

## Anxiety During The Menopause

The transition into the menopause can be a turbulent time for many women. Declining oestrogen levels and fluctuating FSH levels cause your periods to become erratic, hot flushes to start and your sleep pattern can change too. These and other symptoms can be extremely distressing and for some, anxiety symptoms can begin to set in. Everyone feels anxiety at times it is part of being human, however it is important to note that this can start to take control of your life and stops you doing certain things.

These changes in oestrogen, progesterone, FSH and testosterone in your body can trigger feelings of anxiety and depression. Over 60% of perimenopausal and menopausal women show signs of this with 1 in 9 having extreme anxiety or panic attacks resulting in them stopping driving, going out and in some cases are unable to work. When these levels of anxiety are experienced getting the support needed is crucial in management and working towards recovery.

Some women who have suffered from this level of anxiety have had postnatal depression or PMT type symptoms in the past and research shows this group of women are more likely to have a panic disorder during menopause unfortunately. Symptoms of panic disorders can involve sweating, shortness of breath and palpitations and some women can feel dizzy, sick and experience pins and needles in their body.

Anxiety can affect us in numerous ways such as physical symptoms, emotional, cognitively (how we think) and our behaviour (often avoiding situations).

**Why is this?** Changes in hormone levels and in particular, a drop in oestrogen may influence certain areas of the brain and alter the neurotransmitters and their effect in the brain.

### When it is worth seeking help for anxiety during the menopause?

If you are experiencing depression or anxiety in your relationships, at home or at work and there doesn't seem to be a clear solution to these problems, it is a good idea to speak to a specialist or a doctor about how you are feeling. Having access to the right information is vital, if you are experiencing any of the following:

- You have suicidal thoughts or feelings.
- Your negative thoughts or feelings last more than two weeks.
- You don't have anyone to confide in. If you have no one to share your thoughts with, it's difficult to know if what you are thinking makes sense. A good therapist will offer an invaluable perspective on the issues that are affecting you.

### Hormone replacement therapy can help some mental health problems during the menopause including anxiety.

There is growing evidence to support using hormone therapy to help with emotional symptoms associated with the menopause, although it is not effective in treating more severe mental health conditions alone. In consultations with my patients, we talk about the mental health affects impacting them during their perimenopause and menopause and some of my patients often seek mental health support in the form on counselling to assist them through the menopause too.

## Ways to support your mental health during the menopause

- Exercise regularly and eat healthy. Minimise caffeine intake, reduce alcohol consumption especially if you are using it to 'self medicate'.
- Find a hobby, take up yoga, practice mindfulness and practice 'self-care'.
- Turn to friends, family members or a professional counsellor for support. Stay connected with your partner and family and call on friends to help when needed.
- If you are struggling at work, speak to occupational health or someone in HR. Explain how you are feeling and ask for help and support if needed.

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The changes in oestrogen, progesterone, FSH and testosterone in your body can trigger feelings of anxiety and depression in over 60% of perimenopausal and menopausal women with 1 in 9 Having extreme anxiety or panic attacks that means they stop driving, going out and are unable to work.

Some of my patients who have suffered from this level of anxiety have had postnatal depression or PMT type symptoms in the past and research shows this group of women are more likely to have a panic disorder during menopause unfortunately.

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Why is this? Changes in hormone levels and in particular, a drop in oestrogen may influence certain areas of the brain and alter the neurotransmitters and their effect in the brain.

## When it is worth seeking help for anxiety during the menopause?

When depression or anxiety begins to cause difficulty in your relationships, at home or at work and there doesn't seem to be a clear solution to these problems, it may be worthwhile seeing a doctor. If you're experiencing any of the following, it's a good idea to speak to a specialist about how you're feeling.

- You have suicidal thoughts or feelings.
- Your negative thoughts or feelings last more than two weeks.
- You don't have anyone to confide in. If you have no one to share your thoughts with, it's difficult to know if what you are thinking makes sense. A good therapist will offer an invaluable perspective on the issues that are affecting you.

## Hormone Replacement Therapy

There is growing evidence to support using hormone replacement therapy can help with emotional symptoms associated with the menopause, although it is not effective in treating more severe mental health conditions alone. In consultations with my patients, we talk about the mental health affects impacting them during their perimenopause and menopause and some of my patients often seek additional mental health support in the form on counselling and therapy.