



## Menopause and Me: Helen Brady

I was technically Menopausal at 40yrs old (2002). BUT... Nobody discussed this with me after my hysterectomy. No discussion about symptoms, or what could happen next, no advice on hormone replacement. Nothing! Zero!

I had just started a new job in a large global corporation and the job over the years became more and more involved and with more responsibility. I did a lot of travelling. At first, I didn't notice any difference, other than I felt so much better after my hysterectomy. As time went on, I noticed that I was getting quite hot at night. This went on for years, and I sort of just put it down to getting older and hearing how older women often had night sweats I considered overheating was a slightly better option.

My job became more and more demanding and I didn't really pay too much attention to my health or my body. As the years passed the overheating at night was starting to affect my sleep. I had always been a great sleeper and had started to notice that at about 3 am in the morning I was being woken up by simply being too hot. I noticed it was worse when I drank. But I carried on as normal and just put up with it.

I was still coping with the stress of the job, two teenage children and all the changes that come with them. One going away to Uni and the other travelling around the world, and the changes that brought to the household and adapting to being empty nesters... which was interesting.

Then in 2017/18 there were big changes happening in the corporation I worked for. I had a busy job running the Creative Services for EAME, with a team spread over Europe and Africa. There was a big restructuring and myself and my team were all put through a redundancy process. This was extremely traumatic, the team based in the UK all lost their jobs. Me included. This hit me like a train! Overnight I went from having a busy job that didn't allow any time for me. To nothing! It was as if my body said... "Now I have got you!"

I suffered from depression, lack of confidence, and anxiety. Physically my body seemed to be getting its own back on me. My joints were so painful, I couldn't even rest my arms on a desk. The brain fog was a nightmare, I couldn't string a sentence together, let alone function properly. I suffered from debilitating migraines which would knock me out for at least a couple of days. My weight had been creeping up over the past 10yrs, which I put down to travelling so much and not always eating properly and drinking more than I should, with little or no exercise as I was always on the go. I had been going to Slimming World for a while but found it was having no effect whatsoever. I struggled to get out of bed. I would cry if you looked at me the wrong way, or fly off the handle at the slightest thing. On top of all of this, I lost all my libido. I had no interest in my husband and

avoided any physical contact, which on top of all the other changes in me, was not helping our relationship. He just didn't know what to do with me or how to help me. I thought I was going mad...

Reading that paragraph back you could put most of that down to depression from losing a job I had loved. But I felt that it was more than that. Yes, I had found the redundancy process traumatic, but I knew that it wasn't just that. So, I went to my GP.

Initially, the reaction was positive and we talked about using natural remedies or going on HRT. I had been reading quite a bit about the effect of natural remedies and couldn't find any hard fast evidence they worked. I also had no reason that would stop me taking HRT. I remembered seeing a documentary some years back with Mariella Frostrup and knew that the misinformation around HRT was affecting many women from taking it. I went ahead and agreed with the GP that I would take HRT in tablet form. I only needed Estrogen as I had had a hysterectomy. This improved things initially, but after about 12 months I noticed myself sliding backwards, mood swings and low mood were back, and my anxiety was getting bad again. My libido and interest in any physical contact was becoming really bad. My weight was really affecting my confidence.

I went back to my GP to see if we could increase my dosage, a simple request, you would think. This is where I hit a complete wall. I couldn't get to speak to anyone who had any expertise in Menopause, when I did speak to one doctor, they asked me "Why on earth did you start taking HRT at 56?". I would have thought the answer was pretty clear! The final doctor I spoke to said no to increasing my dosage because of the risk of blood clots and cancer. Although in the next sentence she was saying looking at my records I was low risk to both! They wouldn't budge and wanted to put me on antidepressants. Now I am not against antidepressants if you need them. Once again, I felt that that was not the answer for me, I have been a glass-half-full kind of person all my life, always seeing the positive in things. That is not to say that life can throw you curve balls that change how you view the world. I knew it was more likely the menopause that was causing how I felt.

Dr Louise Newson was making a lot of noise about the lack of support for women with menopause, Davina McCall had produced one documentary that was really having an effect nationally. Women all over the news were making more noise about how poor the health care was around a major health issue that affected so many women in this country, so there were other options to get support. I knew at this point I was going to have to pay for help. Niki Fuchs from OSiT is a client. One day she sat me down in a café and listened to what I had to say and understood completely that I was clinging to the edge of a cliff with my fingernails! She advised me on some options, having gone through a rough time herself and taking things into her own hands to improve her health and wellbeing. This gave me the push to contact the Newson clinic in Stratford-upon-Avon and arrange a zoom appointment with a menopause specialist (this was just after the first Covid lockdown). I had a 3-month wait, but it was worth it.

The Doctor was kind, listened and understood completely my frustration. She said that although my GP had been partially right, she had not offered me any alternatives to the tablet form of HRT, and anti-depression tablets come with their own issues. We discussed my options and came up with a plan that would work for me. I was put on an increased dose of Estrogen (Gel form of HRT) plus Testosterone, the Testosterone was to improve my mood, my anxiety and my libido. I had a three-month review and blood test to check my hormone levels. The hormone levels were normal and I was starting to feel much better in general.

I am coming up for 12 months on from my consultation with the Newson Clinic, I am feeling more myself in general. My weight is still an issue for me, but I feel more able to deal with how to improve that and my fitness. My general wellbeing is much improved and I can function pretty normally. My GP has agreed to subscribe my Estrogen, but I have to pay privately for my Testosterone. I appreciate I can afford to do this, but I do believe there is a Testosterone a GP can subscribe. That is another conversation I am yet to have!

So, what have I learned from all of this...?

That menopause is simply a hormone deficiency and should be treated as such. If we changed the way we talked about this deficiency, perhaps the stigma would go. During this process, I found out by chance that one of my closest friends was going through the same as me having been medically menopausal for 10yrs. Both of us were scared to talk about it through embarrassment or shame. This has to change. All women have the right to talk to a medical professional who is fully trained in this field. Sadly, the NHS and GPs in general are

slow to respond. Saying all of that, things are changing, they will only continue to change if we as women continue to be vocal and not simply accept what mother nature has dealt us, as previous generations have. Not having the right medication is proving detrimental to not only our physical health but our mental health and there is now evidence that by taking HRT early enough it can lead to a reduced risk of dementia.

So, let's keep talking about the Menopause. Let's help future generations of women not have the struggles we have had.

On the following pages are some facts on the Menopause situation today!

Oh! PS: I am ichy too! 😊

## FACTS



## One person in four with menopause symptoms is concerned about their ability to cope with life.

Research from the independent [Nuffield Health](#) group discovered the following sobering facts.

- Approximately **13 million women** in the U.K are either peri- or post menopausal
  - Symptoms can **last up to 15 years**
  - **Over 60% of women experience symptoms** resulting in behaviour changes
  - **1 in 4 women** will experience severe debilitating symptoms
  - **Almost half** of menopausal women say they feel depressed
  - A third of women say they **suffer with anxiety**
  - Women commonly complain of **feeling as though they are going mad**
  - Approximately two thirds of women say there is a **general lack of support and understanding**
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The Nuffield research shows many women are being failed by their GP due to lack of knowledge around symptoms and treatments

- Women are being **incorrectly diagnosed as depressed** and given antidepressants
- Approximately **38 per cent of women** seek help from a GP

- One quarter of those who visited a GP say the **possibility of the symptoms being menopause related is missed**
  - One third of women who visited a GP were **not made aware of hormone replacement therapy (HRT)**
  - Many women are **mistakenly denied HRT** due to existing or family health concerns
  - Women **still feel very confused about HRT**
  - Many women are **unaware of NHS menopause clinics**
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Currently there are only 29 NHS menopause clinics in the U.K (with waiting times for appointments up to 6 months)

- **72% of women in work** say they feel unsupported
- **9 out of 10** women say they feel unable to talk to managers at work
- **1 in 5** take time off to deal with menopausal symptoms, **1 in 50** are on long term sick leave

According to the Nuffield research, no less than 10 per cent of women seriously consider giving up work due to their symptoms. And females make up 77% of NHS staff, with an average age of 43!

It's not just the women themselves – partners of menopausal women struggle to understand what is happening to them as they try to cope with fast-moving, after overwhelming symptoms.