

## COVID-19 and the Menopause

### COVID-19 and the menopause- what is the story?

The COVID-19 pandemic is putting an enormous strain on the NHS. While preparing for the worst, most routine appointments in Primary and Secondary Care have been cancelled for the moment. Severe menopausal symptoms can greatly affect the quality of life of women who suffer from it but they are rarely life-threatening unless they have a very negative effect on their mental health. Therefore it will be very difficult to get a medical appointment at your GP practice or the specialist Menopause Clinic (Tayside Sexual & Reproductive Health Service) over the weeks to come although some practices might still offer telephone or video consultations.

Hot flushes, night sweats, anxiety, depression, mood swings and palpitations are all common menopausal symptoms. Very few of us will feel calm at the moment and the additional stress and anxiety around the COVID-19 crisis might make your symptoms even worse.

### I am suffering from severe menopausal symptoms. I was thinking about starting HRT and now I am struggling to get an appointment with my GP. What can I do?

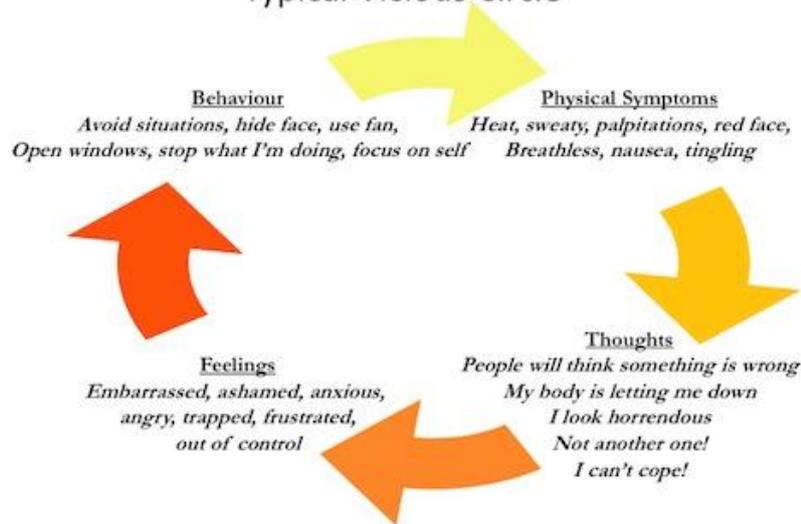
There are quite a few non-medical things you can do to improve your symptoms without taking HRT, in the meantime.

Cutting down alcohol and strong spices and doing regular exercise (preferably at home) has all shown to improve hot flushes, night sweats and insomnia. Check out the latest home exercise programmes on your TV or via YouTube or download a home exercise app to your smart phone or tablet of which many are free! Doing breathing or mindfulness exercises or using relaxation techniques have also shown to help with these symptoms. Again, there are many apps available to download to help you with this and many of those are also free.

Some women find the menopausal supplements you can buy (often very cheaply) at your supermarket very useful. Others find herbal remedies like sage or black cohosh help their symptoms.

Cognitive Behaviour Therapy (CBT) can also be really useful to help to cope with menopausal and is used by women who do not want to use HRT, can't take HRT for medical reasons or their HRT does not relieve their symptoms completely. CBT can give you "tools for life" which are not only very useful to deal with vasomotor symptoms, but also with insomnia, anxiety, depression, sexual problems etc. You might have to invest some time to get your head around the concept but it's definitely worth the effort. Women's Health Concern (the patient arm of the British Menopause Society-BMS) has produced an excellent patient information leaflet (see link under "Resources") which refers to self-help book written by Myra Hunter called "Managing Hot Flushes and Night Sweats: A cognitive behavioural self-help guide to the menopause". Another excellent book, which is easier to read, is: "The Cognitive Behavioural Therapy Workbook for Menopause: A Step-by-Step Program for Overcoming Hot Flashes, Mood Swings, Insomnia, Anxiety, Depression Symptoms" by Sheryl Green. Both books are available to read digitally in Kindle format so you do not have to wait for a delivery which might be delayed.

## Typical Vicious Circle



Mechanical aids like “O2 Cool necklace fan” (or similar), a cooling pillow gel insert like “Chillomax” (or similar) and cooling sprays like “MagiCool” (or similar) can also be really useful. Nonetheless, they might be difficult to get hold of should deliveries be concentrating on more essential goods over the next few weeks.

You could also use this time to have a good look through the websites and patient information leaflets listed below under “resources” to make an informed choice about starting HRT once routine menopause appointments will be offered again at your GP or at the Specialist Menopause Clinic.

**I am already on HRT for severe menopausal symptoms and/or because I entered the menopause early. Now I am running out of medicine and can't get hold of my GP to prescribe more. What can I do?**

You could request an online repeat prescription of your current method on your GP Practice website, ideally to be sent directly to your local pharmacy.

If this is not an option and your GP practice has sent your prescriptions to your local pharmacy in the past, your pharmacy might be able to issue you with an “emergency prescription” on their own accord, asking your GP to prescribe your HRT in retrospect.

If you were seen in our Specialist Menopause Clinic in the past twelve months we might be able to send you an HRT prescription via recorded delivery. Please contact us in this case to discuss this.

## Resources

[NHS Tayside Menopause and HRT](#)

[NHS Tayside Premature Ovarian Insufficiency](#)

## Women's Health Concern

Website: [www.womens-health-concern.org](http://www.womens-health-concern.org)

Patient arm of the British Menopause Society (BMS) – excellent fact sheets, including info about CBT and Alternative Therapies

**Royal College of Obstetricians and Gynaecologists (RCOG)**

Website: [www.rcog.org.uk/en/patients/menopause/](http://www.rcog.org.uk/en/patients/menopause/)  
Menopause Hub with lots of information for patients

**Menopause Matters**

Website: [www.menopausematters.co.uk](http://www.menopausematters.co.uk)  
Website run by a Scottish menopause specialist – includes discussion forum

**The Menopause Exchange**

Website: [www.menopause-exchange.co.uk/index.htm](http://www.menopause-exchange.co.uk/index.htm)  
Another UK based website about the menopause run by health care professionals

**National Osteoporosis Society**

Website: [www.nos.org.uk](http://www.nos.org.uk)  
Downloadable factsheets about calcium-rich diet, healthy living, etc.

**The Daisy Network**

Website: [www.daisynetwork.org.uk](http://www.daisynetwork.org.uk)  
Premature Ovarian Insufficiency (Menopause) support organisation

**Sexual Advice Association**

Website: [www.sexualadviceassociation.co.uk](http://www.sexualadviceassociation.co.uk)  
Professional site with fact sheets about low sex drive, etc.

**Tayside Sexual & Reproductive Health**

**Telephone (central line): 01382 425542**

**(Mon- Fri, 9AM- 12 PM) (hours might be extended, depending on demand)**