



when
love

hurts ...

Taking the
pain out of
intercourse
during and
after the
menopause



Did you know that as many as 1 in 3 women have sexual problems around the menopause?

It can be easy to believe that a dwindling sex life is just part of getting older - but nothing could be further from the truth.

While most of us are aware that the menopause can mean hot flushes and night sweats, how many of us realise that painful intercourse can be another symptom?

When intercourse becomes painful, you may feel inclined to make love less often. Eventually you can find your love life comes to a complete halt.

Painful intercourse

When a woman goes through the menopause, her ovaries stop releasing eggs and her body produces less oestrogen. This causes an 'oestrogen deficiency' which results in different symptoms for everyone. Some women may experience a thinning and drying of the tissues of the vagina (called 'vaginal atrophy'). As a result, the vagina cannot become lubricated during intercourse making sex uncomfortable, even painful. The medical term for this is 'dyspareunia'.

'When I went through the menopause, I knew my hot flushes were a symptom. What I didn't know was that the painful sex and dryness down below were also caused by the menopause.'

'I knew it was part of the ageing process, I just didn't know it was treatable.'

Painful intercourse - the answers

These days, there's no need to suffer in silence. Once the problem has been recognised, there are a number of options to make things better.

Treatment choices

If the cause of painful intercourse is oestrogen deficiency, an effective way to help resolve the problem is to replace the missing oestrogen.

This can be done in two ways:

Local oestrogen therapy

This comes in the form of vaginal tablets, pessaries or creams which are inserted directly into the vagina. Vaginal rings are also available. These local treatments deliver oestrogen into the dry thin walls of the vagina, and can help relieve painful intercourse and vaginal discomfort. Because these treatments help to restore the vaginal tissues, they do not need to be inserted just before sex like a lubricant. There are several different types of product available, and inserting them can be simple and mess-free.

Hormone replacement therapy (HRT)

This is usually taken by mouth or as a skin patch and helps deal with all oestrogen deficiency symptoms, including painful intercourse caused by vaginal dryness. In some cases, HRT is not enough to resolve the problem of painful intercourse. If this is the case, the HRT and local oestrogen can be taken together for greater effect.

Vaginal lubricants can be useful, particularly for women who are not suited to oestrogen replacement. They can be messy and need to be applied each time before you have intercourse in order to be effective, which can be a disadvantage.

'I never felt HRT was for me, so my doctor suggested I could insert vaginal oestrogen. It works only on the vagina - not on the rest of my body.'

Painful intercourse - the next step

If you're unsure of which option is best for you, or if you simply need more information, why not ask your GP or your practice nurse for advice? They know that painful intercourse during and after the menopause is not something that just has to be put up with, and they will be happy to go through the different options with you.

Painful intercourse is a common problem for women during and after the menopause.

There are effective treatments available for this condition. Your doctor or nurse can advise you on what you can do next.

For more information about the menopause visit:

www.menopause-info.co.uk



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