



## Information for the NMH Complex Menopause Service 2022 DL

### Natural Menopause/Perimenopause

#### What is the Menopause?

The Menopause is officially defined as the last day of the last menstrual period you will ever have but most people use the term “menopause” to describe the various symptoms that can start as the amounts of female hormone being released by the ovaries begin to “change”.

Many months or years before your last period, your ovaries will start to release female hormones in a different way. Some days the ovaries will release the normal amount of sex hormone, some days they release too little or too much. It is this **hormonal fluctuation** that starts off the symptoms of the Menopause and some people refer to this as the **Perimenopause**. Blood tests of sex hormone levels can often be normal when people are in the perimenopause so the diagnosis is usually made by symptoms alone.

People who experience the menopause or who have abnormally low female hormone levels before their 40<sup>th</sup> birthday may be experiencing Premature Ovarian Failure or as we now call it Premature Ovarian Insufficiency. This is a very special medical situation, which is known to be linked to much more serious health issues and not to be confused with the typical natural menopause that happens to people in their 40's and 50's. See our NMH document “**Premature Menopause/Early menopause and POI**”.

#### What are the Menopause Symptoms?

Most menopausal people will feel the changes in their hormone levels with symptoms such as **hot flushes, sweating (especially at night), poor sleep, mood changes and more**. Some of us are lucky and don't have too much trouble from the faltering levels of hormone production. Sadly, for lots of people, the symptoms of their menopause can be profound and there might be a dramatic effect on their quality of life. See the “**Menopause Symptom Chart**”.

It can be a very destructive time for some. Mood especially can be influenced by female hormone changes and some menopausal people (who might never get a flush) can notice depression, anxiety and /or irritability around the menopause time.

#### How do you know you're in the menopause?

Some symptoms of the Menopause are obvious – like flushes and sweating. Some are more subtle - especially the changes in mood, confidence and being able to cope. To make things worse, there are **no blood tests** that confirm the diagnosis of natural menopause, so it can be



a bit confusing at times and even an experienced menopause doctor might struggle to make the diagnosis. In the main, early symptoms include flushes, night sweats and sleep disturbance.

Some sufferers are more troubled by emotional and cognitive issues like low mood, poor sex drive, irritability or anxiety, poor memory and/or a cloudiness in their thinking. Vaginal discomfort and reduced sex drive are also common. As some people move deeper into the change, issues to do with declining collagen levels can become noticeable, so weakness of the pelvic floor with urine leakage can start or get worse. Skin, hair and nail quality declines as collagen levels drop even further. The stretchiness of the vaginal wall can fail as time goes on and that can make things like exercise, going for a smear and having sex less comfortable.

### **How long does this last?**

It is hard to predict how long you might be troubled by menopause symptoms – things like your own genes, your past health problems and certain lifestyle factors all play a role. It is not uncommon to have between 2 - 5 years of noticeable symptoms, which will eventually just improve and disappear but it is also not uncommon for patients to say they are still experiencing sweats and flushes well into their late 50s and 60s.

Some menopause symptoms – especially vaginal discomfort and pelvic floor problems seem to last indefinitely and don't ever really get better without treatment.

### **What can we do to relieve severe menopause symptoms?**

The most efficient way to relieve the symptoms of the menopausal is to level off, balance and stabilise the fluctuating levels of sex hormones. We do this by offering you supplemental ovarian hormones made up of estrogen (always), progestagen (usually) and testosterone (sometimes). These are collectively known as **Hormone Replacement Therapy or HRT**.

### **Where Can I Read Reliable Information on Menopause and HRT?**

HRT use will improve most if not all of the symptoms of the menopause for almost all sufferers and it is always worth educating yourself before making a decision. Wonderful information can be found for patients and health care workers alike on the NICE website. Look at [www.nice.org.uk](http://www.nice.org.uk) and search for Nice Guidance (NG) 23. Additionally, some excellent agencies in the UK offer clear advice and information e.g. [www.womens-health-concern.org](http://www.womens-health-concern.org) and [www.menopausematters.co.uk](http://www.menopausematters.co.uk) among others. See our NMH document “**What is HRT?**”



## **HRT Alternatives**

Some people choose not to or can't consider HRT. There are a variety of non HRT products and therapies that have been shown to help with menopausal symptom.

See our information sheet **"Non-HRT therapies for Menopause"**.