

## Menopause, self-worth and body image: Feeling at home in your changing body

Menopause is most often described in medical terms, declining oestrogen, hot flushes, or irregular periods. But the experience is much wider than symptoms. **It's a natural life stage** that can influence how you see yourself, how you relate to others, and how you feel in your body.

**For some, menopause brings relief:** no more monthly periods, no pregnancy worries, and freedom from hormonal fluctuations that once caused PMS or painful cycles. For others, the visible and invisible changes like weight gain, skin differences, altered libido take adjusting to.

**Menopause is not an ending, but a transition.** By understanding what's happening physically and emotionally, it becomes possible to build a more compassionate relationship with your body during this time.

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## Weight gain and body shape changes

Weight gain and body shape changes are common in midlife, particularly around the abdomen. This shift is often noticed first in the mirror or in clothes fitting differently, but it's underpinned by real biological processes.

- **Hormonal changes** – As oestrogen levels fall, fat storage tends to move from hips and thighs to the abdomen. This “central” fat distribution is linked with increased risk of type 2 diabetes and heart disease. Understanding this helps reframe weight gain as more than cosmetic and highlights why lifestyle adjustments can be protective.
- **Slower metabolism** – From the mid-40s onward, muscle mass naturally declines, lowering the number of calories needed to maintain weight. Without changes to diet or activity, gradual gain is likely. This is a biological process, not personal failure.
- **Emotional impact** – In societies that prize slimness, gaining weight can affect confidence. For some, it can trigger old patterns of dieting or self-criticism. Recognising that these changes are largely hormonal can help ease blame and open space for kinder self-talk.

While these changes can feel unfamiliar, they are part of how the body adapts in midlife. Building strength, protecting the heart, and supporting bone health become more important than chasing a number on the scales. Many people find that focusing on fitness goals like walking further, lifting heavier, or simply having more energy helps them feel proud of what their body can do, not just how it looks.

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## Skin, hair and physical appearance

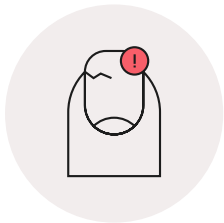
The decline in oestrogen influences collagen, hydration, and circulation. These changes often show on the surface and can feel like visible markers of ageing.



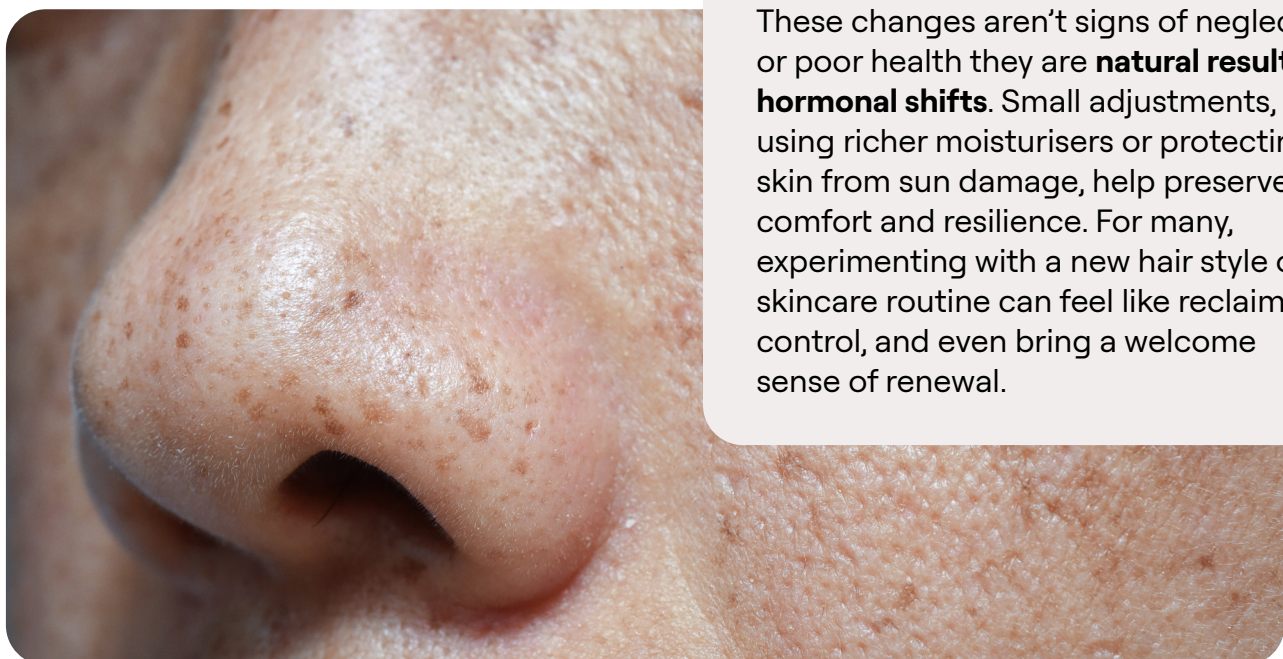
**Skin changes** – Skin may feel drier, thinner, or more sensitive. Collagen loss makes wrinkles more noticeable. Medically, thinner skin is more prone to bruising or irritation, so moisturisers and sun protection matter more than ever.



**Hair thinning** – Hair may shed more easily or feel less dense. This is caused by hormonal shifts in the growth cycle. While usually not dangerous, it can feel confronting if hair is tied to identity. Treatments like gentle scalp care, nutrition, or medical options may help.



**Nail fragility** – Nails may become more brittle or ridged. This reflects slower cell turnover, which is normal but can add to the sense of visible change.



These changes aren't signs of neglect or poor health they are **natural results of hormonal shifts**. Small adjustments, like using richer moisturisers or protecting skin from sun damage, help preserve comfort and resilience. For many, experimenting with a new hair style or skincare routine can feel like reclaiming control, and even bring a welcome sense of renewal.



## Libido and sexual health

Menopause often brings shifts in sexual function and libido, but these are not uniform. For some, interest in sex decreases. For others, freedom from contraception and monthly cycles brings new confidence and enjoyment.

- **Reduced desire** – Lower oestrogen and testosterone can dampen libido. Stress, fatigue, or self-image concerns may compound this. Medically, this is common, and not a reflection of attractiveness or relationship quality.
- **Vaginal dryness** – Lower oestrogen reduces natural lubrication and thins vaginal tissues. This can cause pain or discomfort during sex, which may lead to avoidance. Without support, dryness can worsen and increase the risk of infections. Local oestrogen therapies or lubricants can ease this significantly.
- **Pelvic floor changes** – Muscles supporting the bladder and vagina weaken with reduced oestrogen, sometimes causing leaks or discomfort. Strengthening these muscles through pelvic floor exercises or physiotherapy can improve both function and confidence.

Menopause doesn't mark the end of intimacy, it's an invitation to approach it differently.

**With the right support, many people rediscover pleasure and closeness**, often with less pressure and more confidence than before. Talking openly with a partner or healthcare provider can transform what feels like a barrier into an opportunity for a new kind of connection.

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## Local oestrogen therapies

For vaginal symptoms like dryness, discomfort during sex, or irritation, **local oestrogen therapies can be highly effective**. Unlike hormone replacement therapy taken as tablets or patches, these treatments act directly on the vaginal tissue with very little entering the bloodstream. They can be used safely long-term for most women, even into later life.

As well as improving comfort, **local oestrogen can reduce the risk of recurrent urinary tract infections (UTIs)**, which become more common around and after menopause. Strengthening vaginal and bladder tissues helps restore natural protection against infections. These treatments are available as creams, tablets, or rings, and a doctor or nurse can advise on which option may suit best.

## Mood, self-worth and identity

The hormonal shifts of menopause affect neurotransmitters such as serotonin and dopamine, which regulate mood. But mood is also shaped by how we think about this stage of life.

- **Low mood and anxiety** – Some experience more frequent mood swings or anxiety. Medically, this reflects hormonal fluctuations, but external stressors (like caring for ageing parents or work pressures) can add to the load.
- **Loss of identity** – If fertility, youth, or appearance have been closely tied to self-worth, menopause may feel like losing part of oneself. This transition can be emotionally challenging but also opens the door to redefining identity beyond physical changes.
- **Resilience and growth** – Many also report feeling more confident and grounded post-menopause. With periods and fertility behind them, some describe freedom to focus on career, hobbies, or personal passions with renewed energy.

Shifts in mood and self-image are real, but they don't define this stage of life. Many people emerge from menopause with a clearer sense of who they are, grounded in experience and resilience. Seeing it as a chapter of growth, not decline, helps transform uncertainty into a time of rebuilding confidence and purpose.

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## Simple ways to support body and mind

Self-care strategies during menopause aren't about reversing ageing but about supporting health and comfort. These changes also carry long-term benefits for heart, bone, and brain health.



**Regular exercise** – Strength training preserves muscle mass and bone density, protecting against osteoporosis. Aerobic activity like walking or swimming supports heart health and reduces risk of metabolic disease. Exercise also improves sleep and mood by boosting endorphins.



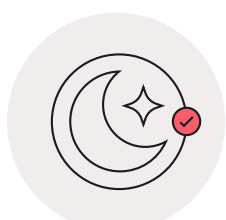
**Balanced diet** – Calcium and vitamin D strengthen bones, while protein preserves muscle. Omega-3 fatty acids support brain health and may ease mood fluctuations. Limiting processed foods helps manage energy and weight.



**Skincare and hydration** – Moisturisers and sun protection help counter thinner, drier skin. Hydration supports circulation and energy. These routines aren't vanity – they are medical care for changing tissue.



**Mind-body practices** – Yoga, meditation, and mindfulness reduce cortisol (the stress hormone), improve mood regulation, and strengthen the mind-body connection. These practices build resilience and promote a kinder relationship with the body.



**Sleep support** – Consistent routines, a cool sleep environment, and addressing night sweats help restore energy and focus. Good sleep is protective against cardiovascular disease and supports memory.

No single habit will erase every symptom, but these everyday choices can make life smoother and healthier. Beyond managing menopause, they are investments in long-term health like supporting bones, heart, brain, and emotional wellbeing well into later life.

## When to seek professional help

Most menopause symptoms are manageable, but medical support can transform quality of life. It's worth seeking help if:

- **Severe hot flashes or night sweats** disrupt daily life. Hormone replacement therapy (HRT) or non-hormonal treatments may help.
- **Persistent low mood** affects work, relationships, or enjoyment. Depression is not “just part of menopause” and can be treated.
- **Painful sex or vaginal dryness** continues despite lubricants. Local oestrogen therapy or other treatments restore comfort and protect vaginal health.
- **Urinary issues** such as leaks or urgency interfere with life. Pelvic floor therapy, medication, or physiotherapy can help.
- **Bone health concerns** (osteoporosis risk) are present. Doctors may advise scans and preventative treatment.

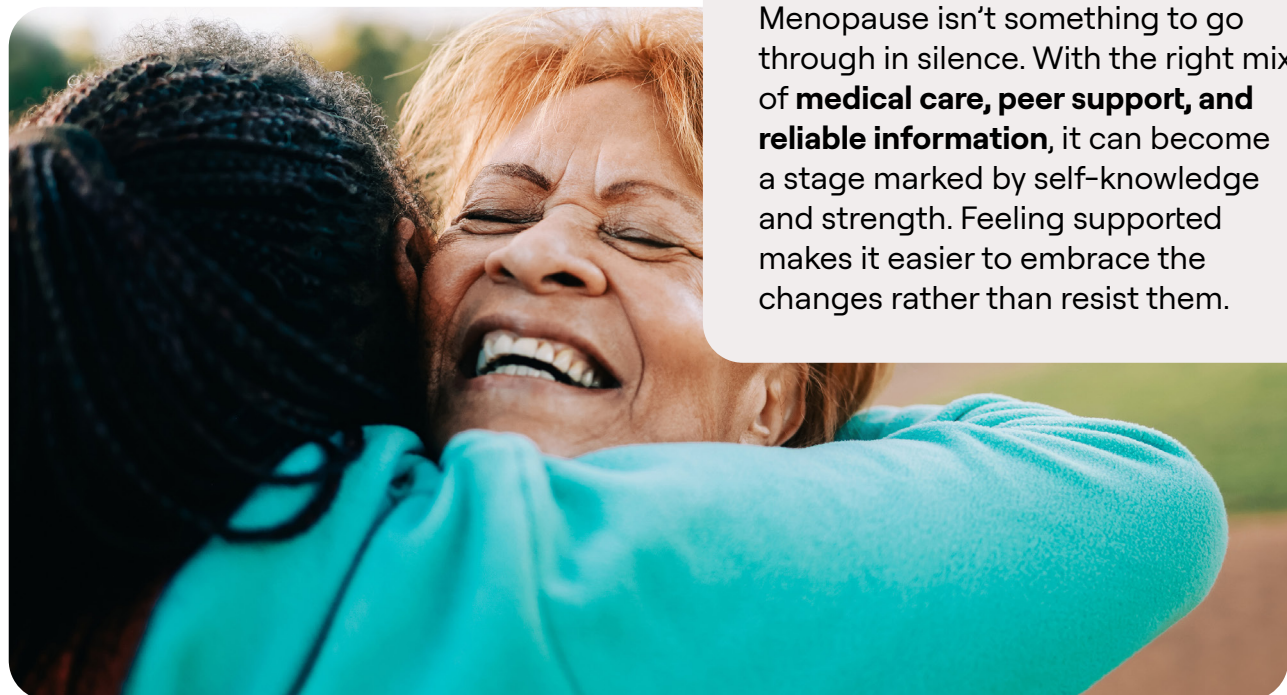


If symptoms are disrupting daily life, **medical support can make a meaningful difference**. Effective treatments exist, and **you don't need to “just put up with it.”** Reaching out early helps protect long-term health and restores quality of life at a time when it matters most.

## Support during menopause

Menopause is natural, but support is still important. Having the right information and resources can turn a difficult transition into one of self-discovery and strength.

- **Healthcare providers** – GPs, gynaecologists, and menopause specialists can give clear advice, offer treatments, and support symptom management. Their role is to empower, not medicalise unnecessarily.
- **Peer groups** – Local and online communities provide solidarity and practical advice. Hearing others' experiences can validate your own and reduce isolation.
- **Counselling** – Therapy offers space to explore self-worth, relationships, and body image. It helps reframe menopause as an opportunity for growth.
- **Global organisations** – Trusted resources such as the WHO, NHS, HSE, British Menopause Society, and North American Menopause Society provide evidence-based guidance, helping cut through misinformation.



Menopause isn't something to go through in silence. With the right mix of **medical care, peer support, and reliable information**, it can become a stage marked by self-knowledge and strength. Feeling supported makes it easier to embrace the changes rather than resist them.

## How HealthHero can help

With **HealthHero**, you can book an online GP consultation quickly and discreetly. A doctor can discuss your symptoms, explore treatment options, and provide support so you feel guided through this stage with care.