

Your Health

 Health Partners

AUGUST 2024 NEWSLETTER

WOMEN'S & HEALTH & WELLNESS

*A Journey to Wholeness:
Empowering Your Personal Wellness*



In this issue of *Your Health*, we delve into personal wellness – what it means and how to achieve it – looking at mind, body and life. Our main article focuses on women's health, focussing on some of the main health concerns affecting women and the symptoms, treatments and preventative topics surrounding women's health.

Personal Wellness

In the last few years, the way we look at staying healthy has changed. It's not just about avoiding illness anymore. Now, it's about looking after our entire selves – our bodies, minds and feelings.

Life can often be busy and stressful, so we are all of us looking for ways to fit in activities that keep us healthy and happy, despite our packed timetables. The idea of wellness today is all about seeing health as a big picture, inspiring everyone to actively look after ourselves in a way that makes our lives richer and more satisfying.

The multifaceted nature of wellness

Wellness is not simply the absence of illness – it is a dynamic process of change and growth; a state of complete physical, mental and social wellbeing. It involves a conscious, self-directed and evolving process of achieving our full potential.

In trying to lead a happy and satisfying life, looking after our health and wellbeing can help point us in the right direction.

To help navigate this journey, let's delve into 10 essential wellness topics, each bolstered by practical advice and actionable steps, ensuring that we can feel confident moving towards a more vibrant and wholesome existence.



Nutrition: Your Body's Optimal Fuel

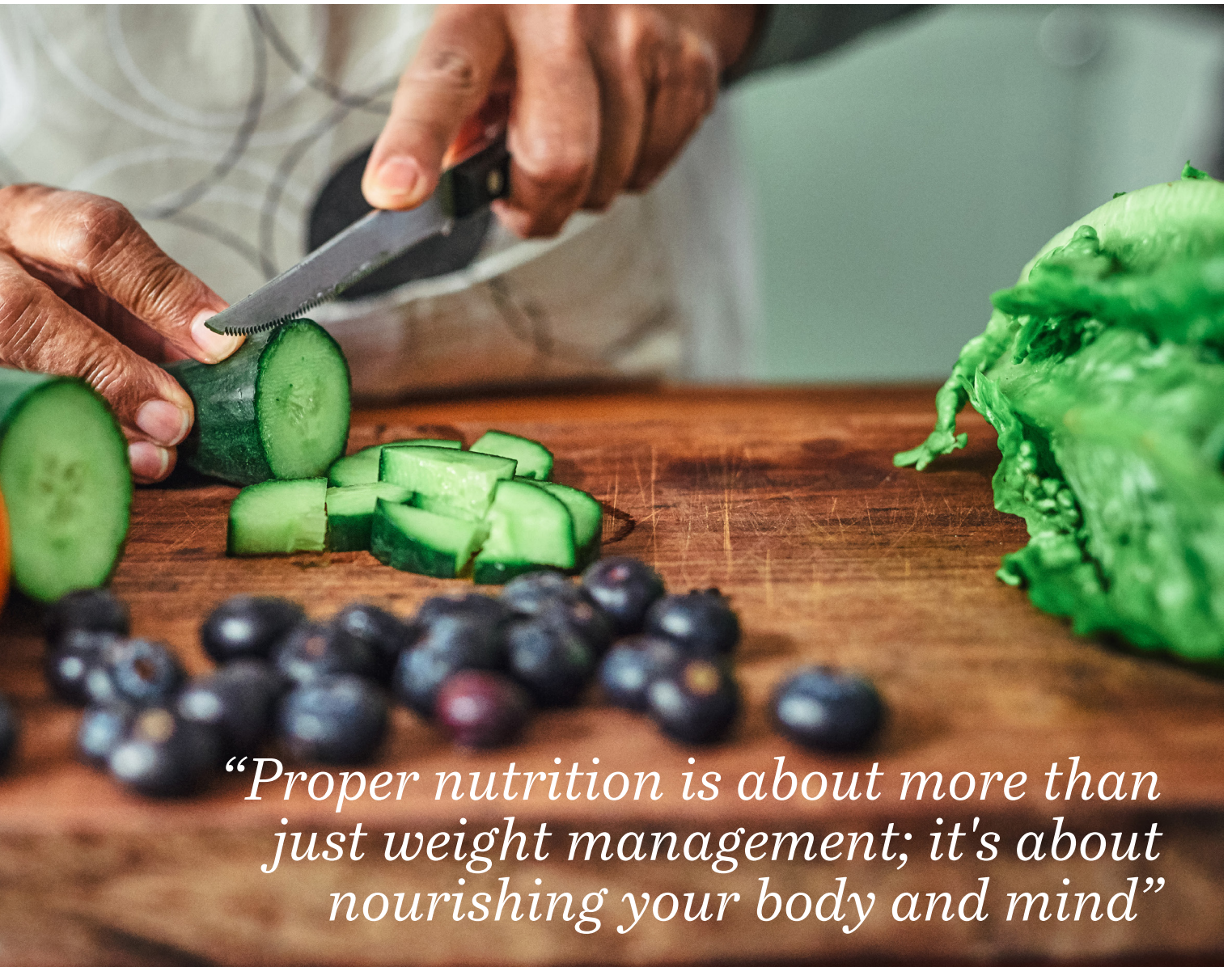
Proper nutrition is about more than just weight management; it's about nourishing your body and mind with the right kinds of foods that can boost your energy and prevent diseases.

- ▶ Educate yourself on the food groups and the benefits they provide.
- ▶ Read nutrition labels and be mindful of portion sizes.
- ▶ Eat a variety of vegetables at every meal and a selection of fruits each day.
- ▶ Choose whole grains over refined ones and opt for lean proteins.

Physical Activity: The Pillar of Vitality

Regular exercise strengthens the body, improves mood, and reduces the risk of chronic diseases. It's a cornerstone of personal wellness that invigorates both body and soul.

- ▶ Find an activity that you enjoy and can stick with long term.



“Proper nutrition is about more than just weight management; it's about nourishing your body and mind”

- ▶ Set achievable goals, like walking 10,000 steps a day.
- ▶ Schedule regular workouts into your week.
- ▶ Use the stairs instead of the lift to incorporate more activity into your day.

Mental Health: The Mind's Equilibrium

Your mental health influences how you think, feel and behave in daily life. It also affects your ability to cope with stress, overcome challenges and recover from life's setbacks.

- ▶ Practice self-care activities that promote relaxation and stress relief.
- ▶ Recognise when to seek professional help if you're feeling overwhelmed.
- ▶ Set aside time each day for activities that

- you find calming, such as reading or yoga.
- ▶ Ensure you get enough sleep, aiming for a consistent sleep schedule.

Emotional Wellbeing: The Art of Balance

Emotional wellbeing is about feeling and expressing emotions in a healthy, constructive way. It's about being aware of and accepting your feelings, whether they're positive or negative.

- ▶ Develop healthy coping mechanisms for managing emotions.
- ▶ Cultivate strong, supportive relationships with friends and family.
- ▶ Practice expressing your emotions through keeping a diary or through art.
- ▶ Communicate openly with loved ones about how you feel.

Preventative Healthcare: The Proactive Approach

Preventative healthcare involves taking steps to prevent illness, rather than treating it after it occurs. This includes regular check-ups, screenings and immunisations.

- ▶ Know your health history and share it with your healthcare provider.
- ▶ Stay up to date with recommended vaccinations and health screenings.
- ▶ Make appointments for routine health check-ups and follow through with them.
- ▶ Adopt healthy lifestyle habits to help to prevent chronic diseases.

Personal Hygiene: The Foundation of Health

Good personal hygiene is crucial for maintaining good health and preventing the spread of illnesses. It includes practices like bathing, brushing teeth and washing hands.

- ▶ Establish a daily hygiene routine that's easy to follow.
- ▶ Regularly clean and disinfect frequently touched surfaces in your home.
- ▶ Wash your hands thoroughly with soap and water for at least 20 seconds after using the bathroom and whenever you prepare and/or eat food.
- ▶ Brush and floss your teeth twice a day to maintain oral health.

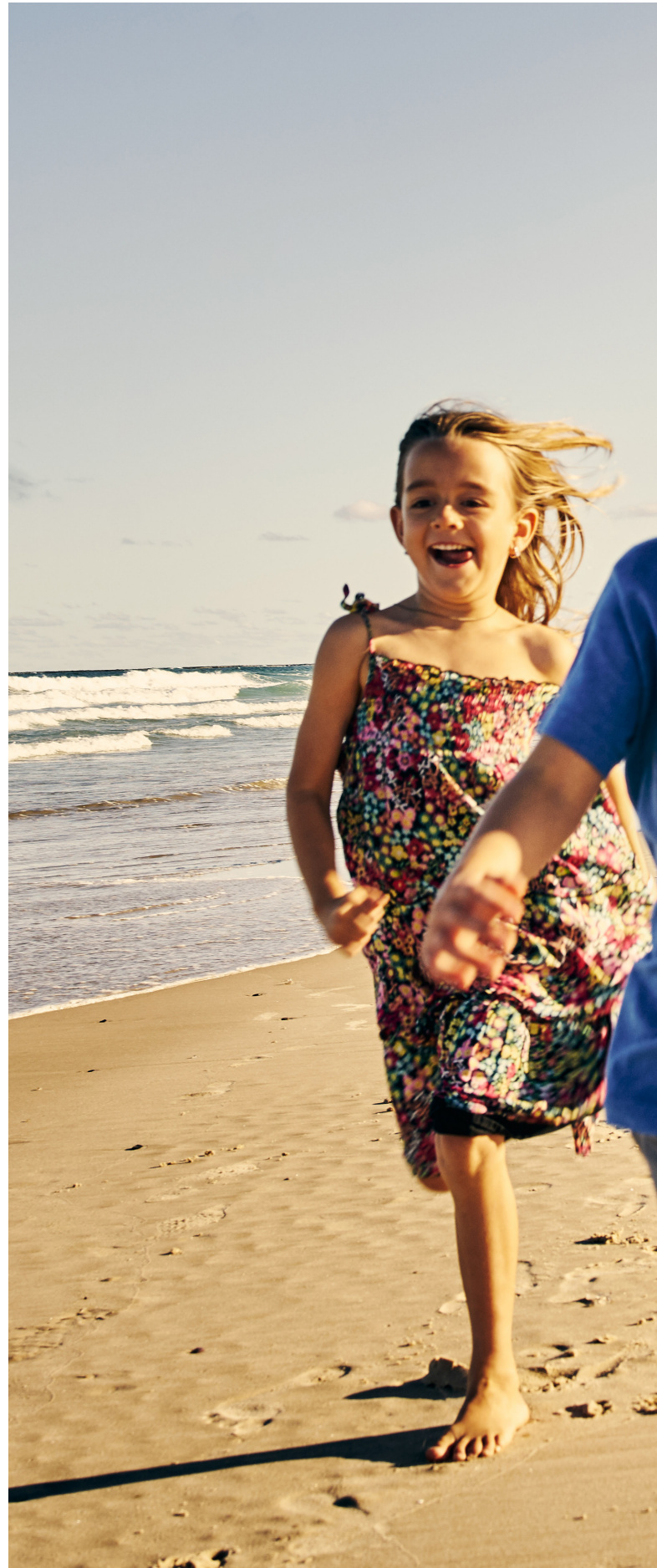
Work-Life Balance: The Harmony of Responsibilities

Achieving a healthy work-life balance means having harmony between the demands of your job and the pleasures of your personal life.

- ▶ Prepare your work week by planning and setting/agreeing feasible timeframes for projects.
- ▶ Prioritise tasks and delegate when possible.
- ▶ Schedule breaks during your workday to rest and recharge.
- ▶ Make time for hobbies and interests outside of work.

Healthy Environment: Your Personal Oasis

Your surroundings can significantly impact your health and wellbeing. A healthy environment is clean, safe and promotes a sense of wellbeing.





- ▶ Reduce clutter and create a space that reflects tranquillity and comfort.
- ▶ Consider the quality of air, water and light in your living spaces.
- ▶ Invest in houseplants to improve air quality and enhance your mood.
- ▶ Ensure your living and workspaces have plenty of natural light.

Substance Use and Abuse: Choosing Wellness over Risk

Substance use and abuse can negatively affect your health and wellbeing. It's important to make informed choices about the consumption of alcohol, tobacco and other drugs.


- ▶ Understand the health risks associated with substance misuse.
- ▶ If you drink or smoke, set limits for yourself and stick to them.
- ▶ Opt for social activities that don't involve alcohol or drugs.
- ▶ Seek support from friends, family or professional services if you're struggling with substance use.

Spiritual Wellness: The Soul's Journey

Spiritual wellness is about finding meaning and purpose in life, which can come from religion, nature, meditation or art. It's about connecting with something greater than yourself.

- ▶ Explore different spiritual or philosophical paths that resonate with you.
- ▶ Reflect on your core values and how you can express them in your life.
- ▶ Dedicate time for meditation, prayer or reflection.
- ▶ Engage in local activities or volunteering to connect with others and give back.

Wellness is not a one-size-fits-all solution. It varies widely by individual – not all practices will be suitable for every person. It's a personal journey that involves a continual search for the tools and practices that best support your overall health and happiness.

By adopting a holistic approach to wellness, we can all work towards a more balanced, energised and satisfying life. 

Women's Health

Women's health covers many important areas, from reproductive health to gynaecological care and much more, all contributing to the complete health and wellness of women.

This article is intended to provide insight into the range of topics that comprise women's health. A balanced approach to nutrition, exercise, sleep and stress management forms the bedrock of preventative health. Ensuring you are empowered with the knowledge and resources to make healthy lifestyle choices is essential for long-term wellness.

Please note: When we use the word 'women', we are referring to women, trans men, people who are non-binary who were assigned female at birth and cis gender women

PREGNANCY

If you are planning a pregnancy, it is recommended that you take a 400 microgram daily supplement of folic acid three months before conception and continue to take this until the end of the first trimester at 12 weeks. This is to help reduce the chances of your baby developing birth defects such as spina bifida. Some individuals will need a higher dose due to their medical history. Speak with your doctor if you are concerned.

You should be offered the influenza vaccine and a whooping cough booster vaccine during your pregnancy. Both vaccines are safe and effective at protecting you and your newborn baby as they will be born with antibodies passed from you.

Don't worry if you get pregnant unexpectedly: just start taking the supplements as soon as you find out.

Other ways to look after you and your baby include stopping smoking, cutting out alcohol and maintaining a healthy diet and weight. Take advice from your doctor if you are on any medication.



“You will notice your bump starting to grow and you may see skin changes”

First trimester: 1-12 weeks

Pregnancy is dated from the first day of your last period – so for approximately the first two weeks you aren't technically pregnant. Adjusting to pregnancy can be an exciting time but includes a range of physical and emotional changes. What will you be experiencing during the first 12 weeks?

- ▶ Your periods have stopped.
- ▶ You may feel nauseated or vomit – the term “morning sickness” is sadly misleading as the symptoms can happen at any time of the day or night. Some people have no symptoms, but an unlucky few can develop hyperemesis gravidarum, which results in severe vomiting and will require medical treatment.
- ▶ Feeling tired or sometimes exhausted.
- ▶ Feeling exhilarated and/or up and down due to hormonal changes.

- ▶ Tender breasts.
- ▶ Increased sensitivity to smells, changes in taste.

Baby

- ▶ Just after 12 weeks the foetus is fully formed. Organs, muscles, limbs, bone and sex organs are in place.
- ▶ You will usually have your first scan around the 12-week mark and can see the developing baby.

Second trimester: 13-27 weeks

During the second trimester at around 20 weeks, you will usually be offered a detailed ultrasound scan. The scan checks on the development of the baby and can help to identify any potential problems. At this scan the sonographer may be able to tell you the sex of the baby. However, some hospitals may refuse. You should check your local hospital's policy.

For most individuals, the sickness and exhaustion improve during the second trimester. You will notice your bump starting to grow and you may see skin changes. You may develop a dark line down the middle of your stomach. These changes will gradually fade after the baby is born.

You will also start to feel the baby moving. This is usually between 16 and 24 weeks. If it is your first baby, you might not notice movements until 20 weeks.

Third trimester: 28-40+ weeks

This is the home stretch. During this trimester, your baby is continuing to grow and its lungs and central nervous system are maturing. Towards the end of the trimester (depending on the position of your baby), the head will often 'drop' into your pelvis.





As the baby grows, some individuals experience additional symptoms:

- ▶ heartburn and shortness of breath;
- ▶ excessive tiredness;
- ▶ swollen feet or hands (if the swelling develops suddenly or gets a lot worse, contact your midwife to check for a condition called pre-eclampsia);
- ▶ difficulty sleeping;
- ▶ increased urinating especially at night;
- ▶ Braxton-Hicks contractions, or “practice contractions” from 30+ weeks. These are caused by the womb starting to contract;
- ▶ varicose veins due to expansion of blood volume and changes in the vessel walls;
- ▶ leaking a milky fluid called colostrum from your breasts.

You will see your midwife more frequently as the pregnancy reaches term, and you may have bloods taken at around 28 weeks to ensure you are not becoming anaemic.

Most babies do not arrive on the due date, and many individuals go past their expected delivery date. This is common and usually not something to be concerned about.

In most cases labour will have started naturally by 41-42 weeks. If not, you will be offered an induction to start your labour as there is a higher risk of stillbirth beyond 42 weeks.

Labour

The experience of labour can be different



dilating (opening) the cervix, and for most women this is the longest stage of labour and can take many hours, particularly if it is your first baby. You are not in 'established labour' until you are at least 4cm dilated.

- ▶ **2nd stage:** now you are fully dilated (to 10cm) and your body is ready to push and deliver your baby.
- ▶ **3rd stage:** delivery of the placenta – this can happen naturally or actively if you have treatment to make it happen faster. Your midwife will discuss your options with you.

Breastfeeding

It is never too early to start thinking about how you would like to feed your baby. You may not breastfeed due to personal choice or difficulty with the process. If you decide to breastfeed, there are numerous recognised benefits for both mother and baby, and your baby can be fed exclusively on breast milk for the first six months or until ready for weaning.

If you would like to breastfeed, you are much more likely to be successful if you have support from midwives and your health visitor.

Additional resources

- ▶ [World Health Organisation](#)
- ▶ [NHS Breastfeeding & Bottle Feeding Advice](#)

Pregnancy and work

Most people can safely continue to work during their pregnancy. Speak to your employer about carrying out a pregnant worker's risk assessment.

Pregnancy is a protected characteristic under the Equality Act 2010.

You will need a MAT B1 form which is usually completed by your doctor or midwife. This confirms the pregnancy and expected week of confinement (EWC) and is issued after your 20th week of pregnancy.

You should inform your employer of the date you plan to start maternity leave no later than 15 weeks before your baby is due.

from one person to another, but generally everyone giving birth will experience:

- ▶ contractions or 'tightenings' – as labour progresses, these increase in intensity and frequency;
- ▶ a 'show' when the plug of mucus at the entrance to your womb has come away;
- ▶ back pain;
- ▶ waters breaking – labour will normally start within 24 hours of your waters breaking; if not, you will be offered an induction, because without the amniotic fluid there is an increased risk of infection for your baby.

Stages of labour

- ▶ **1st stage:** contractions are gradually

HEALTH CONCERNS

▶ Endometriosis

You may have seen a lot of information recently about endometriosis on the news or via social media, but what is it?

Endometriosis is the condition where tissue similar to the lining of the womb grows in other places, such as the ovaries and fallopian tubes. Endometriosis can affect you from puberty to menopause. Five to 10% of women worldwide are living with the condition.

Symptoms may include period pain that limits normal activities, pain can be felt in your lower abdomen or back (often worse during your period), pain during or after intercourse and pain during bowel movements and/or when passing urine.

Bleeding

- ▶ Heavy periods
- ▶ Prolonged periods
- ▶ May pass clots
- ▶ Spotting

Other symptoms

- ▶ Fatigue.
- ▶ Depression.
- ▶ You may have difficulty conceiving.

Diagnosis

Getting a diagnosis may take some time – and sometimes, scans, blood tests and internal examinations may not lead to a conclusive diagnosis.

The only definitive way to diagnose endometriosis is by a laparoscopy. A laparoscopy is an operation where a camera is inserted into the pelvis via a small cut near the navel.

Treatment

There is currently no cure for endometriosis, but there are treatments to help manage the symptoms and improve an individual's quality of life. The choice of treatment will depend on your age, symptoms, if you are planning to become pregnant and how you feel about surgery.

Pain medications include:

- ▶ anti-inflammatories such as ibuprofen or paracetamol;





- ▶ heat and comfort – using hot water bottles or a hot bath;
- ▶ TENS machines;
- ▶ stronger pain relief and guidance may be required through a pain clinic.

Hormone treatments include:

- ▶ combined oral contraceptive pill;
- ▶ progesterone: as a progesterone-only pill, as an intrauterine device or as a contraceptive implant or injection;
- ▶ gonadotrophin-releasing hormone analogues can cause a temporary menopause by reducing oestrogen.

Surgery

During surgery, the surgeon aims to remove or destroy areas of endometriosis tissue; this can help improve symptoms. Most commonly, this would be carried out laparoscopically (keyhole surgery).

During the procedure, patches of endometriosis are cut away or treated with a laser, heat or a beam of special gas. You will need a general anaesthetic for the procedure.

Symptoms can recur after surgery if endometriosis tissue is left behind. There

are also risks associated with a surgical procedure.

If no other treatment has been effective and you do not wish to get pregnant, then a hysterectomy may be considered. If you need to have your ovaries removed as well, then you may need to consider HRT afterwards.

A hysterectomy is a major operation and would need to be carefully considered along with guidance from your doctors.

▶ Cervical Cancer

Cervical screening (otherwise known as a smear test) checks the health of your cervix. You will be invited to attend for a test from the ages of 25 to 64.

The sample taken during the test is used to check for certain types of human papillomavirus (HPV – see below for more information), which have been identified as high risk for causing cervical cancer. If the test is negative, you require no further treatment and will be recalled for screening dependent on your age and where you live in the UK.

In England, the first invitation is sent to eligible people at the age of 24.5 years.

People aged 25 to 49 receive invitations every three years. People aged 50 to 64 receive invitations every five years. In Scotland, screening is every five years between the ages of 25 and 64 years.

If your previous screening tests have found HPV, you may be invited for screening more regularly.

▶ HPV

Human Papillomavirus (HPV) is a common group of viruses, with some types linked to various conditions including cervical cancer. Most HPV infections don't lead to cancer and the body often clears the virus naturally. However, it's important for women to attend cervical screenings when invited, as it can detect abnormal cells in the cervix caused by HPV. Vaccinations are also available to help protect against the virus.

For comprehensive information on HPV, its health implications and the services available, visit the [NHS website](#) which provides guidance on prevention, screening and treatment options.

Why do we not screen under 25?

This type of cancer is very rare under the age of 25. If you were to be screened, you may end up having treatment that you did not need; there is evidence that abnormal cells often return to normal in younger females.

▶ Ovarian Cancer

This topic was covered in depth in our [March 2023 Your Health newsletter](#). Please refer to the article for information or go to www.ovarian.org.uk, and if you have any concerns about symptoms, please get yourself checked out.

▶ Endometrial/Uterine Cancer

Endometrial cancer is a cancer of the uterus (womb). The cancer begins in the lining (endometrium) of the uterus.

Around 9,700 females are diagnosed in the UK with this type of cancer each year. It tends to present in older individuals and is much less common in those under 40.

Symptoms

- ▶ Vaginal bleeding after the menopause
- ▶ Bleeding between periods
- ▶ Changes to vaginal discharge
- ▶ Pelvic pain

Risk factors

Anyone with a womb is at risk, but high oestrogen increases your risk. You may have high oestrogen if you are:

- ▶ overweight;
- ▶ on oestrogen-only HRT;
- ▶ have never given birth;
- ▶ have polycystic ovarian syndrome;
- ▶ have gone through the menopause after the age of 55.

You may also be at higher risk if you have:

- ▶ diabetes;
- ▶ a family history of bowel, ovarian or endometrial cancer;
- ▶ have been on Tamoxifen (used to treat breast cancer);
- ▶ have had radiotherapy on your pelvis.

Making the diagnosis


The first test will usually involve an ultrasound scan that is performed by inserting the scanning device into your vagina (transvaginal scan) – although this may be a bit uncomfortable it should not be painful.

To confirm the diagnosis, a biopsy will be taken so the cells can be analysed. You may require blood tests and further scans to identify if the cancer has spread beyond the womb to help your doctors decide on the best treatment for you.

Treatment

Surgery is often the main treatment especially if the cancer has been found early. Options include:

- ▶ hysterectomy: removal of the uterus/womb. In some cases, surgery will also include removal of the fallopian tubes or the ovaries;
- ▶ depending on spread you may require removal of lymph nodes or more extensive surgery involving neighbouring organs.



“A cervical screening checks the health of your cervix”

Radiotherapy may be offered as the main treatment if you cannot have surgery, to shrink the tumour prior to surgery or if the cancer has spread, is large or as additional treatment to help prevent recurrence.

Chemotherapy may be used along with radiotherapy (chemoradiotherapy) as treatment or as additional treatment after surgery to avoid recurrence. You may have a single drug or a combination of two or three drugs.

MENOPAUSE

The menopause is the term used where the monthly periods stop and hormone levels decrease. This usually happens between the ages of 45 and 55.

For most women, there will be a period of

disruption where hormone levels fluctuate, periods may continue but become irregular.

This is known as the perimenopause and it can last for months or several years. Once your periods have stopped for 12 months, you have reached the menopause.

An early menopause describes the menopause between 40 and 45, and under 40 is described as a premature menopause.

What symptoms will I experience?

There is a huge spectrum of symptoms, and the experience is different for every individual. Some lucky individuals have no symptoms; however, for some the symptoms can have a big impact on their daily life and at work.

Physical symptoms include changes

to your periods. In perimenopause, your periods often become irregular or more frequent and they may be lighter or heavier. In addition to menstrual changes, individuals may experience hot flushes and night sweats.

Insomnia, joint and muscle pain, urinary symptoms, vaginal dryness and a reduced libido may all be possible symptoms associated with the menopause, as well as mood swings, brain fog, feeling anxious and irritability.

Symptoms may be exacerbated by poor sleep and night sweats. You may also notice poor concentration and memory.

Self help

To help mitigate some of the symptoms:

- ▶ keep cool;
- ▶ avoid spicy foods, caffeine, alcohol and smoking and understand how to manage stress;
- ▶ wear layers that allow you to take off clothes when you are too hot;
- ▶ choose natural fabrics rather than synthetic;
- ▶ exercising regularly will lift your mood and help with sleep;
- ▶ pelvic floor exercises may help with bladder control.

Medication

If you are struggling with symptoms see your GP to discuss whether hormone replacement therapy (HRT) is right for you. HRT helps to restore hormone levels. The treatment may contain both oestrogen and progesterone or oestrogen only and this is usually in a gel form.

For those with libido problems particularly, there is a move towards using low doses of testosterone. This can be in a gel or patch form. It is not currently licensed for use in females, but you may be offered this if it was felt to be appropriate after specialist discussion.

If you are suffering with low mood or erratic temper, the doctor may also discuss using antidepressants or making a referral for talking therapy.






Osteoporosis

Osteoporosis results in weakened bones, making them fragile and more likely to break. There is a direct relationship between a lack of oestrogen which occurs following the menopause and an increased risk of developing osteoporosis.

Your doctor may discuss supplements to help prevent the development of osteoporosis. You can help yourself by taking regular exercise, stopping smoking and reducing alcohol consumption.

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, we must all understand and look after our health to enhance our overall quality of life. By focusing on our health, we empower ourselves to lead fuller, healthier lives. 

Sources:

NHS, Cancer Research UK, Women's Health Concern, Menopause Matters, Endometriosis UK, Ovarian UK, NICE.

NEXT ISSUE:

- Accessibility & Inclusion
- Work-life Balance

At Health Partners we offer a full range of tailored health and wellbeing services.

Our thinking is innovative. We constantly develop new responses and tools designed to address the health and wellbeing challenges that face your business and people.

Our commitment is total. We invest in our services, creating new ones and keeping in step with every client. We constantly explore new ways of working and make no compromises in the quality of our services.

Simply put, we are here to help people be their best.