



Getting the most out of your doctor's appointment

So you have decided that it's time to visit your doctor to discuss the seemingly unrelated mixed bag of symptoms you have been trying to cope with. You might have a sneaking suspicion that these could be related to the menopause but you may never have considered it and are just completely fed up with feeling tired and lifeless, anxious, tense and sleep deprived or hot one minute and chilly the next and sometimes tearful, irritable and unhappy for no particular reason. The problem is that many women don't understand what is going on and that can affect personal and professional relationships too.

So where do you start when planning your visit to your doctor?

1. Do your research, take a look at the NICE menopause guidance, there is a section in the guidelines for patients and knowledge is power. When you know what your doctor could offer you in terms of treatment and support it will enable you to have an informed conversation.
2. When you book your appointment ask the receptionist who in the practice has a special interest in menopause and don't be afraid to ask for a double appointment.
3. Make a list of all your symptoms and everything you have tried so far to deal with them. You can print and complete the Menopause Support symptom checker at menopausesupport.co.uk. Having everything written down is so helpful as it avoids that feeling of panic when you sit down in front of the doctor and your mind goes blank.
4. Take a supportive friend or family member with you to your appointment. This can be particularly helpful if you are feeling very low or anxious, having some support can be invaluable.
5. Ask questions; if you don't understand what your doctor is saying always ask them to explain so that you can have a clear understanding of what they are suggesting.
6. Be prepared to wait for answers; if your doctor is unsure about menopause and seems reluctant to discuss options with you ask them to consult a colleague or read the NICE guidelines on menopause before coming back to you.
7. Ask for a referral to a menopause clinic; it's only fair to say that there are simply not enough of these throughout the U.K and they often have long waiting lists, but if you feel that you are not making any progress with your doctor, then you can ask to be referred to your nearest clinic.

Remember that you know your body better than anyone else and if you feel that things are changing for you that should be listened to and respected. Hopefully you won't need my hints and tips when you see your doctor but I sincerely hope that they empower you to take control of your menopause symptoms if you do.