

**Dr Daisy's Blog at
Menopause Matters. This month...**

My New Year Menopause Resolutions – Why not try CBT?!

It's a New Year! 2018 - New beginnings!



Hmm ... I started to think about how to manage the menopause better

If you are reading this, you may well have symptoms and signs of menopause. You may be unsure about HRT, and wondering at the array of alternative and natural remedies.

Today I am writing about something new. There recently been great success in treating menopausal symptoms, not with hormones, but with Cognitive Behavioural Therapy - known as CBT.

Results from clinical studies on the effectiveness of CBT in treating menopausal symptoms, have been so encouraging, that NICE (The National Institute for Health & Care Excellence) released a statement in 2015, recommending CBT be offered to women suffering from menopausal symptoms such as anxiety and depression, and in particular to women with a history of breast cancer – who are generally not recommended HRT. This advice has been supported by the British Menopause Society, and by Women's Health Concern, who have both published excellent Factsheets on this topic.

What is CBT?

This is a psychological approach to treating menopausal symptoms. The treatment aims to provide coping skills and strategies.

How effective is CBT in alleviating menopausal symptoms?

In three separate clinical trials, involving over 600 women, CBT significantly reduced a range



of menopausal symptoms, including hot flushes, night sweats, anxiety, and depression.

For example, in one study Professor Myra Hunter of the Institute of Psychiatry at King College London, took 96 women who had been treated for breast cancer, who were unable to

take HRT, and were suffering with menopausal symptoms. These women were divided into two groups randomly. One group underwent a 90 minute CBT session once a week, while the other group had usual care. By 9 weeks, the CBT group was showing statistically significant improvements in hot flushes, mood, sleeping patterns and overall quality of life. These improvements were maintained at 6 months.

How does CBT work for menopausal symptoms?

In Professor Hunter's study, the CBT group attended six structured sessions of CBT these once a week, for 90 minutes. These sessions were run by a specifically trained clinical psychologist, and supported with a specially designed study manual.

In these group sessions women were given information about the physiological changes taking place at menopause, and all about their menopausal symptoms - including hot flushes and night sweats (HFNS). There were presentations, group discussions, handouts and homework once a week. Women were taught how to do "paced breathing" and given a CD. They were asked to practice paced breathing and relaxation daily at home and to keep a diary.

Session 1

The group discussed their experiences of breast cancer and their menopausal symptoms, and set goals for treatment.

Session 2

The role of stress in exacerbating symptoms, and how to combat stress. Paced breathing was started.



Session 3

This focussed on cognitive issues such as 'catastrophising' and 'negative thinking', as well as behavioural reactions, such as avoidance of events that might precipitate a hot flush.

Session 4

Understanding night sweats and improving sleeping habits.

Session 5

More work on sleep, looking at sleep related anxieties and wakefulness.

Session 6

Revision session and forward action planning.

Women were assessed with a standardised Women' Health Questionnaire, at the start of the study, at 9 weeks and at 26 weeks, the end of the study.

Where can I go to get CBT?

Interestingly, in another smaller study about CBT and menopause (Green 2013), women were split into two groups. A CBT group - which they attended with a therapist, or a self-help group where they were given a book and a CD about CBT.

Improvements in menopausal symptoms were seen in both groups, by a similar amount! This implies – you can do effective CBT by yourself at home, with a CBT book purchased from the internet. There are several of these for example, on Amazon.

NHS Clinical Psychologists can provide these services, but with current waiting time and funding pressures, there may be long waiting times.

I would suggest reading the Women's Health Concern Fact sheet as this contains a very readable and useful summary about CBT and menopause, as a good starting point <https://www.womens-health-concern.org/help-and-advice/fact-sheets/cognitive-behaviour-therapy-cbt-menopausal-symptoms/>

BOX 1

How to do 'paced breathing'

You can do this sitting, lying or standing and walking

The idea is slow your breathing and use your diaphragm rather than your chest wall muscles to fill and empty your lungs

Breathe out. Place one hand on top of your stomach and one on your chest.


Breathe in through your nose slowly and gently. As you do this, the hand on your stomach should rise but the hand on your chest should stay still.

Try to slow your breathing. When doing this, you should aim to breathe in and out 5 to 7 times a minute.

You should try to do this for 5 minutes, 3 -4 times a day, or whenever your menopausal symptoms are troublesome.

Learn the diaphragmatic breathing technique - <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=k-gTL5G1iblo>





CBT and Menopause - a helpful summary

1. Read and understand the physiology of the menopausal transition. It helps to know what is happening inside your body.
2. Follow common sense advice, for example avoid spicy foods, too much alcohol or caffeine, keep the house cool, wear thin layers of clothes.
3. Learn to do paced breathing. *See Box 1.*
4. Write your emotions down. It's a bit like starting to keep a diary. Read back what has happened to upset you during the day. Be a critical. Have you been over thinking this? Is it really as desperate as you made out?
5. Write down three things that were good about today. Focus on the positives.
6. Learn to watch out for triggers that make you feel out of control. This could be overwork, too little exercise, and a poor work/life balance. Plan your day better. Think what you like to do to relax and make time for it, whether this is watching TV, reading, walking – you owe this to yourself.
7. Try to think much more positively. For some people the glass is always half empty! Instead of thinking “Oh my goodness this is so embarrassing, everyone can see me like this!” Take a deep breath and think rationally “Actually this is a busy restaurant, everyone is sitting down, they are all busy eating and no one is looking at me!”
8. Plan to sleep better. Get into a bedtime routine – keep the lights low in the evening, no TV in the bedroom, have blackout blinds/curtain. Keep the room cool, the window open. Don't take naps during the day. If you have a bad night, carry on the next day as normal.

Take home message

New Year! New You! Perhaps CBT has something to offer if you have never tried it before.

I am quite excited about this new psychological approach to helping women with menopausal symptoms. I would love to hear your comments if you have tried it, what you thought about it, if it has helped etc.. please get in touch! All the best for 2018 **Daisy Mae x**



Dr Daisy Mae is a doctor and writer. She has worked extensively as a Specialist in Sexual & Reproductive Health, in the South of England. She has also worked in the field of Menopause for around 25 years, and latterly has run her own specialist Menopause Clinic.

Daisy has just published her first novel - Dating Daisy. She also has a Sexual Health Blog on The Huffington Post UK and writes for Dr Ed, the online doctor service. Daisy will be blogging for us once a month.

You can contact Dr Daisy with ideas and suggestions for the blog or on any specific topics you are interested in. Email: daisymae_224@mail.com.

References

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Image resolutions

https://free-images.com/display/new_year_resolutions_list.html

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