



WOMEN & GIRLS HEALTH AND WELLNESS

Menopause

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UNDERSTANDING MENOPAUSE

What is menopause?

Menopause is something that will happen to all women during their life; it is a natural physiological process. Menopause is a point in time when the ovaries go into retirement and no longer produce either eggs or hormones.

When does it happen?

When you are aged 45-55 years, you will reach a point when you have not had any periods for 12 months. The date when you had your last period is when you reached menopause. The average age of menopause is 51 years but can occur anytime from 45-55 years old.

What is perimenopause?

Entering into menopause is not something that happens overnight. There is a transition from having regular menstrual cycles, to periods stopping completely. This transition is called the perimenopause and typically starts from around age 40.

During perimenopause the timing and proportions of menstrual cycle hormones become unpredictable. Some of your cycles will have the expected hormone fluctuations and during other cycles there will be a mistiming of hormones as the ovaries move into retirement.

The main sign of perimenopause is shortening menstrual cycle length.

Shorter or longer time between menstrual period could be the first sign of menopause.

THE SYMPTOMS ASSOCIATED WITH MENOPAUSE

What are the symptoms?

The symptoms associated with menopause are:

- Temperature regulation issues, resulting in hot flushes.
- Labile mood (easily fluctuating emotions)
- Disrupted sleep
- “Brain fog”
- Random joint/muscle discomfort (not caused by injury)
- Digestive issues
- Increased urinary frequency
- Dry skin including vaginal dryness
- Tendency to gain fat and lose muscle

Once menopause is reached, the ovaries officially retire, resulting in sustained low levels of the ovarian hormones oestradiol, progesterone and testosterone.

What we know about menopause

All women will experience menopause at some point in their life. The average age is 45-55 years. If menopause occurs between 40-45 years this is known as early menopause.

If menopause occurs before age 40, this is known as premature menopause, or primary ovarian insufficiency (POI) which occurs in 1% of women. There could be medical reasons for menopause such as surgery or chemotherapy.

The fall in female hormones that occurs at menopause can impact quality of life, with up to 25% of women reporting debilitating symptoms. Given the increase in life expectancy, women can expect to live up to a third of their life in a menopausal state.

How menopause can impact your game

Female hormones are key to both physical and mental health. These hormones are also key to drive positive adaptations to exercise. So declining hormone levels that occur at menopause can be a physical and mental challenge.



PHYSICAL CONSIDERATIONS:

You may find that you need more recovery after training and matches and it is possible that you may become more prone to injury.



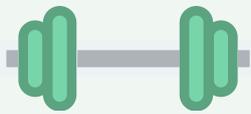
MENTAL CONSIDERATIONS:

You may find that your decision making, and mental sharpness is slightly diminished. This can leave you feeling less confident than usual. It is sometimes referred to as “brain fog”.

LOOKING AFTER YOURSELF DURING MENOPAUSE

The good news is that there are strategies within your control that you can implement to support you reaching your personal full potential during this time in your life.

Making positive lifestyle choices are the keystone to help you achieve your best during menopause:



EXERCISE

With your hormones changing, this is a great opportunity to review your exercise, nutrition and recovery. In terms of exercise, strength training becomes even more important to maintain a favourable body composition and metabolic health. Strength training favours lean body mass (muscle) formation over fat deposition. As you engage many muscle groups during this type of exercise there is a beneficial effect on metabolic health, something that continues even after you stop training. Strength training also has the benefit of maintaining bone health through the action of muscles pulling on bone. This compliments the positive effect of running with changes in direction, that is part of playing rugby. World Rugby's Activate Injury Prevention Exercise Programme is highly recommended in this respect.



NUTRITION

Having a good intake of protein becomes especially important in order to maintain muscle mass. Don't forget vitamin D supplementation for bone, muscle and immune health. As the main source of vitamin D is through the action of sunlight on the skin, living in the UK it is important to take supplementation, especially over the winter months.



RECOVERY

Recovery and sleep You will need more recovery between exercise sessions. Remember that you get fitter while you sleep so reviewing sleep hygiene strategy is a good idea. This is the routine you follow each night before you go to sleep. that is part of playing rugby. World Rugby's Activate Injury Prevention Exercise Programme is highly recommended in this respect.



HORMONE REPLACEMENT THERAPY (HRT)

HRT improves quality of life and reduces the risk of health issues such as cardiovascular disease and osteoporosis.

Taking HRT is associated with an extra 4 cases of breast cancer per 1,000 women aged 50-59 years. This is the same risk as taking the combined oral contraceptive pill. This is far less than the extra 24 cases found amongst women who are overweight and leading a sedentary lifestyle.

Having an active lifestyle and taking 2 and half hours or more exercise per week is associated with 7 fewer cases of breast cancer per 1,000 women aged 50 -59 years.

The optimal form of HRT is oestradiol taken through the skin (transdermal) via patch or gel, with micronised progesterone. This form of body identical HRT is available in regulated, licensed form on the NHS. There is a flat rate prescription charge for HRT.

Local vaginal oestradiol can be taken in addition to systemic HRT.

Fortunately, the only absolute reason not to take HRT is a personal or very strong family history of breast cancer.

TIPS FOR REFEREES & COACHES



When going through menopause referees and coaches should:



MAKE SURE YOU TAKE SUFFICIENT RECOVERY AND REST BETWEEN YOUR RUGBY ACTIVITIES



ENSURE CONSISTENT NUTRITION INTAKE, IN PARTICULAR KEEP AN EYE ON PROTEIN INTAKE



TRY TO DO YOUR OWN STRENGTH TRAINING REGULARLY



TAKE VITAMIN D SUPPLEMENTATION



RESEARCH HRT TO MAKE AN INFORMED DECISION

REFERENCES

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

Additional Resources

Hormones, Health and Human Potential by Dr N. Keay. This book covers changes in hormones over the lifespan, including perimenopause and menopause. The book provides practical top tips and hormone stories to guide and illustrate. Available on Amazon <https://rb.gy/aaw9oi>

British Menopause Society:

<https://thebms.org.uk/>

Women's Health Concern:

<https://www.womens-health-concern.org/>

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