Tips for Talking to Your Doctor About Menopause

by AFRA WILLMORE

Menopause Appointments: What to Talk About With Your Doctor

It was not so long ago that women never spoke openly about anything private and personal. From menstruation to menopause, anything involving the lower regions of the body was strictly taboo, which is why we are going to talk about menopause appointments, so you know how to approach your doctor with questions and concerns.

It’s no wonder that even now, not too many years past, the era when a lady never spoke of anything from the bedroom or bathroom, that many women still find it difficult to do so.

Or maybe they can talk to friends, but unless their circle of friends includes an OBGYN, it can be less than helpful or possibly even harmful.

Old wives' tales about hormone replacement therapy, symptoms, and remedies could leave women suffering unnecessarily or even passing off symptoms as “just the menopause” when they might signify something more serious.

Take bleeding during menopause for instance. In most cases, it is simply a hormonal anomaly but occasionally it can be caused by a serious or even life-threatening condition.

How to Find a Doctor

It’s important to find someone you trust and feel comfortable with. Maybe you like a compassionate informal approach or maybe you prefer brisk and business-like.

It may be that the primary care physician or OBGYN who has cared for you so far in life may be perfectly qualified or suitable to continue with your perimenopause and menopause care.

Maybe ask if they have undertaken ongoing menopause training, or a particular interest in the subject. If not, they can probably refer you to someone more suitable.

Alternatively, the North American Menopause Society (NAMS) has a useful tool to help you find a menopause practitioner or healthcare provider. The American Medical Association has a similar “Find A Doctor” tool.

Check with your insurance provider. They should have a list of approved specialists who will be covered under your insurance scheme.

Ask your friends. A recommendation is always great but be aware some of what makes a great doctor is linked to how your personalities work together so what is great for one person is awful for another.

If you are horrified at the thought of speaking to a male doctor, make sure you will always have access to female

doctors even at a busy clinic.

Making an Initial Appointment

Book a slightly longer appointment than usual.

If this is an appointment with a new doctor be aware that some doctors may waive the charge for a “getting to know you” appointment.

If you are keen on alternative therapies, ask how they feel about them. Ask what tests they would do to monitor hormone levels, how many patients they schedule each day and how much time each patient is allocated. Ask if they have a chaperone service for intimate exams.

You could also ask about how after-hours services work and if there is the option to call during office hours.

Being Brave

So you have found a doctor you like and who is qualified. But they cannot help if you are too embarrassed to be truthful about your concerns and symptoms.

You might find it helpful to make a written list of symptoms you’d like to discuss, and any questions you have about tests or treatments.

If you cannot say the words out loud, hand over the list and explain that you find it difficult to talk about such personal issues. A good doctor will go out of their way to make you feel more comfortable.

The big thing to remember is that these are trained professionals who will not judge you. They’ve almost certainly seen and heard it all before.

You might be okay asking about hot flashes, but too shy to ask about any sexual issues you might be having. Don’t suffer in silence – be brave and ask.

Anxiety, mood swings, and depression are other subjects some women feel are either taboo or do not realize could be hormone related.

It’s important to mention any low feelings to your doctor as they may be helped through counseling, lifestyle changes or medication.

Phone a Friend

If the thought of speaking to the doctor yourself fills you with horror, or you are worried you will not “hear” their responses because of your embarrassment, stress or anxiety, find a close friend or family member to go with you.

Sometimes just having them with you in the waiting area can keep you calm enough to be able to cope with the appointment alone.

Sometimes though four ears are better than two so if you feel comfortable taking your partner, daughter or bestie actually into the office, do it so you know you have a full and accurate recall of the advice.

Be Informed

Go online, check out books at the library or pick up information leaflets at the clinic. Educate yourself about the basics of menopause so you can better understand tests and treatments your physician may suggest.

Menopause is generally a slow-moving beast so you pretty much always have time to go away and research and/or think about suggested treatments.

Many women swear by hormone replacement therapy whereas others want to avoid this kind of intervention at all costs. It’s a very personal decision.

You do not have to obey the doctor blindly although it is wise to take it on board. If you feel you are being led down a path you aren’t sure about, treatment wise, it is okay to get a second opinion.

Just be careful about believing everything you see on the internet – while one blog or Facebook ad may swear that if you ingest their specially harvested seaweed and vanilla capsules at midnight (Just $400 for a months supply) while wearing a special red hat (and extra $350) it will cure hot flashes, it might be that your doctor’s recommendations might be more reliable.

On the other hand, if you would prefer a less medicalized route, ensure the expert you consult is qualified and registered to be giving advice.