

Women's Health Matters

Factsheet



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Facts about women's health

While both men and women can contract medical conditions, some health issues affect women differently and are more common.

Women bear exclusive health concerns, such as various cancers, menopause, and pregnancy. And many women's health conditions, such as endometriosis can go undiagnosed.

- Women are twice as likely as men to get multiple sclerosis, rheumatoid arthritis, migraines and irritable bowel syndrome
- Although men have more heart attacks, women are more likely to die within one year of having one
- Women experience depression and anxiety twice as often as men
- 80% of hip fractures each year occur in women
- Urinary tract conditions are more common in women
- Sexually transmitted diseases can cause more harm to women



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Understanding menopause

Menopause is when a woman stops having periods and is no longer able to get pregnant naturally. It's a permanent phase of a women's life which incorporates the peri and post phases.

Periods usually start to become less frequent over a few months or years before they stop altogether, but sometimes they can stop suddenly.

Menopause symptoms

Most women will experience menopausal symptoms. Some of which can be quite severe and have a significant impact on everyday activities. Common symptoms include:

- Hot flushes
- Night sweats
- Vaginal dryness and discomfort during sex
- Difficulty sleeping
- Low mood or anxiety
- Reduced sex drive
- Problems with memory and concentration
- Headaches
- Palpitations

Menopausal symptoms can begin months or even years before your periods stop and last around 4 years after your last period, although some can women experience them for much longer.



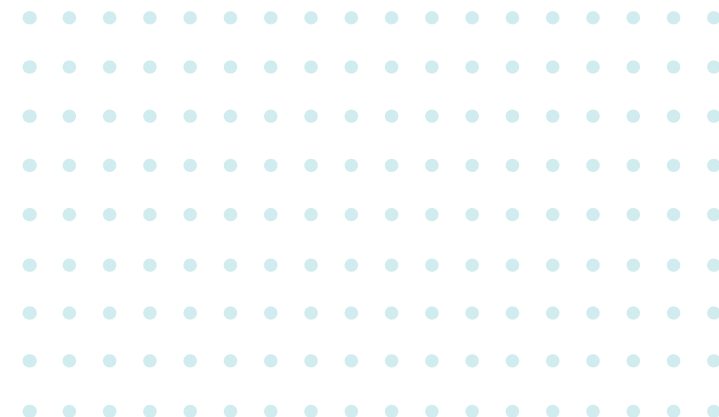
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Combat menopause symptoms

| Health complaint | What you can do to help |
|---|--|
| Decreased muscle mass and bone strength | <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Avoid smoking and excessive alcohol• Do regular weight-bearing exercise (such as walking and jogging) and strength training (such as lifting weights and push ups)• Boost your vitamin D levels with daily doses of sunlight• Eat foods containing calcium, phosphorus, potassium, magnesium and vitamins D and K. For example, milk, yogurt and cheese• Eat foods high in protein, such as eggs, meat, fish, legumes and dairy |
| Poor sleep, hot flushes and night sweats | <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Wear light clothing• Keep your bedroom cool at night• Take a cool shower, use a fan or have a cold drink• Try to reduce your stress levels• Avoid spicy food, sugar, caffeine, smoking and alcohol• Exercise regularly• Lose weight if you're overweight• Eat foods containing omega 3 fatty acids such as mackerel, salmon, flax seeds and chia seeds• Consume food and drink high in the amino acid glycine, such as milk and cheese |
| Mood swings and anxiety | <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Get plenty of rest• Exercise regularly• Take part in relaxing activities like tai chi and yoga• Try CBT therapy |
| Oestrogen decline | <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Phytoestrogens are compounds in foods that can act as weak oestrogens in your body. Foods that naturally contain phytoestrogens include soybeans, chickpeas, peanuts, flax seeds, barley, grapes, berries, plums and green and black tea |

If you have menopausal symptoms that are troubling you or if you're experiencing symptoms of the menopause before you're 45, have a chat with your doctor.

They may prescribe Hormone Replacement Therapy (HRT) which involves taking oestrogen to replace the decline in your body's own levels. This can relieve many of the associated symptoms.



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Keep well with kegel

Pelvic floor exercises (sometimes known as kegels) strengthen the muscles around your bladder, bottom, and vagina. The moves can help urinary incontinence, improve sex, and treat pelvic organ prolapse. Everyone can benefit from doing them.

The exercises involve contracting and relaxing the muscles of your pelvic floor, which holds your uterus and bladder in place above your vagina.

- Always try to do kegel exercises with an empty bladder
- Aim to hold your contractions for two to three seconds and then release
- Once you've got the hang of the technique, try to do five sets of 10 repetitions each day while performing routine tasks such as driving or sitting at your desk

You can feel your pelvic floor muscles if you try to stop the flow of urine when you go to the toilet.

Trying for a baby

Infertility means not being able to get pregnant naturally, and then requiring investigations and treatment to conceive.

Conceiving (getting pregnant) happens quickly for some women, but for others it can take a while. About eight in 10 couples conceive naturally within a year and nine in 10 couples within two years, if they have unprotected sex every two or three days.

If there's a medical condition causing your infertility, then you may have symptoms. This includes conditions such as polycystic ovary syndrome (PCOS), endometriosis or an infection.

If you have any of the following symptoms, you should see your doctor.

- Irregular periods, no periods or heavy bleeding during your period
- Pain in your pelvis
- Painful periods
- Pain when you have sex or bleeding after you have sex
- Having excessive facial hair and acne (spots)

Boost your fertility



Have sex regularly, every two or three days



If you regularly drink alcohol, try to cut down to no more than one or two units a couple of times a week



If you're overweight, losing some weight may help. If your body mass index (BMI) is 30 or over, then losing weight is likely to increase your chances of getting pregnant



If you're underweight, with a BMI of less than 19 and your periods aren't regular, then gaining weight is likely to help you conceive



If you smoke, stop

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Health issues that mostly affect women

Polycystic ovary syndrome (PCOS)

A common condition that affects how a woman's ovaries work.

The three main features of PCOS are:

- Irregular periods – which means your ovaries don't regularly release eggs (ovulation)
- Excess androgen – high levels of "male" hormones in your body, which may cause physical signs such as excess facial or body hair
- Polycystic ovaries – your ovaries become enlarged and contain many fluid-filled sacs (follicles) that surround the eggs

If you have at least two of these features, you may be diagnosed with PCOS.

Thyroid problems

Your thyroid produces the thyroid hormone, which controls many activities in your body, including how fast you burn calories and how fast your heart beats. Diseases of the thyroid cause it to make either too much or too little of the hormone.

Depending on how much hormone your thyroid makes, you may often feel restless or tired, or you may lose or gain weight. It can cause problems with periods, getting pregnant and problems during pregnancy.

Women are five to eight times more likely than men to have thyroid problems, especially right after pregnancy and after the menopause.



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Endometriosis

The tissue that normally lines the uterus grows outside the uterus, on ovaries, fallopian tubes or in severe cases even the bladder, kidneys, intestines and rectum. It can start as early as a girl's first period and last through menopause.

Endometriosis affects an estimated 1 in 10 women during their reproductive years, which is approximately 176 million women around the world.

Women with endometriosis can experience mild to severe pelvic pain, very heavy periods, internal cysts and often find it difficult to get or stay pregnant.

Overlapping symptoms

There are many overlapping symptoms of endometriosis and thyroid dysfunction. These include:

- Abdominal cramps
- Painful bowel movement
- Fatigue
- Poor sleep quality
- Feeling down
- Difficulty becoming pregnant

Because of the symptoms, both thyroid dysfunction and endometriosis can be mistaken as nothing or something else entirely.

Autoimmune diseases

These occur when the body's immune system becomes misdirected and attacks the organs it was designed to protect.

They are a group of more than 100 illnesses that involve almost every human organ system. Approximately 80% of all patients diagnosed with autoimmune diseases are women.

Some of the most common autoimmune diseases

- Thyroid diseases
- Psoriasis
- Type 1 diabetes
- Inflammatory bowel disease
- Rheumatoid arthritis
- Lupus
- Multiple sclerosis

Each disease is unique, but many share these symptoms

- Fatigue
- Dizziness
- Difficulty concentrating
- Low-grade fever
- Numbness and tingling in the hands and feet
- Hair loss
- Skin changes or rashes

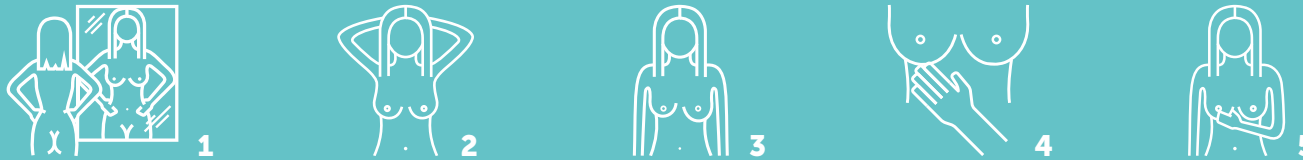
With all these conditions, if you're worried, speak to your doctor. Many of the symptoms can be treated.

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Get to know your boobs and moobs (yes, men too)

In the UK, 1 in 7 women will experience breast cancer in their lifetime and 400 men are diagnosed every year. It's the most common cancer in the UK, but over a quarter of cases are preventable.

Knowing your boobs and moobs could save your life so it's important to regularly check yourself. At the beginning of each month for example.



1. Look at your breasts in the mirror, with your hands on your hips
2. Raise your arms above your head and look again
3. Lean forward, so there's a pendulum effect in your breasts. Look at them again
4. Next, feel your breasts while lying down, using your right hand to feel your left breast and then your left hand to feel your right breast. Use a firm, smooth touch with the first three finger pads of your hand, keeping the fingers flat and together. Using a circular motion, check the entire breast from top to bottom, side to side — from your collarbone to the top of your abdomen, and from your armpit to your cleavage
5. Finally, feel your breasts while you are standing or sitting. Many women find that the easiest way to feel their breasts is when their skin is wet and slippery, for example, in the shower

Signs and symptoms of breast cancer

- Dimpling and puckering of the skin can look like orange peel
- Swelling in your armpit or around your collarbone
- Lumps and thickening. Some boobs are naturally lumpy and this is normal. Get to know your normal, so you notice if something changes
- Constant, unusual pain in your breast or armpit. Some breast pain can be normal, especially around your period. But keep an eye on it
- Nipple discharge
- A sudden, unusual change in size or shape.
- Nipple inversion, or a change to its position or shape
- A rash or crusting of the nipple or surrounding area

If in doubt, get it checked out with your doctor.

Further help and information

[Breast Cancer UK](#)

[Breast Cancer Now](#)

[CoppaFeel](#)

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What you need to know about Cervical Cancer

What is it?

Cervical cancer develops in a woman's cervix (the entrance to the womb from the vagina).

Symptoms

- If you do have symptoms these can be abnormal vaginal bleeding: during or after sex, between periods and new bleeding after menopause. This does not mean you have cervical cancer but should consult your GP as soon as possible
- Discharge of abnormal amounts, colour or smell
- Urinating more frequently
- Pain when urinating
- Pelvic pains

Protecting yourself

- Best protection method for cervical cancer is attending regular smear tests!
- Every woman between 25-65 yrs are invited to have a smear test
- Every 3 years from 25-49 yrs
- Every 5 years 50-64 yrs
- HPV causes a majority of cervical cancers. Certain strains of the virus cause normal cervical cells to become abnormal. Over the course of years or even decades, these cells can become cancerous



75% of cervical cancers can be prevented by screening

Cervical cancer often has NO SYMPTOMS in the early stages, or can be confused with urinary tract infection, yeast infection or menstrual cycle

A smear test lasts 5 minutes...

The impact of cervical cancer lasts a lifetime.

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