



M E N O P A U S E

Menopause is a natural process that happens to all women when hormone production declines, usually between the age of forty-eight and fifty-two. It really is a design fault because our ovaries only last until then. Historically, it wasn't a problem as average life expectancy in 1895 was forty-three years. It is now double that. Back then, there was no menopause at all. Now, we know enough about what's going on at this time to be able to top up the hormones that the body is no longer making.

Why do this?

For two main reasons:

- 1** To improve the symptoms that are arising because of low hormones levels. Things like hot flushes, insomnia, vaginal dryness, depression, and anxiety to name but a few.
- 2** To prevent long-term conditions which are caused by low levels of hormones, such as heart disease, osteoporosis, and diabetes.

Is it safe?

The hormones prescribed are safe and do not cause cancer. All studies show that synthetic progestogen is the culprit within hormone replacement therapy (HRT). It is the cause of ALL the issues with which HRT has been associated, such as increased risk of blood clots, cancer, and strokes. We never prescribe synthetic progestogen.



How are hormones given

We prescribe hormones in one of two ways. Most people will be given medication that is available from high street pharmacies. Here, each hormone is given separately.

Oestrogen is prescribed as a patch, pill, gel, or vaginal cream or tablet. They are equally safe. What you are given will be down to personal choice, as well as your doctor's recommendations.

Progesterone is given as a capsule, usually Utrogestan. Some women, including those who are allergic to soy or peanuts, do not tolerate this preparation. Others experience side effects such as vivid dreams, feeling groggy, or headaches. If this happens to you then contact your doctor who will prescribe an alternative. There is no alternative on the NHS, aside from the same preparation administered vaginally.

Testosterone is given as a cream. Either Androfeme which you should not use if you have an almond allergy, or a pump-action tube from one of our specialist pharmacies. A pea-size amount should be applied to the upper buttock area five to seven times a week and you should not notice any side effects. If you do, they may include spots, greasy skin, and hair loss. This will be related to the dose you have been given, so be sure to let your doctor know.

Dhea is an adrenal hormone that declines with age. It gives you energy, motivation, and concentration. If levels are low, you will be given Dhea capsules which are unlikely to cause side effects. If you notice spots on your face or hair loss, you should let your doctor know.

Tests and scans

You will be asked to have a pelvic scan once a year whilst on treatment. This enables us to assess your ovaries and ensure that your womb lining is healthy. We will also check that your mammograms are up to date.



Bespoke preparations

If for any reason you are unable to tolerate standard hormone medications, you will be given ones made in the MHRA licensed pharmacy – PCCA, or in one of our other pharmacies. Here, all the hormones will be combined together in a lozenge or rapid dissolving tablet.

If prescribed the lozenge, you will need to cut the square into quarters, which is easy to do. You will usually start by taking one quarter of the lozenge each morning. If you don't experience any breast tenderness you may then be instructed to increase your dose to half a lozenge each day, taking one quarter in the morning, and one quarter in the evening.

Common side effects include breast tenderness, bloating, and spots and if you do experience these things, it will usually be at the start of your treatment. If this happens, stop the treatment until the symptoms subside and then start again, but do make your doctor aware.

Other hormones you may have been prescribed

Melatonin – a hormone made in the pineal gland in the brain that declines with age. It is responsible for circadian rhythms in the body and will be prescribed by your doctor if clinically beneficial to you. This is given in capsule form. You are unlikely to have any side effects, but it can make you feel groggy in the morning or bring about vivid dreams.

Pregnenolone – this hormone may be prescribed for you if you are over sixty-five years old. It rarely has any side effects.

The long-term

Some women choose to take HRT for life, whilst others decide to stop taking it. There really is no danger in taking HRT for the long-term and it does, in fact, have many health benefits, promoting brain, heart, and bone health. If you choose to stop HRT, you should do this in stages and after consultation with your doctor.

The purpose of HRT is to make you feel like your 'old self' with no side effects or downsides. It can take up to four weeks for symptoms to settle down after starting treatment, but at no point should you feel terrible. Remember we are here to help if you need us.