

## INFORMATION FOR PATIENTS

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# Menopause and musculoskeletal (MSK) health

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This booklet contains information about the menopause, how it affects musculoskeletal health, and it aims to answer common questions that you may also have.

### What is menopause?

Menopause is when menstruation (periods) stops completely due to decreasing hormone levels. It usually affects women between the ages of 45 and 55, but it can happen earlier. Menopause can happen naturally, or for reasons such as surgery or with specific cancer treatments. For example, if the ovaries are surgically removed, hormone levels decline, and a person is considered to be in surgical menopause.

Perimenopause is the transitional phase where hormone levels gradually decline. This can cause menopause symptoms and changes to the menstrual cycle to occur.

Perimenopause can last from a few months up to 10 years and ends when you have not had a period for 12 months in a row.

### What hormones are involved in menopause?

The main hormones involved are oestrogen and progesterone, which control the female reproductive system. Testosterone is also important because it helps with sexual desire, bone strength, muscle mass, and mood. As perimenopause starts, the levels of these hormones slowly go down. This change can cause both physical and emotional symptoms linked to menopause.

### What are the symptoms of menopause?

Menopause can cause many different symptoms, including:

- Feeling sad, anxious, moody, or low in confidence.
- Trouble remembering things or focusing (sometimes called brain fog).
- Hot flushes, which are sudden feelings of heat or cold in the face, neck, and chest that may cause dizziness.

- Problems sleeping, often because of sweating at night.
- Heart palpitations, when your heartbeat feels fast or strong.
- Headaches or migraines that happen more often or are worse.
- Muscle aches and joint pain.
- Changes in body shape and gaining weight.
- Lower interest in sexual intercourse.
- Dryness and discomfort in the vagina, which can cause pain or itching during sexual intercourse.
- Frequent urinary tract infections (UTIs).

Some of these symptoms are like those in other health conditions such as fibromyalgia, chronic fatigue, or long COVID. Because of this, it is important to talk with your doctor about menopause if you have these symptoms.

### Common MSK issues associated with menopause

When oestrogen levels drop, it can cause joint pain and stiffness, muscle pain and weakness, weaker bones (called osteoporosis), and a higher chance of problems with tendons and ligaments. Many women report pain in places like the heel, the Achilles tendon (the strongest and largest tendon in the human body, connecting the calf muscles to the heel bone), and joints in general. More than half of women experience musculoskeletal pain, and women are twice as likely to have joint pain and stiffness around menopause compared to before menopause.

### How can menopause be managed?

#### Hormone Replacement Therapy (HRT)

HRT is the main medical treatment for symptoms of menopause and perimenopause. It works by replacing the hormones that are low in your body. You should talk to your GP to find the best treatment for you. The British Menopause Society explains that combined HRT, which contains both oestrogen and progestogen, may slightly increase the risk of breast cancer. However, this risk is small compared to other factors like obesity and alcohol use.

#### Diet

Eating a healthy diet is important for everyone. Some foods contain phytoestrogens, natural substances that can act like low levels of oestrogen in the body. These foods include soya, oats, sunflower seeds, chickpeas, beans, onions, green beans, celery, sweet peppers, garlic, broccoli, tomatoes, and bean sprouts. Women who have had breast cancer should check with their GP before eating these foods.

## Hydration

Lower hormone levels can affect how your body controls fluids. Hot flushes and sweating can cause dehydration. Drinking enough water helps you concentrate better, reduces brain fog, and improves skin health.

## Supplements

If you want to try herbal remedies, talk to your GP first. Some common herbs used for menopause symptoms are evening primrose oil, black cohosh, angelica, ginseng, St John's wort, and red clover. The NHS recommends calcium and vitamin D to support bone health during menopause, and some women find magnesium helps reduce joint pain.

## Sleep

Good sleep helps your body rest and heal. You can try changing the room temperature, type of duvet/cover, lighting, or bedtime to improve your sleep. Women usually need about eight hours of sleep each night.

## Movement and weight training

Osteoporosis, or weak bones, affects an estimated two million women in England and Wales. Strength training can help increase bone density and reduce the risk of fractures. It also helps keep muscles strong, improves heart health, boosts metabolism, and can ease some menopause symptoms. Exercise can improve mood and lower anxiety. The Royal Osteoporosis Society recommends two to three strength training sessions each week, such as lifting weights or using resistance bands.

Exercise also releases endorphins, which are 'feel-good' hormones. These help to reduce stress by balancing cortisol, the stress hormone. High cortisol can worsen menopausal symptoms and, with lower oestrogen, can cause fat to build up around the belly.

## Contact details:

- King's Mill Hospital Therapy Services department  
Telephone: 01623 622515, extension 3221 (Monday to Friday, 8am-5pm).
- Newark Hospital Physiotherapy department  
Telephone: 01636 681681, extension 5885 (Monday to Friday, 8am-5pm).

## Useful websites:

- Women's Health Concern: [Women's Health Concern | Confidential Advice, Reassurance and Education](#)
- Bodyline medical wellness clinics: [What are the stages of menopause? - Bodyline Clinic](#)
- Royal Osteoporosis Society: [Royal Osteoporosis Society - Better Bone Health for Everybody](#)

- Women's Health Concern: [Women's Health Concern | Confidential Advice, Reassurance and Education](#)
- One Woman Health: [The menopause in pictures - One Woman Health](#)

### Further sources of information

NHS Choices: <https://www.nhs.uk/conditions/menopause/>

Our website: [www.sfh-tr.nhs.uk](http://www.sfh-tr.nhs.uk)

### Patient Experience Team (PET)

PET is available to help with any of your compliments, concerns or complaints, and will ensure a prompt and efficient service.

**King's Mill Hospital:** 01623 672222

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If you would like this information in an alternative format, for example large print or easy read, or if you need help with communicating with us, for example because you use British Sign Language, please let us know. You can call the Patient Experience Team on 01623 672222 or email [sfh-tr.PET@nhs.net](mailto:sfh-tr.PET@nhs.net).

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