Suffolk GP FEDERATION

Very Important Invitation

Raising Awareness Of Cervical Screening

CERVICAL SCREENING

SMEAR TEST AND MENOPAUSE

During the menopause, your body loses the female sex hormones, oestrogen and progesterone, these hormones also help to lubricate your vagina and keep the tissue that makes up the vaginal walls stretchy.

As these hormones decrease the vagina may become drier and less stretchy, therefore some people can find cervical screening may be uncomfortable or even painful.

Thankfully, it's often easy to treat – here are some top tips.

- **Ask the nurse to use a smaller speculum.** Yes, speculums come in different sizes! As your vagina changes, a speculum that was fine before may no longer be right for you. You can ask to try out different sizes to find what works best.
- **Ask the nurse to use a water-based lubricant on the speculum.** This can help the speculum go in more comfortably.
- **Try using a vaginal moisturiser before your appointment.** A moisturiser is different to a lubricant – it can be applied regularly, sometimes daily, and goes into your vagina instead of onto whatever is being inserted. You can get vaginal moisturisers from most pharmacies, without a prescription however you can also ask your nurse or GP to prescribe it for you.
- **Ask your nurse or GP to prescribe you hormone replacement therapy (HRT) or local oestrogen.** HRT replaces the hormones which are no longer made in your body, and can help with lots of the symptoms of the menopause, including vaginal dryness. HRT comes in many forms, such as a daily tablet or skin patch, but also as a gel or a cream, which you may see called local oestrogen. You apply the gel or cream to your vagina. Recently, there have been lots of news stories about HRT, which may have worried you, but often the benefits of the treatment outweigh any risks. You may want to speak with your nurse or GP to make a decision based on your situation.

Important to remember, as well as vaginal dryness, the menopause can cause other symptoms that may make cervical screening more difficult. Symptoms like mood changes – perhaps feeling more anxious or low – which can make it hard for patients to book and attend an appointment.

Helpful menopause links and resources

Menopause Matters
An independent website providing up to date, accurate information about the menopause, menopausal symptoms and treatment options. It also includes ‘The Man Shed’ which offers support to partners.
Menopause Matters, menopausal symptoms, remedies, advice

NHS
The NHS website provides advice around the symptoms and self-help. It also provides the opportunity to make a self-referral for NHS psychological therapy.
Menopause - NHS (www.nhs.uk)

British Menopause Society
The British Menopause Society (BMS) is the specialist authority for menopause and post reproductive health in the UK.
British Menopause Society | For healthcare professionals and others specialising in post reproductive health (thebms.org.uk)

The Menopause Café
The Menopause café provides information and events where strangers gather together and eat cake, drink tea and discuss all things menopause related.
Gather to eat cake, drink and discuss menopause (menopausecafe.net)

The Dr Louise Newman Podcast – Avaliable on Apple and Spotify.
Menopause expert, GP and founder of the menopause charity Dr Louise Newson hosts the menopause and perimenopause information podcast, helping women receive and unbiased, evidence based holistic advice and treatment.
Founder of Balance app.
Newson Health - Dr Louise Newson