



## The Menopause

I have had several people asking me about the menopause recently so I thought it might help people if I share some information with you. The menopause is triggered by a reduction in oestrogen levels and this typically occurs between the ages of 45-55 years old. The average age in the UK is currently 51. Most Ladies will unfortunately experience some of the symptoms which can sometimes have a big impact on daily life. Often the first indication you are entering into the menopause (or perimenopause) is when your periods become more erratic – sometimes a longer break between them and sometimes shorter.

Other symptoms include hot flushes, night time sweats, difficulty sleeping, anxiety, vaginal dryness and loss of libido (sex drive). Such fun! Unfortunately menopausal symptoms can last for several years and often start in advance of your periods stopping. If you start experiencing symptoms of the menopause prior to 45 years old or your symptoms are severe and affecting your day to day life then you should see your GP to discuss your options, including hormone replacement therapy (HRT). The good news is that there are things that you can do to help lessen symptoms – a healthy diet and exercise keeps you fit and healthy and also reduces anxiety.

The most common issue in the menopause is hot flushes and night time sweats. Wearing thinner clothing, sitting near a window and sipping cold water can all help. Evening primrose oil, black cohosh, red clover and sage promise to relieve hot flushes; St John's Wort offers an alternative to antidepressants; valerian is said to reduce anxiety; ginkgo biloba may improve memory; and agnus castus may help regulate hormone fluctuations and premenstrual tension. You should consult a pharmacist or doctor prior to taking complimentary therapies if you suffer from any other health related problems as some complimentary therapies can interact with prescription medication.

Vaginal dryness is a common occurrence in menopausal and post menopausal woman – if it is causing you problems with intercourse then the first step would be to try a lubrication gel that you can buy from any pharmacy or supermarket. If that is not working very well for you, or you are suffering symptoms unrelated to intercourse, then your GP can prescribe vagifem (hormone pessaries) which gets inserted into the vagina. It replaces some of the oestrogen your body is lacking and therefore stops the vagina being so dry. This is also possible to use on the run up to having your cervical smear taken if the dryness is putting you off getting your “smear” done.

It is important to remember that the change in hormones that occur during the menopause can also cause depression, anxiety and mood-swings. Things like cognitive behavioural therapy (CBT) can help with these symptoms as can talking things through with a friend. We are looking into running a menopause educational session with a guest speaker to talk through all things menopausal. If this would be of interest to you then please email or ring me and let me know. Alternatively, you can find Capel Parish Nurses on facebook.

Blessings,

Capel Parish Nurses Team

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