

Advice sheet for peri/menopause

If you are suffering from perimenopausal or menopausal symptoms and they're getting in the way of you enjoying life and doing well at work, its time to talk to a healthcare professional, but sometimes that's easier said than done.

We all know how difficult it can often be just to get an appointment, and then it's only ten minutes. Talking about symptoms can be hard, let alone if you feel rushed or unprepared. So what can you do? Here are some helpful, straightforward tips to help you get the best from your appointment.

Don't wait. It is all too common for people to feel they must simply 'put up' with perimenopausal and menopausal symptoms as a part of life, but if they are affecting you, there are things you can do and support available. There is no need to wait until symptoms get unbearable.

Learn as much as you can so that you know about the perimenopause and menopause. There is a list of resources at the end of this leaflet.

Prepare for your appointment. Its easier for your doctor to understand what's going on if you provide them with all the information. If you are over 45, your doctor doesn't usually need to do any blood tests to confirm a diagnosis, your symptoms will be the most important factor. Read up about HRT and the benefits before you go.

Keep a list of your symptoms. Track your periods if you still have them, record any symptoms, how you feel and any changes you've noticed. Remember there are many more symptoms than just hot flushes including headaches, aching joints, irritability and anxiety. The free **Balance menopause support app** allows you to note all your symptoms and periods and you can print out a report for your doctor.

Read about HRT (Hormone Replacement Therapy) and if you have any preferences about how you would like to manage your symptoms tell the doctor. The NHS website has some useful information: <https://www.nhs.uk/conditions/menopause/treatment/>

Ask the receptionist which doctor is best to talk to about menopause. It may not be your usual GP; it could be someone who has specialist training.

Ask for a longer appointment. If you don't think your standard appointment will be long enough, try to book a double appointment.

Don't be afraid to ask for a second opinion. If you don't feel you've received the help you need, ask to speak to someone else. (Many doctors have limited knowledge in this area as it is not part of their standard training.) Don't be put off, you know how you're feeling, and how it's affecting you.

Ask if there is a menopause clinic in your area. There are some regional clinics specially devoted to menopause. If there is one in your area and you think this would be helpful, ask for a referral.

Take your partner or friend with you. The chances are, you spend your life supporting others and during menopause it's your turn to ask them for support. Your partner or friend will know how the symptoms are affecting you. They could help you at the appointment and find out how they can continue supporting you.

Your healthcare professional should:

- talk to you about your lifestyle, and how to manage your symptoms, and your future health
- offer advice on Hormone Replacement Therapy and other non-medical options
- talk to you about the safety and effectiveness of any treatment
- review any medication levels regularly to ensure you have the right dose to alleviate the symptoms.

They should not:

- tell you that it's 'just that time in your life'; menopause is a natural process but it does not mean that you must put up with symptoms without help
- tell you that they don't prescribe HRT; they should discuss the benefits and potential risks with you fully
- impose unnecessary time restrictions, or low doses only. This is an ongoing conversation, and if your symptoms persist, you will still need help to alter the dose, type or method of delivery of the HRT.

Remember, your healthcare professional is there to help and support you, and you should feel comfortable and confident in talking to them about your symptoms, and any help you need. Don't think you have to struggle when there is help and support available.

Useful information:

- The NHS website for information about symptoms and treatments – <https://www.nhs.uk/conditions/menopause/>
- Visit the **Balance website** where there is a wealth of information about all aspects of the perimenopause and menopause including leaflets, films, podcasts and stories. <https://www.balance-menopause.com/menopause-library/>
- You might find it useful to watch this documentary with Davina McCall: <https://www.channel4.com/programmes/davina-mccall-sex-myths-and-the-menopause>