Don’t Suffer in Silence

The symptoms associated with menopause can often lead to debilitating affects on relationships, working life and even mental health. GALWAYnow spoke to menopausal expert, Dr. Louise Newson about breaking the stigma of menopause and its related symptoms, and what can be done to help.

Menopause is something that can’t be avoided; every woman will have to go through it at some stage in her life. With the average age for onset at approximately 51, menopause occurs when your ovaries stop producing eggs. When you are no longer producing eggs, the levels of your hormones fall which can cause difficult symptoms.

A GP for over 20 years, Dr. Louise Newson has treated many menopausal women – her interest peaked when she herself experienced the silence that surrounds it. ’As I have gotten older and indeed my friends have gotten older, I realised that no one is talking about the menopause. It’s strange because it happens to all of us, and you can’t do anything to stop it. Having said that, you can do a lot to make your menopause a positive experience. The objective of my work is to try and help reduce the stigma and empower women with the correct information.”

As a regular on Channel 4’s Embarrassing Bodies, Louise understands how disconcertion can hinder those seeking medical treatment. “When people are embarrassed it’s often because they don’t know enough about something. They don’t realise how common it is so they think they are alone.”

A recent survey that Dr. Newson carried out with the Midlands Police and Fire Brigade showed that almost 80% of the women questioned hadn’t realised that their symptoms were due to menopause, until they had the correct information.

Lack of information was a common thread that emerged from speaking with Louise. Often women will blame the less obviously associated symptoms on external lifestyle stressors. “If you speak to the average person, they would talk about hot flushes and night sweats. They wouldn’t be able to recognise that the symptoms of low mood, poor self esteem, anxiety, difficulty concentrating, memory problems, lack of libido, vaginal dryness, migraines and joint pains – they are all related to the menopause.”

Menopause is clearly having a drastic affect on the workforce so it is important that employers and the general public educate themselves about the symptoms. “Many women experience loss of concentration, poor memory, fatigue, increased frequencies of migraines and lack of motivation. This is hard because then women think that they are not doing their job properly which has an even more negative effect on their daily lives.”

While it is women who experience these changes, family and partners can also be affected by symptoms which often come on gradually making them difficult to recognise. “We are a lot more open nowadays but if people’s families don’t speak about menopause, then the whole process is very negative and scary. If men don’t know what to expect, their partner has suddenly changed which can be very confusing. A lot of men will have female partners and mothers who are suffering. Once they read the information in a booklet or online, they realise what their loved ones are going through.”

Louise believes there is much that can be done to eradicate the menopause being an exclusively negative and silent experience. “I would like to think that the taboo around women’s health is shifting. I think it exists sometimes because people are scared. I hear so many stories in my clinic of women who have suffered for years. So many of their symptoms can certainly be treated and helped with the correct treatment.”

Alongside educating people about the menopause, Louise aims to shed a light on the benefits of Hormone Replacement Treatment, or HRT. “I am trying to get the message out about the safety of HRT, which can actually reduce the health risks associated with menopause. Many people don’t understand how safe and effective HRT can be for treating symptoms, and how much it can help women to get their lives back.”

Don’t Suffer in Silence

Visit menopasedoctor.co.uk for more information on how to make the menopause a positive experience.