

Is the Menopause upsetting your bladder?

Every woman's experience of the menopause is different with some people experiencing more symptoms than others, but one thing that is for sure, is that it will happen to all women.



It is considered that once your periods have stopped for 12 months, you have reached the menopause. The average age for this to happen for women in the UK is 51 but it usually occurs between 45 and 55.

As a woman's pelvic organs are reliant on oestrogen to keep the tissues healthy, urinary symptoms can begin when the oestrogen levels drop as this results in the tissues of the bladder, urethra and vagina becoming thinner.

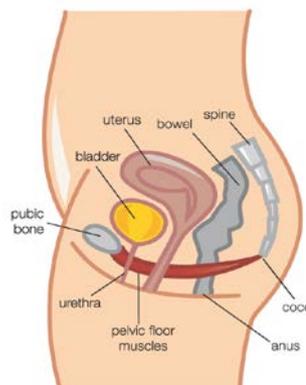
The word 'Menopause' makes people think of hot flushes and night sweats but its effects can be much more extensive.

The lowering levels of oestrogen, when in combination with damaged or weakened pelvic floor muscles usually as a result of childbirth, impacts women's ability to control the urinary system. Particular risk factors are: the length of labour, weight of the baby, the use of forceps/ventouse, degree of tear or use of an epidural. Immediately following childbirth, urinary symptoms may not be apparent but unless a programme of pelvic floor exercises has been followed the weakness remains.

The Bladder, Urethra, Vagina and Pelvic floor muscle are all reliant on Oestrogen. When the levels fluctuate women may find that they 'can't hold on' or that they begin to use the toilet more frequently.

On average, people should pass urine every 3-4 hours.

Due to the changes within the urethra, and weakened muscles, women may experience a 'dribble' as they stand up from the toilet or may be prone to urine infections



The good news is that bladder problems related to the Menopause are treatable.

In addition to this, women may find that when they cough, sneeze, or exercise that urine leaks. This is called Stress Incontinence and is often due to weakened pelvic floor muscles.

The vagina may also become dry or irritated by a condition known as 'Vaginal Atrophy' or women may have a heavy feeling that could indicate a prolapse.

The good news is that all these symptoms are treatable

Bladder symptoms may include:

- ❖ Frequency
- ❖ Urgency
- ❖ Frequent urine infections
- ❖ Stress incontinence
- ❖ Overactive bladder

It may help to:

- ❖ Ensure a good fluid intake, but avoiding caffeine.
- ❖ Visit the toilet at regular intervals
- ❖ Always sit on the toilet to pass urine
- ❖ Begin pelvic floor exercises

It is advisable to see a Health Care professional for a full assessment, who can provide a bespoke pelvic floor exercise programme, support with bladder retraining and advise if medication may help.