

## When Do I Need Blood Tests During The Perimenopause & Menopause

The most common reason for doing a blood test as part of menopause care is to check baseline hormone levels in the blood. The most common things looked for are levels of Oestradiol, follicle-stimulating hormone and testosterone levels. This is especially important in women under 45.

### Oestradiol

An oestradiol test measures the level of oestrogen in the body. In perimenopausal women, it fluctuates hugely from day to day and even from hour to hour. Checking levels is often not needed when it comes to commencing and monitoring HRT but in women who may be having an early or premature menopause, it is a vital test and should be used to guide treatment.

### Testosterone

Testosterone and Sex Hormone Binding Globulin levels are checked at the same time and used to calculate the Free Androgen Index. This test is needed to decide whether women with hypoactive sexual desire disorder (low libido) or other symptoms of low testosterone may benefit from replacement therapy. It is also vital in the monitoring of testosterone treatment.

### Follicle Stimulating Hormone (FSH)

FSH levels are sometimes checked to help diagnose the menopause in younger women. FSH is a hormone produced by the brain to stimulate the ovaries to produce oestrogen. It is this hormone that contributes significantly to hot flushes. It usually becomes raised when a woman is perimenopausal and menopausal. However, levels of this hormone can fluctuate and while a raised level can be helpful to know about, a lower / 'normal' level doesn't exclude the possibility of you being perimenopausal or menopausal.

## Diagnosing Perimenopause or Menopause

Diagnosis of the perimenopause and menopause is most often diagnosed from clinical symptoms as opposed to blood test results. Hormone levels in the blood can be very misleading as they vary from hour to hour. If a lady is on a certain form of contraception such as the combined pill, FSH levels can sometimes be used to aid diagnosis in these cases.

## Why are hormone levels useful to know?

Oestradiol levels are most useful for checking how well a treatment is working. In women who take an oral replacement, levels can be inaccurate but they can be very useful for women who take transdermal oestrogen who may still be symptomatic and we need to assess a woman's response to oestrogen or are considering a dose increase.

Once we are sure that oestrogen levels are in the correct range, testosterone levels can be used to guide treatment in women if she has symptoms suggestive of testosterone deficiency such as fatigue, memory problems, brain fog, reduced stamina, muscle and joint pains and reduced libido.

In a woman who chooses to try testosterone therapy, Testosterone levels are checked at frequent intervals to ensure levels are kept in the normal range for women and its efficacy is assessed along with how well her symptoms are controlled.

## What are normal ranges?

In most cases, it's beneficial to achieve 'physiological' levels of oestradiol and testosterone, which means levels similar to women who are pre-menopausal but Doctors should be guided by a woman's symptoms and how well she feels on HRT.