

# North East, North Cumbria Menopause resources:

## Your GP appointment

### When should I visit my GP?

If you have not had a period for a year, if you are having symptoms such as lack of sleep, changes in your mood, energy or menstrual cycle (your periods may still be happening) and are finding this difficult you may want to get some advice or information on how to manage things. The symptoms can be physical (like hot flushes) or affect your mental health and every woman will have a very individual experience for a period of time unique to her. There isn't a 'typical' model and although the average age for menopause in the UK is 51, averages are really unhelpful because menopause is affected by many things; race, surgery, medication, or even happen very early for no apparent reason.

### What information should I take to an appointment (8 golden tips)?

1. Ask for a nurse or GP with an interest or training in menopause
2. If you can, ask for a longer/double appointment to give yourself time to ask your questions or explore your plans
3. Prepare your questions or concerns ahead of the appointment
4. Keep a journal or diary (or a menopause passport) of your symptoms;
  - how you've been feeling – have you been emotionally up and down
  - has your sleep been disrupted, or are you very tired despite sleeping
  - have you experienced any specific menopausal symptoms such as night sweats, hot flushes
  - have your energy levels been low even if you've slept
  - has your menstrual pattern changed eg, shortened gap between periods, stopped or become heavier
  - note down other issues you have felt or noticed as there are symptoms that many of us are unaware of; skin changes, urinary symptoms etc
5. Consider any questions you are worried about; eg, breast cancer, do you have this in the family or heard about risks
6. Consider your wider health issues, do you have an existing condition such as diabetes, are you anaemic (low iron) or have a thyroid condition
7. Consider your mood and mental health eg. Have you felt particularly low since you first suspected you were peri menopausal. Have you experienced mental health issues before. This may have been low mood in relation to your menstrual pattern or something you were diagnosed with such as depression
8. Consider your position on HRT (hormone replacement therapy) and prepare any questions on this beforehand.

## What should I expect?

You should expect to have a discussion that helps you decide your next steps. This will be based on your past medical history, health risks, lifestyle choices and your decision on whether you would like to use hormones to manage symptoms.

Actions and investigations that *may be undertaken* in your appointment;

- General blood test; to check your iron and thyroid function levels
- Blood pressure
- Weight
- General wellbeing check; you may be asked if smear tests are up to date
- Mental health discussion; you may explore previous episodes

## What about a blood test for menopause?

Menopause is confirmed based on the symptoms you discuss, unless your situation is not within the criteria mentioned in the [NICE Guidance](#) (for example if you are 40 years old or under). This is because hormones are fluctuating across your 28 day cycle, so a blood test on any given day is not reliable.

**In women 40 years and under**, NICE does recommend investigation. This is known as Premature Ovarian Insufficiency (POI). This **does require blood tests** which are completed 4-6 weeks apart and will be managed with specialists.

## What follow up should I expect?

You should have a 3 month appointment if you decide to commence HRT (after blood tests are completed and checked). HRT is checked and reviewed at this 3 month appointment and decisions made whether it is helping – sometimes a variety of changes are needed to help absorption which is to be expected. Time of day, type of medication, site of application, dose level etc are all important to get your own dose just right. Its important that you monitor how the HRT is working for you, so any change in the dose can be discussed.