

# Relationships and Sex

As Perimenopausal and menopausal symptoms can affect women in many different ways, and mental and physical symptoms can often be very detrimental to relationships, but there are solutions, including hormone replacement therapy, discussed below.

The divorce rate peaks at the time of perimenopause, when most women are in their late forties, and the more women and their partners know about the symptoms they are facing, the more likely a relationship will survive and even change and flourish.

The changes in hormone levels that occur in our bodies during the perimenopause can often lead to mood swings and symptoms of anxiety and depression. Many women feel they become irritable with the smallest of triggers, which can often lead to arguments and their partner.

## Loss of libido:

Hormonal changes, especially in our testosterone levels, can lead to levels of libido (sex drive) reducing. Many women say that they still love their partner but are no longer interested in sex – they purely “go through the motions” to please their partners.

## Night sweats:

Night sweats can be unbearable and alarmingly frequent. It can be common for women to have to change their bedclothes and the bed sheets at least once a night, often every night. Even if they don't have to do this, they often describe the duvet needing to be flipped back when they are hot, only for it to be pulled back by their freezing partner. So it is not just menopausal women who have disrupted sleep – their partners often do too.

## Vaginal dryness:

The low levels of oestrogen that occur can cause the tissues around your vagina to become thinner, dryer and inflamed. Your vagina may then shrink a little and

expand less easily during sex making sexual intercourse more painful or uncomfortable. Your vulva (the external genitals; labia, clitoris and the entrance to your vagina), may become thin, dry and itchy. You may notice that your vulva or vagina has become red and sore. None of these changes are conducive to a healthy, active sex life.

## Your not alone:

The overwhelming fatigue that many women experience, the loss of confidence, hot flushes and memory problems that can also occur really can have a negative effect on their relationships.

This all sounds really depressing but it is so important to know that there are many treatments available to help with these symptoms. These treatments include talking about the menopause and knowing you are not alone.

## Can HRT help?

Taking hormone replacement therapy (HRT), even for a short time, can help. There are many different types and doses of HRT available so it is important to find one that suits you, preferably including a transdermal patch or gel which is associated with low risks.

Testosterone is usually given as a gel and taking it can improve libido in many women. It can also improve mood, energy and concentration. It is available on the NHS, but doctors do not regularly prescribe it at the moment. The Charity is campaigning to change this.