but interacts with many medications (e.g. tamoxifen, SSRIs, contraceptives and blood thinners).

*** Avoid if there is a history of hormone sensitive cancers**

Note: The quality and purity of many herbal or plant-based products can vary due to limited regulation; choosing remedies with a THR (Traditional Herbal Registration) mark ensures they meet established standards for safety, quality, and consistent dosing.

Non-hormonal prescription options

For women who cannot or choose not to use HRT, there are several non-hormonal prescription medications that may be helpful. Each treatment has their own benefits and potential side effects. It is important to discuss these options with your healthcare team to understand the best, and most suitable option for you.

When to seek professional support

Contact your GP or menopause specialist if you experience any of the following:

- Severe or persistent symptoms (including low mood and anxiety) that disrupt daily life
- Concerns about supplements or treatments, especially if you have a health condition, history of breast or other hormone sensitive cancer or are on other medications.
- Unscheduled vaginal bleeding
 - Any vaginal bleeding after 12 months of no periods (postmenopausal bleeding) should be promptly investigated.
 - Bleeding within the first 3 months of starting or changing HRT, is common. If it this persists beyond 3 months or is heavy/unusual, seek medical advice.
 - Any bleeding after this initial period (3 months on stable HRT) should always be reported promptly.
 - Early assessment helps rule out serious causes like endometrial (inner lining of the womb) pathology.

Further information and support

- British Menopause Society - <https://thebms.org.uk/>

- Women's Health Concern (BMS) - <https://www.womens-health-concern.org/>
- Menopause Matters - <https://www.menopausematters.co.uk/>
- The Menopause Charity – <https://themenopausecharity.org/>

Menopause in women who have had cancer

- Macmillan Cancer Support: <https://www.macmillan.org.uk/> — Provides guidance on managing menopause after cancer treatment ([Menopause page](#)). Contact: 0808 808 00 00
- Cancer Research UK: <https://www.cancerresearchuk.org/>
- Menopause and Cancer Charities:
 - Menopause and Cancer: <https://menopauseandcancer.org/>
 - Future dreams: <https://futuredreams.org.uk/> – emotional and psychological support for those diagnosed with breast cancer
 - The Eve Appeal: <https://eveappeal.org.uk/> – Specialises in gynaecological cancers but offers menopause advice.
 - Breast Cancer Now: <https://breastcancer.org/> – Focuses on breast cancer and related concerns.

For more information leaflets on conditions, procedures, treatments and services offered at our hospitals, please visit www.stgeorges.nhs.uk

Remember, you are not alone. Menopause is a personal journey, and while it can be challenging, with the right tools, support, and small, meaningful changes, you can navigate it confidently and feel more in control of your health and wellbeing.

Additional services

Patient Advice and Liaison Service (PALS)

PALS can offer you advice and information when you have comments or concerns about our services or care. You can contact the PALS team on the advisory telephone line Monday, Tuesday, Thursday and Friday from 2pm to 5pm.

A Walk-in service is available:

Monday, Tuesday and Thursday between 10am and 4pm

Friday between 10am and 2pm.

Please contact PALS in advance to check if there are any changes to opening times.

The Walk-in and Advisory telephone services are closed on Wednesdays.

PALS is based within the hospital in the ground floor main corridor between Grosvenor and Lanesborough Wing.

Tel: 020 8725 2453 **Email:** pals@stgeorges.nhs.uk

NHS UK

The NHS provides online information and guidance on all aspects of health and healthcare, to help you make decisions about your health.

Web: www.nhs.uk

NHS 111

You can call 111 when you need medical help fast but it's not a 999 emergency. NHS 111 is available 24 hours a day, 365 days a year. Calls are free from landlines and mobile phones.

Tel: 111

AccessAble

You can download accessibility guides for all our services by searching 'St George's Hospital' on the AccessAble website (www.accessable.co.uk). The guides are designed to ensure everyone – including those with accessibility needs – can access our hospital and community sites with confidence.



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