

How to ask your GP for help

If you suspect that you're perimenopausal or menopausal, and your symptoms have started to interfere with your quality of life, it's a good idea to make an appointment to see your doctor or a healthcare professional who specialises in the menopause.

In most cases, your first point of contact will be your GP or the practice nurse at your local surgery – but it's always worth asking there's a particular person who specialises in the menopause. Some areas have specialist menopause clinics, but these are few and far between. Unless you have a complex medical history, your menopause care is likely to be managed by your GP.

Preparing for your appointment

If your local surgery offers double appointments it's a good idea to book one of these so that you'll have enough time to discuss your symptoms and concerns. Before your appointment, take a look at our Symptom Checker [link here] and fill out our checklist / questionnaire [link here] to record the menopausal symptoms that you're experiencing.

Make a note of any changes to your periods, and bring a list of any medications that you're taking, including herbal supplements. It's also wise to jot down any questions or concerns, so that you don't forget to mention them during your appointment. If you're feeling anxious, you can bring along a friend or family member for moral support.

Your first appointment

According to the 2015 NICE menopause guidelines, your doctor should discuss the following:

- the stages of menopause
- common symptoms of the menopause
- how the menopause is diagnosed
- lifestyle changes that can help your health and wellbeing

- benefits and risks of treatment
- how the menopause can affect your future health

Your doctor may want to carry out blood tests to check your hormone levels, but this isn't usually necessary as these can vary by the hour. Sometimes your doctor may want to carry out blood tests to rule out other underlying issues, such as an underactive thyroid, and they will also check your blood pressure.

Try to leave the room with as many questions answered as possible, ask if your doctor has any leaflets or information they can share with you, and check if you need a follow-up appointment. NICE guidelines recommend a review three months after your first appointment, but you should ask for an earlier review if you are experiencing side effects or the treatment doesn't seem to be working.

A second opinion

Unfortunately, some doctors and healthcare professionals still believe outdated reports that HRT is linked to cancer, blood clots and heart problems, so they're reluctant to prescribe it. If there's no medical reason why HRT is unsuitable for you, then it's important to speak up and, if necessary, ask for a second opinion.

You could ask to speak to another healthcare professional at your surgery, or ask to be referred to a specialist. Alternatively, you could refer yourself to a private menopause clinic. In the UK, the British Menopause Society has a register of recognised menopause specialists at thebms.org.uk. If you live outside the UK, you can contact the International Menopause Society imsociety.org.