The final female health taboo is set to change as women are talking to men about the menopause

Research has found that instead of turning away from their male partners in embarrassment, more women are now talking about the menopause with the men in their lives.
Dr Louise Newson said talking to men about the menopause can be an enormous benefit to women.

It has been seen as one of the last female health taboos, a topic considered far too embarrassing to discuss with male partners.

Women going through 'The Change,' as it was once known, may have boldly ventured to discuss the issue with their closest girlfriends and asked for support or advice in the past.

But new research has found a third of women are now turning to the men in their lives for support when going through the menopause.

The survey, conducted by new advice website Menopause & Me, also found that 80 percent of women today felt comfortable discussing some of the debilitating symptoms with their partner.

“`It’s fantastic that women are opening up more,” says GP Dr Louise Newson who runs a menopause clinic in Solihull.
“There’s still so much uncertainty about what the menopause means and how it can be managed and talking with a partner is a wonderful way for women to voice their concerns and receive help.”

However, while such sharing is a great step forward, for Dr Newson, there’s still much work to be done.

“I want to see the remaining two-thirds of women feeling able to lean on their loved ones more during this difficult period too,” she says.

“Better still, I’d like all women to be properly informed about the menopause and the treatments available to them – and to feel able to ask their GP for help if symptoms are damaging their quality of life.”

Indeed, by the time they pay her a visit, Dr Newson frequently finds her menopausal - patients are already isolated, depressed and at the end of their tether.
‘I just don’t feel like ‘me’ anymore’, ‘It’s like wading through treacle every day’ and ‘I’m just about hanging on by my fingernails,’ are sentiments Dr Newson hears daily.

“As for their partners, many tell me they don’t recognise their wives since they started the menopause,” she continues. “They see them having night sweats, low confidence and mood swings – and want to help but don’t know how.”

Dr Newson is embarrassed to admit that she herself is a case in point. “I’m a GP, but it took my 12 year-old daughter to point out my excessive moodiness a year ago.

“Only then did I realise I’d not had a period for several months. It seems obvious now, but it took me months to realise I was actually starting the menopause myself!”

The menopause officially occurs when your ovaries stop producing eggs and levels of the hormones oestrogen and progesterone fall until your periods stop.

This usually takes place between the ages of 45 to 55, but it can be earlier for some women. It’s the drop in oestrogen that causes many of the more unpleasant symptoms.

Women can find themselves suddenly suffering from low confidence and anxiety – and experiencing everything from the classic hot flushes, to brain fog, insomnia, bladder problems and a diminished libido.
But many still don’t realise that these symptoms can present themselves up to five years before menopause actually starts, as oestrogen levels begin declining. This is known as the ‘peri-menopause’.

“It’s actually very sad that many women aren’t recognising these as peri and even menopausal symptoms - and therefore treatable,” says Dr Newson. “I am constantly astonished at how little women know about the menopause and how many don’t get adequate help and advice for their symptoms.”

For more advice about all issues related to the menopause, women can consult menopauseandme.co.uk, an online resource designed to help women make more informed choices when it comes to managing their symptoms.

Dr Newson is a wholehearted supporter of all such efforts: “My message to women is that they don’t ‘just have to get on with it’.

“There’s plenty they can do to tackle symptoms and ensure they have a good menopause and enjoy this period of their life to the full.”

One area where women are still confused is hormone replacement therapy or HRT.

“Despite scare stories in the past, it’s important for women to realise that the newer forms of HRT are actually very low risk,” says Dr Louise Newson.

Combined oral oestrogen and progesterone, the older type of HRT, was linked to an increased risk of stroke, but the newer gel and patches doctors typically prescribe don’t pose this risk.

When it comes to breast cancer, there is a slight increased risk with taking combined HRT. For every 1000 women over 50 taking HRT for five years, two more will develop breast.
It's thought HRT doesn't cause cancer but may encourage existing cancer cells to grow in some women.

“But this is still lower than the associated breast cancer risk of drinking two glasses of wine a night or being overweight,” points out Dr Newson.

Menopause & Me provides tailored information about all stages of the menopause and what to expect. The free resource offers the tools and support to help women make informed choices when it comes to managing their symptoms. Visit menopauseandme.co.uk
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