

Decision making, concentration and memory changes/problems during menopause Information Leaflet

Many women describe changes to their memory, concentration and decision-making abilities during menopause (brain fog)

Decision making, Concentration and Memory

Brain fog is a very common symptom of the menopause. Women often say their brains feel like "cotton wool," they can become frightened, isolated and depressed. Difficulty with concentration and memory loss have often been linked with the menopause, but is not clear whether there is a direct association with the hormone changes or whether these problems are due to a 'knock-on' effect from difficulty in sleeping, or, whether age-related changes are also a factor. Several studies that have looked at the effect of HRT on concentration and memory have often given inconclusive results; although many women report an improvement in brain fog when using HRT

Making decisions - from what to have for tea, through to important complex decisions - especially when under pressure, can sometimes prove very challenging. Some women stop driving as they feel they cannot concentrate and react to the road around them quickly enough. They feel unsafe and vulnerable. Putting keys in the fridge, forgetting what you went to the shops for and not remembering phone numbers is inconvenient and annoying, but some women find their memory is so poor they worry they have dementia.

Women can give up work as they feel they can no longer cope with the job they previously managed successfully. New information in particular can be difficult to grasp and retain. Forgetting the content of conversations and meetings leads to performance worries and can undermine self-confidence.

Hormone Replacement Therapy (HRT)

It is not yet clear if the beneficial effects of HRT on memory, concentration and decision-making are a direct result of treatment with HRT or as a result of its improvement of symptoms such as night sweats and sleep patterns. Having disturbed sleep has a huge impact on how women feel the following day. When women wake up feeling exhausted, it is understandable that they won't feel as focused and alert.

Managing Symptoms

Accepting that your memory isn't as reliable as it used to be and being kind to yourself will help.

If memory is a concern, confiding in friends and family often helps, as does speaking to your GP. If these symptoms are affecting your work, talk to the Human Resources Department or a supportive colleague. Allocate extra time for workloads, and create routines for regularly occurring activities such as prescriptions, bills, library book renewals etc. and try to delegate some responsibilities to others.

Strategies like list making and note taking when at home or in work are often useful and made simpler by recording "to do" lists on your mobile as and when something pops into your head. Simple changes like this can ensure less is forgotten.

Making habits such as keeping a diary and checking it a week in advance as well as every evening for the following day – even when you are sure you know what is planned – will reduce anxiety about missed commitments.

Keeping healthy and active is also very important. Reducing alcohol, stress and cigarettes along with regular exercise, good nutrition and relaxation techniques, including mindfulness and breathing techniques, all play vital roles in our overall wellbeing.

Menopause cafes are being set up throughout the UK – these are forums for women to discuss their experiences of menopause and gain peer support. Attending one can be invaluable - or consider running your own!

This leaflet can be made available in different formats on request. If you would like to make any suggestions or comments about the content of this leaflet, then please contact the Patient Experience Team on 0151 702 4353 or by email at pals@lwh.nhs.uk

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