

Menopause and Mental Health

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The menopause can be an incredibly difficult time and can have a significant impact both psychologically and physically. It is important that in addition to the physical symptoms we also recognise and feel able to seek support if the menopause is having an impact on our mental health too.

It may be that you are breezing through a problem-free menopause, however most experience some symptoms ranging from mild to severe. Hot flushes are the most common symptom of the menopause, occurring in three in every four menopausal women. Other common symptoms include night sweats, sleeplessness, vaginal dryness, irritated skin, more frequent urinary incontinence and urinary tract infections, low mood, and a reduced interest in sex. Symptoms vary hugely in duration, severity and what impact they have between individuals.

The menopause can also have an impact on our mental health. Psychological symptoms that can be experienced are:

- ✔ Anxiety
- ✔ Depression
- ✔ Sadness
- ✔ Difficulty Concentrating
- ✔ Overreacting To Minor Upset
- ✔ Anger And Irritability
- ✔ Forgetfulness And Mood Swings

We cannot separate our mental health and our physical health; one will always impact on the other. Therefore, if we look at the physical symptoms that occur such as hot flushes this is natural to have a psychological impact too, and the level of this distress differs from person to person. The experience of this physical symptom may lead to us experiencing anxiety about when/where the hot flushes occur which may lead to panic attacks. They may also lead to negative thoughts linked to the changes we're experiencing. If we're having trouble concentrating along with forgetfulness it is understandable for this to increase anxiety or worry which in turn may lead to frustration and low mood.

Sleep is a double-edged sword for our mental health because we can't sleep when we're struggling with our mental health, but equally little or poor sleep makes the management of any symptoms of our mental health increasingly difficult.

It is important whenever we're thinking about how we feel, that we recognise how the physical symptoms we're experiencing may be impacting on us psychologically also. We should also acknowledge any understandable emotions that we may be experiencing linked to this significant change in our lives. There is no right or wrong way to be feeling during this time, and any emotions you may be experiencing are valid.

Know that you're not alone in how you are feeling, and although the menopause is a physical change the impact of menopause on our mental health is very real and that there is support available for both physical and psychological symptoms of the menopause such as

- ✔ **Medications.** Whether this is antidepressants or hormone replacement therapy (HRT) speak to your GP for further advice and support on what may be the most suitable option for you.
- ✔ **Counselling.** Counselling is a safe open space to talk through and process any life changes or difficulties and can also help in finding practical solutions to problems.
- ✔ **Cognitive Behavioural Therapy (CBT).** CBT is a modality of talking therapy and early evidence shows the effectiveness of helping develop coping strategies for the physical symptoms of menopause and increasing wellbeing.
- ✔ **Mindfulness.** Mindfulness is about being present in the moment and concentrating on the here and now. Mindfulness has been proven to reduce symptoms of anxiety, stress and depression.

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It is important that we recognise the impact of the menopause on both physical and mental health. There is support available for both the physical and psychological symptoms of the menopause through medications and talking therapies.

Useful links

- ✔ NHS Choices
- ✔ Women's Health Concern
- ✔ The Menopause Exchange
- ✔ The British Menopause Society
- ✔ The Daisy Network
- ✔ Menopause Matters

References/information for content of leaflet

- ✔ <https://www.menopausematters.co.uk/psychological.php>
- ✔ <https://cks.nice.org.uk/topics/menopause/>
- ✔ <https://www.health.harvard.edu/womens-health/menopause-and-mental-health>
- ✔ Menopause and Mental Health <https://www.rcn.org.uk> > publications > november

