



Prompt Notes for:

## HEALTH & MENOPAUSE

**ADVISORY** - When guests book on to your event, one of the questions that is pertinent to ask is if they have any disability or injury that may impact on their ability to walk (mobility) or use of stairs (accessibility). This will prevent any issues when they arrive, and the worst thing that can happen is that you are taken by surprise. (Dee had this once at a workshop where a woman had a broken leg, she did not know until the guest had arrived. At the venue, there were a series of stairs up to the meeting room, which did cause her some issues. So it pays to be prepared.)

*Health-related questions:* If you're being asked specific details about what to do and it is a medical question please do not try to answer this or give your best guess if you are not qualified to do so. Always refer guests to their own GP to discuss. You can however provide anecdotal support and stories that you may have heard from other women, but always follow up with 'it is advisable to discuss this with your own GP'.

**OPENING SLIDE:** This slide should be left open if you have all gone off for a tea break. It will act as your guide when you return and give your guests an idea of what comes next.

**PAGE 1:** Covered During This Session - Give an overview of what menopause is, our reproductive system, hormones, etc.

**PAGE 2:** Reproductive System - you might want to ask when was the last time they saw a vagina and our reproductive system like this? - Most will answer at school. Give an overview of what happens, pointing out things like the fallopian tubes, and how when eggs are released they follow the tubes into the uterus for fertilization and if they are not fertilized then we have a period.

Talk about the lining of the uterus wall shedding and that this is what causes our periods. You might also want to hear stories about fibroids as this can come up regularly, especially for those who have heavy or painful periods. Try to keep it basic, not overly clinical, it has more to do with women understanding how we are made down there, and of course, some will have had hysterectomies too. Some with the womb removed, others the ovaries, or having everything removed (which of course plunges them straight into menopause without warning). Ask in the room if anyone would like to share their stories about heavy periods, or hysterectomies. Get a discussion going if you can. (keep an eye on timings though it is easy to get carried away).

More details can be found in the training under 'What Is Menopause?' It is important for people to understand female biology. Often it is good to point out areas like the vagina, cervix, and uterus as you will be amazed how many women do not know how they are made up. Also, make a point of telling them that as girls, we are born with all of our eggs - around 1-2 million of them, and they start to deplete from puberty. This leaves around 4% of eggs at the time when most women are thinking of having babies.

**PAGE 3:** What are hormones? All of this is contained within the Hormones section of the training, and so perhaps decided to just briefly highlight what hormones are and how responsible they are for our overall health and wellbeing. Cover the following (use as prompts)

"Hormones are chemical messengers produced in our bodies to regulate the activity of tissues and organs. They regulate the body's growth, metabolism, sexual development, and function.

Our female hormones and the glands that secrete them are part of an incredibly sensitive glandular system known as the endocrine system.

The endocrine system controls organs like the:

- brain
- kidneys

- stomach
- liver
- uterus
- skin

The hypothalamus controls the pituitary gland by sending messages to it. It is situated immediately above the pituitary gland in the brain.

The pituitary gland is often called the 'master gland' because it controls several other glands in our body, including the thyroid, adrenals, and ovaries. It also controls men's testes.

At the start of our menstrual cycle, the pituitary gland sends out the Follicle Stimulating Hormone (FSH) to tell the ovaries to start the cycle.

Our ovaries and brain speak to one another about reproductive readiness. Still, we also have receptor cells all over our bodies to pick up hormones and tell various body parts how to support a possible future pregnancy.

Here are some examples of what estrogen does to our systems:

- Promotes breast tissue growth and lactation, uterine growth, and production of the womb lining
- Regulates our menstrual cycle
- Thickens and lubricates the vaginal wall
- Accelerates metabolism
- Influences how and where fat is stored
- Grows and maintains skin, bone, and tissues throughout the body, including cellular repair in the brain
- Keeps blood cells healthy and promotes high levels of 'good' blood fats while reducing levels of 'bad' blood fats
- Assists balance of fluid and salts
- Works in tandem with testosterone to increase sex drive
- Connects with other chemicals that enable brain cells to function efficiently

You can see how estrogen plays a major role in how we function. Similarly, having less of it can cause a host of challenging issues, such as:

- Disruption of our menstrual cycles
- Drying and thinning of the skin
- Weakened bones
- Negative effects on the blood and cardiovascular system
- Slow metabolism and changing fat stores

- Causes the brain to go slightly askew

We might end up forgetful, moody, tired, sore, achy... not a pleasant prospect!"

THE BASICS TO PULL OUT OF THIS ARE THAT THE CHEMICAL MESSAGES COME FROM THE BRAIN AND THAT HORMONES DOMINATE THE REPRODUCTIVE CYCLE BUT THAT ESTROGEN IS VERY POWERFUL AND THE REDUCTION AND THEN LOSS OF ESTROGEN IS WHAT CAUSES US TO HAVE SOME IF NOT MANY SYMPTOMS LIKE (GIVE EXAMPLES).

**PAGE 4: 3 STAGES OF MENOPAUSE.** You need to let them know that 'pre' means before any symptoms become obvious, it is the time when they are still fertile but perhaps estrogen is on the decline but not dramatically enough for symptoms yet. 'Post' is once they have reached 12 months and 1 day without having a period - and 'peri' is what you really need to labor the point of discussion around. This can last up to 10 years for some women - ask around the room to see how long your guests have been peri for. This is the most symptomatic phase. Remind them that it is all hormone-related not age and can happen at any time but most usually it started in their 40's. You will get some to tell you that they have experienced early menopause by raising this, let them share their story. Be mindful that you may have some sensitive women who did not want to become infertile, and perhaps through disease or surgery are dealing with menopause very reluctantly. Talk inclusively. Try not to reference age too much as you will have diversity in ages.

**PAGE 5:** This is the time to really start to talk about perhaps your own experiences - symptoms (previous, that you have overcome), and how they impacted life in general. Listen to your audience, they will tell you. Blood tests are not recommended to diagnose unless they are under 45, due to the fluctuations. GP will diagnose through symptoms usually (they will tell you stories about how their GP's know nothing about menopause, look out for that. It is very common, and this is why we have to educate ourselves we cannot wait for doctors to catch up).

**PAGE 6:** Everyone is different - it will settle down but there are so many ways we can help ourselves (which you will come on to throughout the day). Talk about the fact that there are hormone receptors all over the body - as this is an

important piece of info. They are everywhere, which is why we might get teeth problems, to achy joints, hot flushes to skin irritations, even itchy armpits!

**PAGE 7:** Open up about symptoms - perhaps revert to what they may have written on a board when they arrived (as per a technique shared in the guide) keep talking about symptoms.

**PAGE 8:** Talk about all the ways they can help themselves (diet and lifestyle) and how certain remedies/treatments may help - HRT is not a magic bullet but can be very effective for many women - however, to make it even more effective, other diet and lifestyle changes are required. Look at the whole picture, not just one part of it - many women will not want to take HRT, and some women can't. BHRT basically means Bio or Body - Body Identical is more often than not what Doctors are now prescribing as it is regulated, however, Bio is still unregulated. There are some well-written notes here from the BMA should you need to explain this in more detail. Essentially one is more natural than the other being synthetic.

BMA:

<https://thebms.org.uk/publications/consensus-statements/bioidentical-hrt/>

Talk about supplements and how they may have helped women - you will find a few in the room wanting to talk about what has or has not helped them. When starting any new supplement they should first talk to their GP in case any medication interacts with one another.

**WARNING - be mindful of expressing your own opinion when it comes to HRT, if you are pro-HRT, then you will alienate those who are not, and if you are against HRT you risk negative feelings from women who take it and swear by it. You are there to inform, not pass judgment.**

**PAGE 9:** Open discussion about risk, and you can print off a good chart from the BMA which clearly shows the associated risks versus benefits. I also recommend that you go to this website:

<https://thebms.org.uk/publications/tools-for-clinicians/>

Although these are aimed at clinicians, there is very useful information that some women may ask about. Plus it is good to see what clinicians are receiving

in terms of education and tools for diagnosing and treatment. This is the latest research regarding HRT and Breast Cancer - you may want to print this off and just highlight with a pen what you might want to read or disclose.

<https://www.womens-health-concern.org/2020/11/latest-hrt-and-breast-cancer-study/>

You may also like to ask how many women have been given antidepressants, even when they asked for HRT? It will open up debate.

**PAGE 10:** Self-explanatory - get ready to see your GP and prepare all your questions before you go - book a double appointment, etc. Give your audience practical helpful tips.