

Feel Well

The changing health landscape with menopause

Menopause can offer a time for reflection, and it should be a time for taking a new look at your health & wellbeing. The human body is a complex machine. The hormonal changes relate to the many and varied symptoms of menopause, but there are far wider effects of the changes within the body. Read on to learn more about why that fresh look is advisable!



Three ways our health risks change following menopause

Once menopause is reached the hormone fluctuations pass and the body settles into a new rhythm with lower levels of oestrogen. However, the hormonal system doesn't act in isolation, so there are many 'ripples of change' which impact our health & wellbeing following the menopause.

You may have noticed subtle (or not so subtle!) changes to your weight after menopause. Women become more prone to excess weight and the distribution of excess weight changes from being predominantly around hips and thighs, to be more abdominally placed. Body shape can change to being more 'apple' shaped than 'pear' shaped.

Carrying more fat around the vital organs and abdomen can have significant health consequences.

Heart health

During reproductive years women are protected to a degree, with lower levels of coronary heart disease than men. On average women with coronary heart disease present 10 years later than men. Oestrogen helps the blood vessels widen which can help reduce blood pressure.

After the menopause there is catching up of heart health risk and after the age of 60 years women the 'advantage' has lessened.

Considering changes in relation to lifestyle factors makes a big difference to health risk. Diet, smoking, and activity levels are key influencers of heart health.

Getting blood pressure and cholesterol levels checked is helpful and a simple health check at the GP or chemist. Avoiding obesity and managing any stress well also help with heart health.

Type 2 diabetes

Oestrogen affects insulin responsiveness, which helps regulate blood sugar levels. The menopause doesn't cause type 2 diabetes but the effect of more abdominal fat, lower oestrogen levels and potentially higher blood pressure can increase the risk of diabetes.

Having diabetes prior to menopause, means managing blood sugar levels can be more challenging due to the hormonal changes, so you may need to check levels more often, consider treatment adjustments, consider HRT, as well as keeping active and eating healthily.

Bone health

1 in 2 women after the age of 50 will have a fracture associated with osteoporosis. Menopause significantly speeds up the rate of bone loss by the time menopause happens. Approximately 10% of women are affected by osteoporosis. Addressing this as early as possible prior to the menopause is advisable.

Weight bearing and resistance type exercises becomes increasingly important, alongside the Vitamin D & calcium rich diet. Being outdoors enough to generate natural vitamin D production during the summer months will help too!

What can be done to manage the changing health risks?

Menopause is a natural and inevitable part of the ageing process for women. Adopting positive lifestyle habits with regular exercise, ideally 150 minutes/week and two resistance sessions/week, having a healthy diet which avoids being overweight, avoiding smoking and minimizing alcohol means the risk factors for long term health are already well managed and a great starting point. It's never too late to make changes and when entering perimenopause there can be renewed purpose for taking a fresh look at lifestyle, health & wellbeing. This can also be a time of life when there are other family changes, perhaps with children leaving home and often declining health or loss of parents which may also bring new opportunities to change or build on routines which serve us well, and place our health and wellbeing as more of a priority.

Embracing the changes which the menopause can bring and positively adjusting lifestyle factors can mean a renewed focus on health & wellbeing, which can only improve life in many different ways during this new chapter .