

How to Chat With Your GP: Info Sheet

If you think you might be going through perimenopause or menopause, and it's starting to affect your daily life, it's a good idea to book an appointment with your doctor or a menopause specialist. Most of the time, your GP or the practice nurse will be your first point of contact, but it's always worth asking if there's someone at your surgery who knows a bit more about menopause. Some areas have specialist menopause clinics, but they can be rare. Usually, your GP will manage your menopause care unless your medical history is particularly complicated.

Getting Ready for Your Appointment

If your surgery offers longer appointments, it's worth booking one so you've got enough time to chat about your symptoms and any worries you might have. Before your appointment, take a look at a list of menopausal symptoms and note down which ones you're experiencing. Also, jot down any changes to your periods and make a list of any medications or supplements you're taking. It's a good idea to write down any questions or concerns too, so you don't forget to bring them up. If you're feeling a bit nervous, you can always bring a friend or family member along for support.

Your First Appointment

During your first appointment, your doctor should chat with you about:

- The stages of menopause
- Common symptoms
- How menopause is diagnosed
- Lifestyle changes that might help
- The pros and cons of treatment
- How menopause can affect your long-term health

Your doctor might suggest a blood test to check your hormone levels, but it's not always needed since these can change throughout the day. Most women can start HRT (hormone replacement therapy) without any tests. Sometimes, though, your doctor might do some tests to rule out other issues, like an underactive thyroid, and they'll probably check your blood pressure too.

If you're interested in HRT and think it could help, it's a good idea to ask for a prescription during your first appointment. Many women find HRT beneficial, and you can start it during perimenopause. There's usually no age limit for starting HRT, so even if it's been a while since your menopause, you might still be able to take it.

Try to leave the appointment with as many of your questions answered as possible. Ask if your doctor has any leaflets or information you can take home, and check if you need to book a follow-up appointment. NICE guidelines recommend a review three months after starting treatment, but don't hesitate to ask for an earlier review if you're having side effects or if the treatment doesn't seem to be working.

What if My Doctor or Nurse Won't Prescribe HRT?

Here are some tips if you're having trouble getting HRT:

- Let your doctor know what you want to discuss either before your appointment or right at the start. This helps ensure you make the most of your time together.
- Be informed about your rights as a patient. Doctors are more likely to consider your views if you can show you understand the risks and explain why you believe the benefits of the treatment outweigh them for you.
- Be persistent, but polite. If you don't get the outcome you want at first, try again later. You can ask to see another doctor in the practice.

When talking to your doctor about menopause, it's best to clearly explain why you want a certain treatment, what information led you to this decision, and that you understand the risks but still believe it's the right choice for you. You might need to repeat this information to different doctors or nurses, but being persistent and making a well-thought-out case often pays off.

Getting a Second Opinion

Some doctors and healthcare professionals may still refer to earlier studies that suggested a link between hormone replacement therapy (HRT) and an increased risk of cancer, blood clots, and heart problems, which could make them cautious about prescribing it. However, more recent evidence has refined understanding of these risks, and HRT is considered a safe and effective treatment for many women, when appropriately tailored to their individual medical needs.

If HRT is suitable for you, but there is hesitancy about prescribing it, it may be helpful to seek a second opinion. You can request to see another healthcare professional at your practice or ask for a referral to a specialist.

Additionally, private menopause clinics are an option to consider. The British Menopause Society maintains a register of accredited menopause specialists in the UK, and the International Menopause Society is a useful resource for those outside the UK.