

THE  
**Menopause**  
SUPPORT  
GUIDE TO

## **Menopause is the new Black**

As a woman who experienced a pretty miserable time after surgically induced menopause and the founder of the #MakeMenopauseMatter campaign I am delighted to see it taking up more column inches in national news papers and featuring in news programmes on major TV channels but I am also becoming increasingly concerned by the rapidly expanding menopause industry.

Sadly, desperate women will go to desperate measures to relieve their menopause symptoms and as is so often the case this presents an ideal opportunity for those seeking to exploit the situation not for the health and well-being of those women but purely for financial gain. This is nothing new, women have been targeted for years with products and services designed to lead them to believe that without the latest beauty product or treatment, diet or fashion trend etc they are somehow worth less.

That's irritating at best but at its worst it's deeply harmful and affects not only physical but also mental health and this recent turn of events really worries me. I probably have to take some of the blame for this as I have been very outspoken about the failings of GP education, or lack of it, in menopause leaving many women struggling and some feeling suicidal. This has highlighted an opportunity. Now don't get me wrong, I am all for women having choice about the products and services they use but they need factual, evidence based information upon which to make an informed decision and herein lies the problem. Marketing and advertising are about selling and rarely focus on factual, evidence based information.

Currently, menopause is not included in the RSE curriculum so none of us learn anything about it in school. I am delighted to say that thanks to everybody who has supported the #MakeMenopauseMatter campaign that I launched in October 2018 menopause will be included in RSE in England from September 2020. I very much hope that Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland will follow very soon. Shockingly, women still do not receive any information about menopause routinely prior to it coming along and doctors do not receive mandatory education in menopause. This lack of information and education for both the public and professionals is leaving the door wide open for all sorts of gurus, therapies, diets, lotions, pills and potions to walk right through it and that is wrong.

Menopause is a great opportunity to take stock of your life and to focus on a little more self care, part of this should be looking at whether we are eating a healthy balanced diet and if we can reduce sugar, caffeine, alcohol etc. Exercise not only helps to improve our physical health but can also be hugely beneficial for our mental health. If you are not doing any weight bearing exercise, this is the time to start.

So, diet and exercise are important but let's be clear, menopause is the result of fluctuating hormone levels, a very natural occurrence for many women but not for those who experience surgical, medical or early menopause. Approximately 25% will have no symptoms but the other 75% will and for some they can be severe. The first line treatment for those symptoms should be HRT (hormone replacement therapy) your decision about HRT should be personal choice based on the latest facts and advice not on the opinion of a marketer, advertiser, poorly informed doctor, practitioner or guru.

Hormone replacement is now available from your GP in most parts of the U.K as body identical, plant derived preparations. For the vast majority of women HRT is safe and the benefits far outweigh the risks. I have counselled so many women who have spent fortunes on products and services only to find themselves back where they started. Often they will say things like 'it's no good I will have to give in and try HRT' Why are women made to feel that by using first line treatment they are giving in?

If you are a woman or somebody supporting a woman experiencing menopause symptoms please please get the latest facts and information before you start looking at alternative treatments and products. Clearly there is a small but significant population who, for valid medical reasons, cannot consider HRT and for the rest of us, it is, of course, personal choice but whatever you decide to do, take or use make sure you do your research. I have spoken to too many women whose female relatives have experienced repeated bone fractures or are suffering from debilitating urinary or vaginal symptoms to say nothing of the amount of elderly women living with dementia.

Oestrogen is a key hormone in maintaining long term bone, heart and brain health in women. Ask yourself; unless it was contraindicated for medical reasons or you could control it with diet and lifestyle change would you say no to insulin if you had diabetes or to thyroid medication if you had a thyroid condition. Would you seek the counsel of a self professed wise woman or a pill, lotion or potion from an unlicensed, unregulated practitioner? I sincerely doubt it.

So dear reader just remember caveat emptor (buyer beware) Menopause really is the new black.

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