

Questions for World Menopause Day 2023

Questions have been answered by Dr Sonja Rees, Specialty Doctor in Obstetrics and Gynaecology and Morgan Lowe, Pelvic Health Physiotherapist at Sherwood Forest Hospitals

24th November 2023

Please note that questions have been answered where possible but that this guidance should not replace advice and support from a Health Professional.

1	Is it better to start HRT sooner rather than later? And would you suggest taking HRT when in peri-menopause stage?	Start HRT when you feel your symptoms are getting to the point when you want some help. There are some examples like those who are risk of Osteoporosis, particularly women who have had steroid treatments throughout their lives that may predispose them to Osteoporosis. These individuals may be advised to start HRT to protect their bones.
2	Can you clarify why you need to take Oestrogen and Progesterone HRT (not just Oestrogen)	Oestrogen keeps your bones strong and the brain healthy. It also makes the lining of the womb grow and grow, if you leave this it can cause cells to grow and potentially lead to Cancer. Your body therefore needs the Progesterone to slow this growth down. So, you need both of these if you have a womb.
3	What is the recommended length of time to be on HRT?	There is no arbitrary limit on the duration of use. You should have an annual review with a professional to weigh up risks and benefits.
4	Is there a time period of recommended for trailing various different HRT drugs, when you should maybe stop if you don't appear to be responding very well to medication.	Give HRT 3 months to monitor how this is working and if it is easing symptoms. If it is not easing after a couple of alterations speak to the Gynaecology team for further in depth menopause advice.
5	Colleague shared that their GP would not support them until they saw a drop in hormones in blood tests. Can you share how we can challenge a GP when they seem to give false information on blood tests and menopause?	If you are over 45 and come with menopausal symptoms you do not need a blood test to diagnosis menopause. Your GP may need to take blood test for further health checks e.g. thyroid, cholesterol etc. See The Menopause Society website (British Menopause Society For healthcare professionals and others specialising in post reproductive health (thebms.org.uk)) where there are fact sheets included for blood tests for menopause which

		is useful to look at but also have to hand in talking with your GP.
6	Is there any help you can have with non-existent libido. It is causing stress, relationship issues and pressure from my other half. Thinking of trying testosterone but don't want to waste money when some form of therapy might be more helpful.	There are more options to explore than just looking at Testosterone – for example – does sex hurt? How many years are you postmenopausal? Have you lost your sex drive? Have you got a skin condition? Once these are resolved you can then look at arousal. Women's arousal levels are different. Those in long term relationships does not start with desire; desire starts after arousal. This needs to be talked to with your partner. Planning date nights and time for you as a couple would help.
7	I have been blaming my menopause for lack of libido but also take Citalopram. Am I correct that actually might be the antidepressant causing the issue?	¼ of people who take anti-depressants have problems with their libido
8	Can you get Testosterone on prescription?	Yes they are available. As there is a greater need GPs can prescribe this but can be difficult.
9	Is progesterone tablet higher risk for blood clots? I have oestrogen gel but progesterone tablets	Only Oestrogen tablets increase your risk of blood clots, Progesterone tablets do not. The combination of the Oestrogen gel and the Progesterone tablet is a safe combination and does not increase risk of blood clots.
10	Are lack of periods the only way to diagnose periods? What if you have been on the mini pill and have not had a period for years? Would it then be your age?	No, generally diagnosed with symptoms. This is especially so for those on the mini pill and the marena coil who don't have periods, we would not know when their last period was. You go by the symptoms you are experiencing. If those on the progesterone only pill and is under 45 and experiencing symptoms, it is then when a blood test would need to be done.
11	Can you take HRT while on the antidepressant sertraline?	Yes, a Pharmacist can support with any interactions.
12	If a person takes anti-depressants and the contraceptive pill, can it make it difficult to identify if you may be perimenopausal?	If someone takes the mini pill with no Oestrogen they will develop hot flushes and night sweats so will experience symptoms. Some are lucky and do not get these so you may not know. If you are on the combined pill you will not get the night sweats as you take external Oestrogen. The guidelines state that if you are age of 50, fit, a non-smoker, you should be changing to a Progesterone only method so you should then know.
13	Is there any evidence that any supplements help with aches and pains sleep etc. during menopause? Not instead of HRT but alongside?	Turmeric helps with joint pain. Discuss with your GP or your Gynaecology team.

14	How do you exercise when you are exhausted (have underactive thyroid too) I am sleeping lots and lots and falling asleep at random times also	This is really difficult. Firstly make sure your Thyroid issues are being adequately controlled (your GP will be able to help with this). As per the advice from the brilliant diet and sleep sessions today ensure that you are getting a good healthy balance of nutrients, some good sleep practices, and some daily daylight. I think it's just a case of starting small but knowing that in the longer term, exercise will HELP your energy levels, not hinder them. Try to pick a time of day that you generally have a little more energy and pick a form of exercise you enjoy (it could be dance classes, a daily fast walk with your favourite podcast etc etc...). If you drag yourself to the gym or for a run when you really don't enjoy it... you're not going to stick with it! Consistency is key along with starting small. You WILL find that your energy levels actually improve with exercise... it's just about getting started.
15	Can I take HRT during my period? They are now irregular as like every 3-4 months and I'm taking HRT 2 weeks on 2 weeks off as per advised by my GP.	If you require HRT whilst still having periods, you need to be prescribed a sequential preparation, which contains Oestrogen throughout and a Progestogen 2 weeks out of 4 and will mimic a menstrual cycle. Taking HRT 2 weeks on, 2 weeks off is non-sensical and is inaccurate.
16	I have fibroids which lead me to bleed intermittently, will HRT prolong these problems?	We would recommend getting a referral to the Gynaecologists if you have any other medical history.
17	How long to use the Viahruix only a few year? Or can it be for life	Vaginal Oestrogen (Oestradiol 10mcg or Oestriol cream twice weekly) varying brands can safely be used indefinitely. The only contraindication that I can think of is, if you have breast cancer AND take aromatase inhibitor, such as Anastrozole or Letrozole.
18	Can Viagruix Oestrogen pessaries be used with Progesterone?	Vaginal Oestrogen is so low dosed, that it does not require the use of a Progestogen. If you also take "systemic" Oestrogen (tablets, gel, patches, spray) AND have a womb, you will need nasty Progestogen.
19	I regularly get thrush now I've started the perimenopause, is this normal?	Thrush is not the only cause of vaginal irritation. Thrush is not a feature of Menopause. You need to check this with your GP or Sexual Health Team.
20	There are so many vitamin adverts for menopause what would you recommend?	Vitamin D is essential, everything else is optional, unless you are deficient. (I find a lot

		of patients are short on Folic Acid.) You can also discuss vitamin combinations with your Pharmacist.
21	Menopause and yoga - I sometimes find that breathe work exacerbates my anxiety. Any solutions to reduce it when I am doing breath work? I try to change the focus but it takes me a long time to get my brain to stop the feeling like I am having a panic attack.	To be able to let go from anxiety is hard, you need to be kind to yourself. Breathe the way you breathe rather than breathing with particular strategies or patterns. There is no right way as such. Find what is comfortable for you first. Listen to what your body needs first, be kind to your body.
22	Is there guidance specific for individuals with intellectual disabilities, brain injuries or neurodevelopmental conditions?	The short answer is no, I am not aware of any specific guidelines. The same principles apply to all patients, whatever the underlying condition
23	Would stress incontinence cause leakages during intercourse?	Yes, it could but the Pelvic Health Physiotherapy Team could help. Speak to your GP about making a referral.
24	Does the BTL Esmella Chair work?	The evidence base is very biased and its so expensive, there are so many things that you can do before this.
25	What helps with symptoms of itchy skin?	Wash only with aqueous cream, water and hands (no soaps, showergel, wipes, flannels etc) Frequently moisturise using a bland emollient, such as Diprobase cream or Hydromol ointment If symptoms persist, have it checked out. You can also see you Pharmacist for advice.

Specific scenarios or questions

1	Can lack of oestrogen in a 58 year old women not on HRT cause problems with back pain, neck pain, shoulder pain etc.	It could be contributing and joint aches and pains are a common menopausal Sx... If all the symptoms started at a similar time, have no real mechanism of injury or change to activity etc. However, I would also just ensure you rule out any mechanical musculoskeletal issues via a trip to your local physio (you can self-refer to the MSK service). Make sure you're clear when you attend that you suspect menopause might be playing a role in your Sx but you want to rule out other things too.
2	Colleague has gone through menopause at age 34 and has been on oral HRT but now	Please discuss this with your GP or contact the Gynaecology team.

	absolutely exhausted, low libido and brain fog. Do not have hot sweats anymore and no period for over 10 years. What is the best HRT that should be taking which will help these symptoms?	
3	If you have had a hysterectomy and 1 remaining ovary but is damaged due to endometriosis, what would be the best combination of HRT?	Please discuss this with your GP or contact the Gynaecology team.
4	If you have had your womb removed would you be more inclined to prescribe the patches?	Whether you have patches or gel, whether the womb has been removed or not Oestrogen through the skin is the preferred route for those on HRT. If you have had your womb removed you no longer need the Progesterone.
5	ESR recording Menopause related Absence question- Just to highlight that you can select and primary and secondary reason then select menopause in the related reason box. If you work in the Local authority you might not be able to record menopause as a reason but this should be included in any free text notes.	You can select what the primary and secondary reasons for absence and add the related absence as menopause. If you work in a local authority you might not be able to record menopause as a reason, but it can be included in the free text notes.
6	How do you explain what help you need from your line manager when you really struggle to vocalise your menopause experience. I just refer to lack of sleep but the other symptoms are really challenging and I am not sure what “reasonable adjustments” could help me at work	If you feel you are not coping at work ask your manager to refer you to Occupational Health. You can self-referral but you won’t get a report from Occupational Health. Speak to your line manager and HR to talk about what support. It is ok to ask for this referral too. You can find advice on the intranet about how to complete a good managers Occupational Health Referral. You could also speak to your GP who can put some recommendations on your FIT note, alongside this it would be beneficial to write down your symptoms you are experiencing to support you.