Menopause and Anger

by AFRA WILLMORE

The Connection Between Menopause and Anger

Just when you think your age and the hormonal changes to your body mean you can wave a grateful goodbye to PMS, you learn that a similar issue can be part of your menopause journey.

This is not just bad news for you – it can be very bad news for your friends and family, depending on whether your roller coastering hormones present you with slightly increased levels of irritation, or Incredible Hulk-style personality changes.

I find it weird how these hormone-driven rages can come over me. In my case, when I was younger I suffered less with what you could describe as PMS than outright inexplicable fury, and the same goes for my menopause anger. It's like I'm observing someone else ranting and raving, and I am fully aware of how unreasonable I am being most of the time. I want to stop the fury emitting from my mouth, but all I can do is let it run its course, then apologize profusely afterwards, citing my hormones yet again.

Sometimes my husband says it's quite amusing – I have taken to shouting at the TV and writing letters to editors expressing my anger over something I have seen in the news. Let's put it this way –tolerance is not my middle name at the moment! He's less amused when my unreasonable roars are directed at him for no particular reason apart from that he is there.

When you learn that almost half of all menopausal women report mood swings and anger among their symptoms, it's a wonder the divorce rate isn't even higher than it already is! And the moods are generally triggered by seemingly insignificant events. Woe betide the man in your life who leaves the toilet seat up, or the person who forgets to wash up or take their PE kit to school.

Anger might not be your main emotion – you might feel powerless, sad, weepy or just "not yourself."

It probably doesn't really help to know that the mood swings are caused by fluctuating seratonin – the chemical in the brain which controls emotion. When you want to strangle the slow waitress or you suddenly develop all-consuming road rage when someone forgets to indicate, you are probably more concerned about treating the symptoms. Read this quickly, before you batter your partner with the mug they placed on the coffee table WITHOUT A COASTER!

Next page: getting your rage under control.

Getting Your Rage Under Control

Decreasing the frequency and severity of mood swings can be achieved sometimes with simple lifestyle changes. Get more sleep, eat a nutritious diet with regular small meals, and maybe think about adding dietary supplements

suitable for menopausal women if you know your diet isn't the best. The jury is out on the effectiveness of such supplements but they are available, so they're worth a try if all else fails.

Ensuring I **eat little and often** works for me – I find myself reacting negatively to comments and situations much more regularly when I am hungry. If this is true for you too, start carrying low GI snacks with you to keep sugar levels stable.

Try dried apricots, air-popped popcorn (without sugary or salty toppings), grapes, an apple or a handful of peanuts- even a few chocolate covered peanuts are better than many high sugar and fat treats like doughnuts. A family-sized bag of sweet treats or a giant white-flour muffin might make you feel happy and satisfied for a short while but the sugar high and subsequent plummeting low will just make things worse in the long run! In the supermarket many packaged products may have GI (glycemic index) ratings on the bag or box. Aim for foodstuffs with a GI rating of 55 or less.

Exercise is well known to reduce PMS, and it can also work for menopause-related mood swings, lifting your mood by flooding your body with feel-good endorphins. Exercising will also help you get a better night's sleep, as long as you make sure you allow around two hours before bedtime to wind down.

If high impact isn't your thing, try **relaxation techniques** like yoga or tai chi, meditation or massage. I always walk away from my tai chi class feeling calmer and more ready to face the niggles of the day.

There are also **drugs** available – selective seratonin re-uptake inhibitors (SSRIs) – which may work even if you don't feel you are particularly depressed. HRT may help too, by regulating the hormones in your body. It's a personal choice but I found that both of these options helped me not just with anger and anxiety but with other symptoms and medical issues unrelated to menopause. As always, go and chat to your healthcare provider for the best advice based on your individual circumstances.

A simple solution might be just to **talk about how you feel**. Find a qualified counsellor, search for a menopause support group in your area or online, or just meet up with some good friends and open up. Realizing that you are not alone trying to cope on this strange new journey often helps.