



A-Z of menopause terminology

A few examples of some of the terms you may hear or read about

Amenorrhea – Absence of periods - doctors will say ‘six months amenorrhea’ and mean you have not had a natural period for six months. One year of amenorrhea after the age of 50 years is usually defined as post menopause. Amenorrhea can be caused by reasons other than just menopause, especially in young women. Not least if you are pregnant!

Bilateral salpingo-oophorectomy – removal of ovaries and tubes by an operation, resulting in immediate menopause. Sometimes done as part of cancer treatment, if you have severe endometriosis or if it is considered that you carry a high risk of ovarian cancer. If done under the age of 45 yrs, HRT should be discussed.

Cognitive behavioural therapy (CBT) - a form of psychotherapy sometimes suggested for flushes, menopausal mood changes and anxiety. CBT helps you manage your symptoms by changing the way you think and behave in relation to your symptoms.

Dyspareunia – the medical term for painful sex. Might be caused by vaginal changes due to menopause. If so, there are plenty of treatments available, including local oestrogen or non hormonal options.

Endometrium – The refers to the lining of the womb. On HRT, using progestogen protects the womb lining and if you have a scan because of abnormal bleeding on HRT, they will measuring the endometrial thickness. This will give an indication of effectiveness of HRT on this part of the body.

FSH – follicle stimulating hormone - If you have a blood test for menopause, FSH is being measured. After the age of 45 yrs it will not be very accurate, but before then it can contribute to diagnosis if you think you are having an early menopause. Often, more than one test needs to be done, over successive months, to build up a picture. If you are under 40 years, it will be combined with other tests too.

Genitourinary syndrome of menopause (GSM). A collection of symptoms associated with decreased oestrogen that can involve changes to the labia, clitoris, vagina, urethra, and bladder. This phrase tends to be used more in USA. In UK, the same condition is often referred to as VVA – vulval vaginal atrophy.

HRT – hormone replacement therapy – medicines containing oestrogen progestogen and sometime testosterone. used to relieve menopausal symptoms Available in different doses, types and regimens according to your needs.

IUS – intra uterine system – a hormonal releasing coil, used for contraception, to stop heavy bleeding or as part of HRT eg Mirena. When used as part of HRT, the Mirena is changed every five years. If used only for contraception, it may last longer than this, depending on the age it was put in.

Kegel exercises. Urogenital (pelvic floor) muscle exercises sometimes helpful for urinary incontinence and to treat mild prolapse symptoms.

Local vaginal therapy. Therapy that has an effect limited to the site of drug application. It is not systemic (does not circulate through the body, affecting many body systems). Examples include vaginal oestrogen in the form of ring, gel, pessary and vaginal tablet and local DHEA.

Menopause. The final menstrual period, which can be confirmed after 12 consecutive months without a period. This time marks the permanent end of menstruation and fertility. It is a normal, natural event associated with reduced functioning of the ovaries, resulting in lower levels of ovarian hormones (primarily oestrogen).

Neurokinin inhibitors – a treatment currently being researched, that treats menopause without the need for HRT. Still in research phases, not available yet in clinics.

Osteoporosis. Postmenopausal osteoporosis is a disease of older women in which the bone density of the skeleton has decreased to a point where bone has become fragile and at higher risk for fractures, often with little or no trauma. In most women, bone loss accelerates during the first few years after menopause, which is related to the decline in oestrogen levels.

Perimenopause. A span of time may be associated with menopause-related symptoms and extends before periods stop, through menopause (the last menstrual period) to 1 year after menopause. Perimenopause is experienced only with spontaneous (natural) menopause, not induced menopause. Also called the menopause transition or 'the change of life'.

Stress incontinence. An involuntary loss of urine(leakage) that occurs during activities such as coughing, sneezing, laughing, or exercising. Very common amongst women and can be helped by pelvic floor exercise training.

Testosterone. Often perceived as just a male hormone, women make testosterone too. In women, testosterone (partially produced by the ovaries) may regulate sexual desire and may also help maintain bone and muscle health.

Urge incontinence. Involuntary leakage of urine accompanied by a sense of urgency (cannot reach the bathroom in time), usually because of an overactive bladder. May be helped by medication and/or pelvic floor therapy as well as by the use of local vaginal oestrogen.

Vaginal dryness. Inadequate lubrication of the vagina that can be caused by low oestrogen levels, medication, or lack of sexual arousal. Very common around perimenopause and easy to treat with local oestrogen. Symptoms can be helped by using non hormonal moisturisers and lubes.

Weight-bearing exercise. Exercise during which bones and muscles work against the force of gravity or bear the body's weight. Examples include brisk walking, jogging, dancing, and resistance training exercises. May slow bone loss in the early postmenopausal years and reduce fracture risk.