Menopause Symptoms People Don’t Talk About

by AFRA WILLMORE

Lesser Known Symptoms of Menopause

You might think you know what to expect when it comes to the menopause, but like pregnancy, the reality can be very different to what you have gleaned from television.

The trouble is that apart from wry jokes about hot flashes most women don’t talk about their own menopause, so some of the more personal symptoms might come as a nasty surprise when it’s your turn to navigate this change of life. Therefore, it's important to educate yourself on the lesser known symptoms of menopause; if you know what to expect, you will feel more confident and know you're not alone.

Vaginal Dryness

For instance most women (and men) might not appreciate that perimenopause and menopause can have a drastic effect on your love life and sex drive.

As estrogen levels decrease you might find your intimate area becomes dry and remains so, despite the best efforts of your partner. And since relaxation is so crucial to a successful love life, the longer the problem persists the more tense you can get – making sex at best difficult and at worst impossible.

The problem can be solved quickly and simply in a number of ways. Firstly, prioritize relaxation, leaving plenty of time to be intimate and ensuring you are fully comfortable.

Use lubricants if you can’t relax enough or consider asking your doctor about topical hormones, which can be delivered as a small pessary, or hormone replacement therapy (HRT) through patches, tablets or implants. These could also help restore natural lubrication.

Self-Esteem Struggles

Some women suffer with self-image during this time, feeling old or hating the physical changes so much they begin to feel undesirable.

Tackle each issue, like dry skin, weight gain and hair thinning (or even loss), individually. Ask your doctor for help if necessary and treat yourself to a menopause makeover, with new makeup and skincare products to help your self-image and new underwear if you find your breasts droop or lose their fullness.

Unexpected Pregnancy

While we are in the bedroom area, did you know that you can get still get pregnant after a diagnosis of perimenopause?

You might think that because your periods are irregular or even seem to have stopped, that you cannot get pregnant. Although statistically much less likely, it is not impossible – so unless you would be happy with a “menopause baby” you should take contraceptive precautions.

While your hormones are fluctuating you may occasionally ovulate, and doctors advise using contraceptives until you have completed at least one full year without a period – at which point you have officially reached menopause.

Panic Attacks and Heart Palpitations

Other often distressing and lesser known symptoms of menopause (especially perimenopause) are panic attacks and heart palpitations.

Lots of previously confident women suddenly find they become unexpectedly anxious or suffer panic attacks for the first time in their lives.

This can go hand in hand with heart palpitations, which might manifest as a fluttering sensation in the chest, knocking or feeling like your heart is missing a beat every now and again. This in itself can set off panic attacks!

The reason for this side effect is disputed, but many experts believe it is down to the decrease in the calming hormone progesterone.

Some women also find they notice an increase in tension headaches as their hormone levels fall.

Obviously it’s important not to assume any heart-related symptoms are caused by the menopause. If you experience any cardiac symptoms seek medical assistance. It’s worth feeling a little foolish to have reassurance you that nothing life-threatening is happening to you.

Once it has been established that there are no underlying cardiac issues you should make a follow-up appointment with your doctor to discuss if there are any medications that might help.

Alternatively, you could explore relaxation techniques like yoga or meditation you could use to keep calmer generally and to use when a panic attack strikes to minimise its duration and severity.

Skin Sensations

A really unexpected side effect of the menopause is unusual skin sensations. Some women complain their skin becomes much drier, while others say their skin becomes itchy or even that they feel like ants are crawling under it. Others suffer unexplained pins and needles.

These weird and little-known sensations are caused by our old friend estrogen again – falling levels can leave your skin thinner and dryer.

Eating a diet rich in omega-3 fatty acids, including foods like salmon, walnuts and fortified eggs, can help your skin stay healthy. Drinking plenty of water can help, too. If this doesn’t resolve the issue it might be worth considering HRT.

It’s definitely worth mentioning any skin sensations to your doctor, as they could be caused by underlying medical conditions.

In fact, it is always worthwhile mentioning any symptoms that you have to your doctor. Although the menopause does throw up some surprises, it would be dangerous to assume that any change in your health or well-being is down to the fluctuating hormones.

Your doctor will not mind reassuring you, or ordering tests to rule out any other possible medical issues. Better to

be safe than sorry.