

Manage the menopause your own way

With ongoing negative reports about HRT (hormone replacement therapy), women with symptoms of the menopause are feeling frustrated, says consultant gynaecologist Michael Dooley. 'Many find it difficult to get advice about alternatives, and also how to come off HRT. Plus, while it's absolutely right to be cautious about HRT, for some women, nothing else really works so they need good advice about the safest formula and shouldn't feel guilty and anxious.' What's needed, he says, is a coherent strategy: diagnosis (based on history and maybe blood tests); a review of all options including lifestyle, complementary therapies, pharmaceutical drugs; a treatment plan, and monitoring results.

The main concern with HRT is the increased risk of breast cancer. Over five years, the risk in non-HRT users in Europe is ten per 1,000 women between 50 and 59, according to the British National Formulary. Oestrogen-only HRT carries an increased risk of two more women in 1,000 over the same period, rising to six in those women taking oestrogen and progesterone. According to Cancer Research UK (cancerresearchuk.org), 'Hormone replacement therapy causes approximately 2,000 cases of breast cancer in the UK each year.' Additionally, about half of women initially prescribed HRT stop taking it because of the side effects – notably weight gain, irregular bleeding and just not feeling themselves.

Although many of HRT's advantages have been marketing hype not research, it does mostly stop hot flushes and night sweats, as well as loss of libido and vaginal dryness. 'If women have tried alternative remedies and lifestyle shifts in vain, and understand the risks of HRT, their GP should prescribe the smallest dose by the safest route,' says Mr Dooley. He prefers transdermal oestrogen gel, which you squirt on your skin. 'It's easy to vary the dose: if you feel

great, you can use one squirt instead of two. The Mirena coil has advantages for women who can tolerate IUDs because it delivers progesterone [which carries the higher risk of breast cancer] to the womb, rather than throughout the body.'

Discuss the regime for coming off HRT with your doctor. Mr Dooley advises: 'Take two to three months. If you're using a transdermal gel, decrease gradually from two squirts to a quarter. Start a herbal remedy immediately as they take about three months to kick in.' Products he recommends trying include Menopace Plus by Vitabiotics (soy isoflavones and flaxseed), £14.63 for 56 tablets; Ladies Choice (red clover, black cohosh and pomegranate extracts), £17.95 for 72 capsules; Red Clover by Novogen, £18.59 for 30 tablets, or Menosan Tincture by A Vogel (based on sage), £7.33 for 50ml. 'Acupuncture may help hot flushes,' he adds.

For vaginal dryness, try vitamin E (LifeTime Vitamins, £12.95 for 90 softgels) and/or evening primrose oil (1,000mg by Lamberts, £7.78 for 90 capsules). A topical lubricant such as organic Yes is effective (£15.66 for 75ml, £11.99 for six applicators). All available from Victoria Health, see below.

Many women find cutting out alcohol stops hot flushes. A neighbour who suffered badly was 'transformed' when she forsook her moderate intake of wine. Thirty minutes daily exercise (eg, walking) has been proven to help, as well as cutting your breast-cancer risk. Keep hydrated by sipping eight large glasses of still water. Maintain steady blood sugar levels by eating (good food!) every two to three hours, with a wholesome snack (eg, natural yoghurt) before bed.

Find more advice in *Your Change Your Choice* by Michael Dooley and Sarah Stacey (yes, me...), £7.99. To order a copy, post-free, contact the YOU Bookshop, tel: 0845 155 0711, you-bookshop.co.uk



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Sarah reads all your e-mails but regrets that she cannot answer them all personally

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HOT CHOC

Chocolate lovers of all ages can make their own organic raw chocolate – which is dairy-, sugar- and additive-free and full of health-giving antioxidants – with ingredient kits put together by chocolatiers Kieran Renihan and Jake Lawy. The kits, which have now launched in Selfridges, cost from £14.25. For info, visit mayanmagic.co.uk

TWINKLE TOES

Whether your baby's going to be the next Darcey Bussell or not, she'll feel comfy in Baby Bloch 'dance' shoes (for 0-24 months). The collection includes various styles, from pumps to tap, in candy-bright leather lined in cotton. Our six-month-old tester Zofia made a beeline for cherry-patterned pumps, £25. Bloch also makes irresistible styles for grown-up girls. From Harrods, or call 020 7269 0507 for stockists.



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HOTMILK
LINGERIE.COM

Maternity and nursing lingerie brand Hotmilk is collecting clean second-hand bras for young women in Zimbabwe: owning undies gives women prestige so men are less likely to assault them. Find your nearest retailer on the site.

All products mentioned, unless otherwise specified, are available by mail order from Victoria Health, tel: 0800 389 8195; victoriahealth.com