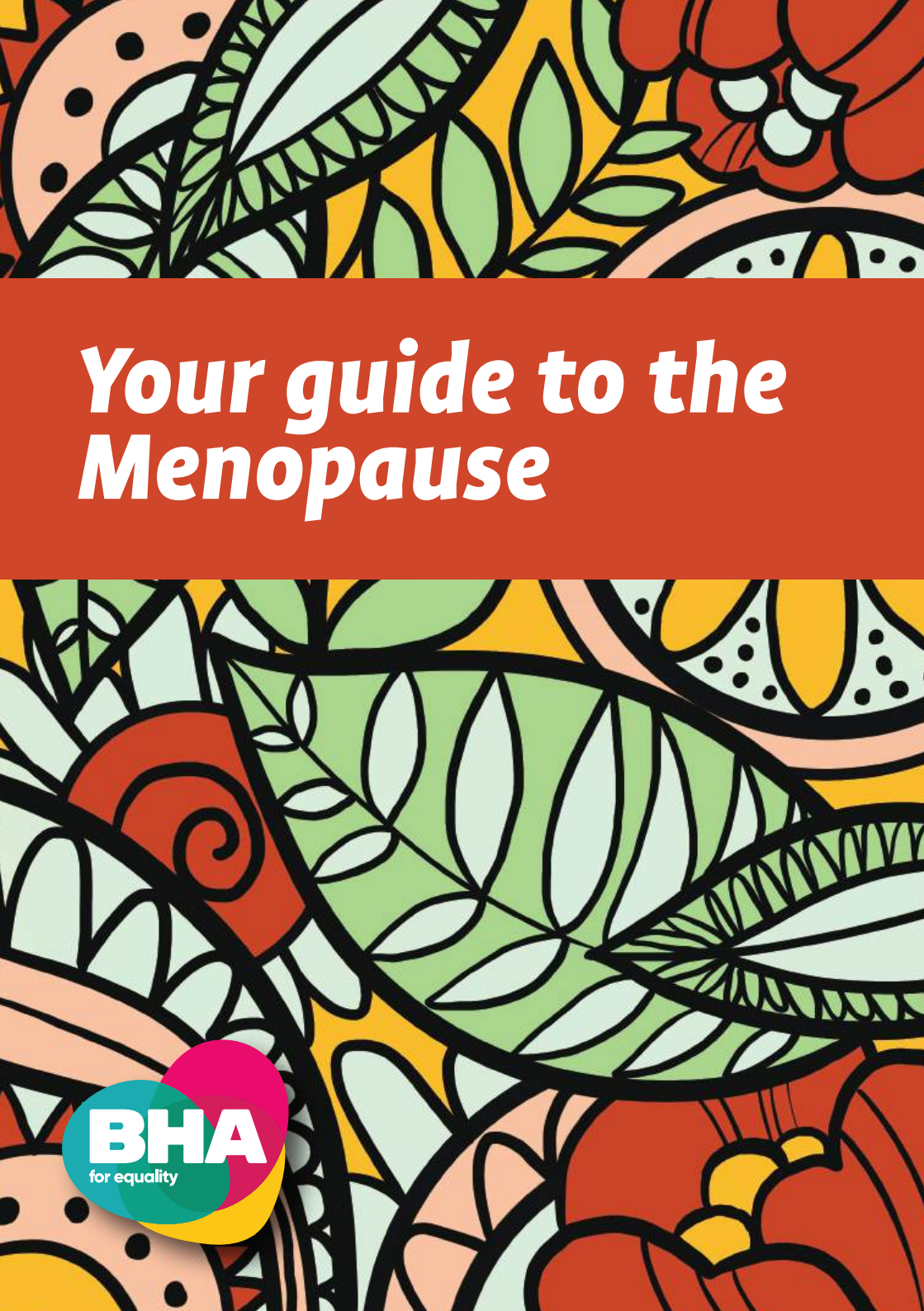




Your guide to the Menopause



BHA
for equality



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Welcome

BHA for Equality engages with people from Black, Brown and Global Majority and LGBTQ+ communities to challenge and address inequalities. Our services and resources aim to support people to improve their health and wellbeing.

Menopause marks the time in your life where you have not had a period for one year. Lots of people experience symptoms before this, which is called perimenopause.

Many people experience symptoms in silence, unsure about what is happening to their bodies, embarrassed to talk to loved ones, and unaware of what support is available.

This comprehensive guide aims to provide you with the necessary information about menopause, empowering you to make informed decisions and access the support you deserve.

This guide is a result of collaboration with people from the communities BHA works with, achieved through multiple focus groups.

This leaflet is inclusive of all who experience menopause, including trans men and non-binary individuals. BHA for Equality provides support and information that acknowledges gender-inclusive experiences.



Symptoms and awareness



What are the symptoms of menopause? What impact can menopause have on my health and wellbeing? Read more of this section for symptoms, awareness and general information on the menopause.

There are different terms to describe the stages of the menopause:

- **Premenopause**
The time in your life before any menopausal symptoms occur
- **Perimenopause**
The time leading up to your menopause when periods start to change, and you will start to get the most symptoms
- **Menopause**
A point in time marking an entire year since you had your final period
- **Post menopause**
All your subsequent years after your menopause. Some people experience symptoms for many years after their menopause.

How old will I be when I reach the menopause?

The average age of menopause in the UK is 51.

Some women experience menopause much earlier, such as in their 30s. If you are under 40 then it is known as premature menopause or premature ovarian insufficiency (POI).

Some women experience menopause much later and don't get symptoms until their 60s.

Surgical menopause

If you undergo a hysterectomy (an operation to remove your uterus) you may also have your ovaries removed at the same time. If this happens you will go through surgical menopause.

If one or both of your ovaries are left intact, there is a chance you will go through menopause within five years of having the operation.

Symptoms

Menopause is a natural stage of life, but many people feel shame surrounding their menopause. You are not alone, and it is important to reach out and get help.

There are over 35 menopause symptoms, and many people find it difficult as symptoms can be severe. The main symptoms are listed on the next page, but it's important to remember that no one's experience will be the same and every person will experience and manage symptoms differently.

Some of the more common symptoms include night sweats, brain fog and memory problems, and people we met with often highlighted the points below:

- Can't remember someone's name or go into a room and forget what you came in for
- Over thinking and mood changes
- Racing thoughts
- Mood swings
- Having a shorter fuse than you used to
- Disrupted sleep
- Waking up at 2am in the morning and not able to get back to sleep
- Irregular periods





All symptoms

- Anxiety
- Changes in mood
- Feeling loss of self
- Difficulty sleeping: Insomnia, night sweats – this affects concentration in the daytime.
- Memory problems and brain fog



- Hot flashes (¾ people experience this during menopause)
- Night sweats
- Joint pains and muscle aches: Oestrogen is important in providing lubrication for your joints and preventing inflammation, so low levels of this hormone can leave your joints sore and aching
- Cold flashes
- Dry eyes
- Headaches or migraines
- Heartburn
- Dizziness
- Altered sense of smell



- Changes in skin texture: dryness, oiliness
- Hair and skin changes: Lower levels of oestrogen can cause skin changes such as fine lines, dryness, itching, tingling and numbness
- Brittle nails



- Changes in period
- Loss of sexual desire
- The acidity of your vagina changes, which can lead to infections such as thrush or frequent UTIs. Low oestrogen also thins the lining of your bladder and urethra which can lead to needing to wee more
- Vulval and vaginal symptoms: low oestrogen can cause the tissues around the vulva and vagina to become thinner, dry, itchy, and inflamed

Can menopause affect health?

What are hormones?

Hormones are chemicals that carry messages through your body. They affect different functions in your body in your organs, skin, muscles and other tissues. One hormone affected by menopause is oestrogen. Oestrogen is a hormone that affects many areas of the body, such as bone strength and hair growth.

Menopause and health risks

Our hormones control much more than just our periods. So, there are some potential health risks associated with going through the menopause.

Osteoporosis

Osteoporosis is thinning of your bones. Osteoporosis is much more common after the menopause as oestrogen works to keep your bones strong. As oestrogen levels fall, bones can fracture more easily.



Gentle impact strength training and exercise such as yoga can improve bone strength alongside a calcium rich diet.

Cardiovascular disease

Cardiovascular disease means disease of your heart and blood vessels so includes heart attacks and strokes. Your risk of cardiovascular disease increases after the menopause as oestrogen is important in keeping your blood vessels healthy.

Other diseases

There is an increased risk of osteoarthritis, type 2 diabetes, bowel cancer and dementia after menopause.¹

If you experience symptoms of these conditions you must check with your GP:

- Osteoarthritis: joint pain, stiffness, swelling
- Type 2 diabetes: urinating more often than usual, feeling very thirsty, feeling very tired
- Bowel cancer: abdominal pain, changes in bowel habits, blood in your poo
- Dementia: memory problems, increased confusion, reduced concentration

If you notice any of these symptoms, keep a track in a symptom diary. This can help you to communicate with your doctor about symptoms and potential menopause treatment. See page 21 or download an online version with this QR code.



Treatment and management

HRT

HRT is hormone replacement therapy, a type of treatment commonly used for menopausal symptoms.

Many menopause symptoms are caused by low oestrogen, so HRT aims to replace oestrogen.

A progesterone is added if you have intact uterus to prevent endometrial cancer.

HRT is a very effective treatment for lots of people and can also help to reduce risks of osteoporosis, heart disease and dementia.

Different doses and combinations of HRT can be taken depending on the individual. HRT comes in:

Tablets – Taken once a day

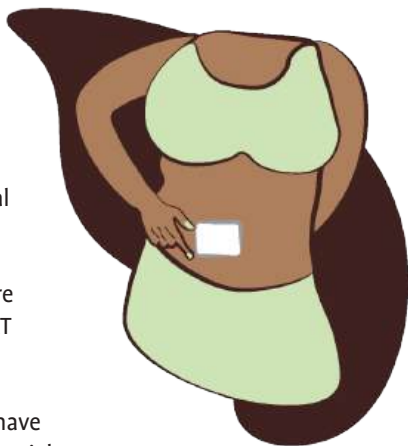
Patches – Stuck to the stomach or thigh and replaced every few days

Gel (Oestrogen only) – Applied to skin once a day. Can take a while to dry

Spray (Oestrogen only) – Used once a day. 1 to 3 sprays onto the inner side of your arm or your inner thigh.

Mirena coil (progesterone only) – Inserted into the womb and lasts for up to 5 years. Can also be used to prevent pregnancy and treat heavy periods

Vaginal oestrogen – Available as a cream, gel, vaginal tablet, pessary or ring that you put inside your vagina. This can help with menopausal symptoms such as vaginal dryness, a burning sensation, or pain during sex.



Most HRT will be prescribed to replace Oestrogen or progesterone, but there is another option of trying testosterone. Testosterone can help improve loss of libido and sexual desire, as well as increasing energy. Testosterone is not currently licensed to treat symptoms of menopause, but a specialist doctor may be able to prescribe it for you.

Risks

- There is a small increased risk of a clot or stroke if you take oestrogen in tablet form. You are more likely to develop a clot or have a stroke if you are obese, a smoker, or have had a clot in the past.
- However, estrogen taken via a patch, gel or spray does not have an increased risk of clot or stroke and these are usually safe to take, even if someone has a high risk of clot.²
- Small risk of breast/ovarian cancer*

Concerns with HRT

HRT is completely safe for many people.

Cancer risk from HRT is small and depends on many different things such as the type of HRT used, how long someone takes it for, their age and general health.³

How much does HRT cost?

You can speak to your doctor about HRT without needing to commit to treatment.

If you are suitable and you both decide it is the best treatment for you, your doctor will prescribe HRT. The standard prescription costs will apply when you go to the pharmacy with your HRT prescription.

You can now buy a hormone replacement therapy (HRT) prescription prepayment certificate (PPC) which can save you money if you need more than 2 prescribed qualifying HRT items in a year.

You can get your HRT prescription from pharmacies or online. With a HRT PPC, you can use this as many times as needed throughout the year.

You can speak to a doctor about HRT without needing to commit to treatment.

Alternative treatments/relief

Vaginal creams and gels

To ease vaginal dryness and discomfort, try using vaginal creams or gels. You can find these over the counter at your local pharmacy or online.

Cooling eye mask

Night sweats or hot flashes bothering you? A cooling eye mask could be just the thing to help you feel more comfortable.

Reflexology

Some people find that reflexology, a therapy where different areas of the feet correspond to other parts of the body, can support their journey through perimenopause and menopause. Give it a try and see if it works for you!

Yoga

In addition to other exercises, like the ones listed on page X, yoga is a fantastic way to move your body and relieve tension during menopause. Give it a go and feel the difference!

Clonidine

Clonidine is a non-hormonal drug licenced for hot flushes. You can speak to a GP about Clonidine and whether it is suitable for you.

Relief and bone strength

- Creatine may help with bone strength problems by reducing inflammation
- Bone broth contains protein and collagen and can help relieve menopausal symptoms

Holistic treatment

There are a variety of holistic ways to try and alleviate menopause symptoms.

Please note, these are not necessarily proven, and a doctor should always be consulted before trying.



Vitamins & Supplements

Vitamin D3 with K2 can help bone and muscle health and mood.

Multivitamins (A, B12, C, D, K, Zinc) alongside diet changes can help increase brain health, reduce future risk of dementia or Alzheimer's.

Herbal remedies and complementary medicines

Make sure to consult your doctor before as some medicines interact differently with others.

- Evening primrose oil
- Black cohosh
- Angelica
- Ginseng
- St John's wort

Herbal remedies such as red clover contain plant hormones that can act in a similar way to oestrogen, while black cohosh is believed to balance oestrogen and progesterone levels. These may help with some menopause symptoms, but this is not supported by scientific evidence.

Some of these remedies, especially St John's wort, may also cause serious side effects if they're taken with other medicines.



Talking, writing, learning

Talking therapy

Therapy during menopause can offer a supportive space to talk about your feelings, manage symptoms like mood swings and hot flushes, improve relationships, boost confidence, and navigate life changes. It's like having a helpful guide to get through this transition with more ease and understanding.

Journalling

Writing in a journal during menopause can help you express your feelings, think about what's happening to you, and keep track of any changes. It's like having a private space to understand yourself better, solve problems, and stay positive during this time.

Try writing down some answers to these questions:

- How have I grown stronger or more resilient through the menopause?
- What goals do I have to make support myself during the menopause?
- Has the menopause care I have received been inclusive to everyone?

Menopause cafes

Search for menopause cafes in your local area, these might be at your local library, church or community centre.

You can even set up your own menopause cafe in your community. The menopause cafe website has some great resources to use.

→ **How to host a Menopause Café (menopausecafe.net)**

Management

Exercise ⁴

Exercise can be a great help during menopause, especially when sleep issues and low energy hit hard. It supports better sleep and can give you more energy.

Regular exercise can also ease other menopause-related symptoms like low mood, anxiety, and maintain bone strength.

Here are some options to consider:

Cardio (for energy and heart health):

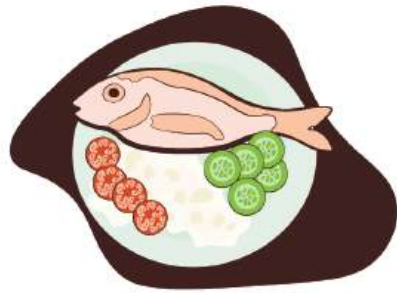
Dance, cycle, try HIIT workouts, try swimming, go for a run, or take a brisk walk.

Strength (for bone health):

Incorporate squats, planks, push-ups, lift dumbbells or weights, or use resistance-based machines.

Yoga (for hot flushes and insomnia):

Try yoga or Pilates to help with hot flushes and improve sleep quality.



Diet

Making small changes to your diet can help some symptoms of the menopause. A mediterranean diet such as oily fish, low sugar, fruits can help with women suffering from brain fog.

Calcium

Menopause can affect bone strength. Calcium keeps your bones strong and healthy.

Aim for 2-3 portions of calcium sources a day.

Protein

Protein can help bone health and muscle mass which may be impacted during the menopause.

The department of health advises 50g-55g of daily protein intake.

Best sources of protein include eggs, milk, yoghurt, fish and seafood, chicken and turkey, soya, nuts and seeds, beans and pulses, tofu and tempeh.

Triggers:

Watch out for hot flush triggers like alcohol and caffeine. Cutting back, especially before bed, can help ease those uncomfortable moments.

Non-alcoholic / low alcohol drinks can be a great alternative to this, as well as decaffeinated coffee and herbal teas.

Recipe ideas

- Butternut squash and coconut spiced soup
- Chickpea and spinach stew with couscous
- Chicken thighs with cherry tomatoes and new potatoes
- Salmon, asparagus and broccoli bake
- Baked or grilled jerk chicken with rice, kidney beans and salad
- Fish stew
- Spinach and tomato stew with ofada rice and tilapia fish
- Cumin Chicken and chickpea stew
- Roasted cauliflower and potato curry soup
- Squash and red lentil soup
- Shrimp and Okra Gumbo



Vitamins

Menopause can cause deficiency of some vitamins in the body. Therefore, vitamins can be an important way to manage menopause. See page 12 for more information.

Foods that are a good source of B12:

milk and milk products, fish and red meat, poultry and eggs.

Foods rich in omega-3 fatty acids: fish, seeds, nuts.

Good sources of vitamin B: peas, some fresh fruits like bananas and oranges, nuts, wholegrain breads.

Phytoestrogens

Phyto or plant oestrogens (oestrogens found in plants) can increase the oestrogenic effect in the body.⁵

Increased your dietary oestrogens such as flax seeds, soybeans and edamame, dried fruits, sesame seeds, garlic, peaches, berries.⁶

Water

Drinking water is key to aging healthily. As you get older, your body holds less water. Drinking 6-8 glasses of water a day keeps you hydrated and can improve menopause symptoms such as:

Night sweats and hot flushes where you lose moisture: when you sweat, you lose moisture, so drinking more water can help keep you feeling cooler and more comfortable.

Urinary incontinence or UTIs: lack of oestrogen thins the lining of your bladder, increasing the likelihood of UTIs and the need to wee more. Drinking plenty of water can improve this.

Healthy skin, hair and nails: hydration helps to strengthen your skin, hair and nails, keeping them looking and feeling their best.

Aim to drink 6-8 glasses of water a day.



Top Tip: Pelvic floor exercises can improve bladder control

Menopause in the workplace



Has menopause affected your ability to work? Do you feel that the workplace is harder to manage? Read this section for advice on how to manage this, and how employers can help you.

Menopausal women are the fastest growing demographic in the UK workforce.⁸ Many menopause symptoms can affect your work including brain fog, memory problems, anxiety and low mood, sleep and concentration problems.

45% of women feel their menopausal symptoms had a negative impact on their work

What you can do

- Speak to your manager or colleagues about your experiences. Many people will be going through a similar experience and you may not realise.
- Request reasonable adjustments at work to help you: flexible working, requesting a different uniform, moving to a cooler part of an office or asking for a fan – don't hesitate to ask for what you need!

Employers, you should...

- Create a safe, inclusive and comfortable work environment for those experiencing menopause.
- Demonstrate that you understand the barriers that prevent people going through the menopause from performing to their full potential
- Make appropriate and reasonable adjustments to support people to thrive at work.
- Allow more flexible working patterns or hybrid working from home.
- Consider access to counselling in the workplace
- Consider staff networks, menopause cafés and information sessions



When an employee's experience of menopause symptoms amount to a disability, under the Equality Act 2010, employers must make reasonable adjustments and not discriminate against the worker.

Menopause and transgender people

Some transgender people will undergo gender-affirming therapy, where they will take hormone treatment. This can be intertwined with menopause symptoms.

Testosterone therapy decreases estrogen levels, which can cause some symptoms of menopause. These can include a loss of cycle, hot flushes, hair thinning and vaginal dryness

Transgender people who are prescribed estrogen, androgen blockers or progesterone may experience symptoms of menopause.

More information on transgender health and the menopause can be found on our website.

Family and relationships



Read this section for tips on how to manage your relationships and how your family or partner can support you.

Menopause can have a huge impact on families and relationships. Amongst other symptoms, your self-esteem, memory and sex drive can cause you difficulty in relationships and family dynamics.

Your menopause can be the start of a freeing and liberating time in your life. You should not feel ashamed of your body's natural reaction to hormone changes.

How can menopause affect your relationships

Menopause can cause (amongst other things) anger, anxiety, forgetfulness, low mood, depression, and brain fog.

Sleep problems can also cause irritability, inability to concentrate, and anxiety.

Physical changes can cause self-esteem issues.¹⁰

Lots of people go through the menopause when their children are teenagers. This means huge changes in hormones for both parents and children.



Top tips for managing your relationships

Support from the people around you can be extremely helpful.

- This can help those around you to understand and adjust, such as supporting you with making positive choices you wish to make with diet, exercise or helping you to consider herbal remedies or medical treatment for the menopause
- Share information sources you have found helpful or you think they would like – keep it simple
- Ask for your close ones to be patient – figuring out freedom around the menopause can take time and effort
- Start an open discussion with your partner about your own aging experiences (see the next section for more ideas)

Beyond your family and friends

- Online forums and groups can be a great way to connect with other people who are going through menopause
- Many local libraries and community spaces hold menopause talks or menopause cafes which can be a great support environment
- Social media accounts
- Menopause podcasts
- Menopause websites – menopause matters, women's health concern
- Menopause Support Resources: menopausesupport.co.uk

You could reflect on these questions:

- What are some emotions that might arise for my partner during my menopause?
- What are some ways my partner can show love and understanding to support me?

Menopause and sex life

You can experience a loss of sexual desire or sex drive during menopause. Perhaps penetrative sex can be physically painful or uncomfortable to you.

This can make sexual intimacy more difficult, but this does not have to be the case. Remember, there are also a lot of ways to show love and care towards a partner. Regularly talking about different ways to feel close to each other and spending time together more is important.

Kissing and touching more or foreplay can make sex feel like less pressure.

Lube is a great way to reduce friction during sex if you are experiencing dryness. Just make sure to choose a gentle one without lots of chemicals that could cause irritation. A water-based lube is a good option.

BHA's Commitment to Addressing Health Inequalities in the Menopause

Menopause is tied to health inequality, with experiences of menopausal healthcare are different across diverse ethnic groups.

45% of Black, Asian and ethnic minority women reported that it took many appointments for their GP to realise they were experiencing the menopause, compared with 30% of white women.¹¹ A 2023 UK study also found that doctors are significantly more likely to prescribe HRT for white women than for other ethnicities.¹²

BHA for Equality wants to raise awareness about all sexual health in diverse ethnic communities, which is why knowledge about HIV is also important to us.

HIV is now a manageable and treatable condition. Development in medicine means someone with HIV can now take one-three tablets a day and will live a long and healthy life. If medication is taken correctly, someone living with HIV can lower the virus in their body to undetectable levels and therefore cannot pass it on.

People living with HIV may experience symptoms earlier compared to HIV-negative people. Those living with HIV may find that their HIV medication can interact with HRT taken for menopause symptoms.

Menopause can cause changes to the vagina. Vaginal dryness and changes in vaginal tissue caused by the menopause can lead to increased risk of acquiring HIV (National Library of Medicine, 2016).

It is important to know your body and stay connected to your sexual health. Regular STI and HIV testing, even alongside decreased levels of sexual activity, is important.

You can book a free and confidential HIV test at your local Sexual Health Clinic or at BHA here:

HIV Testing - BHA for Equality
(thebha.org.uk)



Talking to your doctor about the menopause



Do you feel that talking about the menopause with your doctor is difficult or uncomfortable?

Speaking about the menopause can feel difficult at times. Remember your experiences are important and talking about them is the first step to making change.

If you think you may be perimenopausal or menopausal, speaking to your doctor about treatment options as early as possible can alleviate your symptoms. Your doctor may give you a blood test to measure your hormone levels, or give you a diagnosis based on your symptoms.

It's good to prepare

Before your appointment, jot down any symptoms you've been experiencing, how long they've been going on, and how they're impacting your daily life.

The symptom diary (provided on page 21) is a great way to prepare for an appointment with a doctor about the menopause. This can help you to visualise your symptoms and how regularly you are experiencing them.¹³

Questions are important

Don't be afraid to ask your doctor questions about menopause, its symptoms, and available treatments. You might want to ask about hormone replacement therapy (HRT), alternative therapies, or lifestyle changes that could help.

Everyone is different

Everyone's experience of menopause will be different. It's important to talk to your doctor about the different treatment options available for managing menopause symptoms.

You deserve to be listened to

If you have any questions or concerns after your appointment, don't hesitate to follow up with your doctor. If you feel you would benefit from a different doctor, you can request this. You can also speak with a menopause specialist. They're there to help you navigate this stage of life and support your health and well-being.

You can speak to your doctor about HRT, as it is a great treatment option for a lot of people. You can also ask about alternatives if you do not want to use hormonal treatment.

As well as speaking to your GP or Pharmacist, you can access sexual health and wellbeing resources from sexual health clinics. Here you can get a test, advice on your sexual wellbeing and free resources such as condoms and lube.

Find more information and health and wellbeing resources at:

→ thebha.org.uk

BHA for Equality is part of the PaSH partnership (Passionate about Sexual Health partnership) alongside George House Trust and LGBT Foundation. To find out more about the work of the partnership visit:

→ gmpash.org.uk

You can find a sexual health clinic near you:

→ nhs.uk/service-search/sexual-health/find-a-sexual-health-clinic

Search for Manchester based charities, events and news at:

→ manchestercommunitycentral.org

Symptom Diary

Add your symptoms, the date and time you experienced them and any notes about food or exercise which may have improved or worsened your symptoms.

Date	Time	Symptoms	Notes

Your notes

[illegible]





BHA offers free & confidential sexual health information and advice for Black, Asian and ethnic minority communities. This booklet offers general information on contraceptive methods. If you would like further information & advice, contact us at pash@thebha.org.uk

Further information

Find you nearest sexual health service

→ www.nhs.uk/service-search/sexual-health

Contraceptive choices

→ www.sexwise.org.uk

Mental health support

→ www.mind.org.uk

Advice, support, and information for LGBTQI

→ www.lgbtfoundation

Menopause support

→ www.menopausesupport.org.uk

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