

MEN & MENOPAUSE

A bloke's guide to
the change

03

A bloke's guide to the change

Let's get one thing straight

Let's talk about it

04 06

A word from the wise

Tread carefully.
Menopause is a minefield

Table for two please

Blowing hot and cold

Sex. Sex. Sex.

05 07

For f***'s sake!

Begin an epic charm
offensive

Vaginal dryness

WTF?!

Learn to love lube

08

You don't need balls
to talk about vaginas

A bloke's guide to 'the change'

The dictionary describes menopause as:

The ceasing of menstruation: the end of periods. The time in a woman's life (typically between the ages of 45 and 55) when menstruation ceases.

But there's a lot more to it than that. And menopause often comes with a long list of symptoms that have a big impact on a woman's life.

Let's use this little book as an example.

A woman might have brain fog. So she won't be able to concentrate on the text. She might have a hot flush whilst she's reading it. And if she's struggling with her memory, you won't remember any of this anyway.

Let's get one thing straight

I've got an admission: I haven't got a vagina.

I haven't got ovaries either. Or a uterus. Or a cervix: which most blokes would think is a brand of tumble dryer. Finally, my oestrogen, progesterone and testosterone levels, I think, are pretty level.

With all that in mind, I'm sure you're wondering what qualifies me to talk about menopause.

That's a very good point. Because I'm not a GP. I'm not a consultant, and I'm not a specialist nurse either.

But there is someone special in my life who has got a vagina: plus, all the bells and whistles that come with it.

That special person is my wife, Michelle.

I love her to pieces and I can't even imagine what menopause is like for her.

On the other hand, (and let's be honest), being around a menopausal woman isn't always easy. So, I thought it would help to get a better understanding of what she was going through. Then I could look at things from a husband's perspective and we could deal with everything better. Because we'd be doing it together.

Let's all talk about it!

The other thing is this: not enough women talk about menopause. But men don't talk about it all. Just imagine a couple of blokes down the pub:

"Alright Dave. How's your wife's ovaries these days?"

"Yeah, not so bad mate. But the old oestrogen levels are a bit down."

"Yeah, tell me about it. My wife's got much less mucus in her vagina, so she gets some spotting."

"Sorry to hear that Dave. Send her my love."

"Oh by the way, did you get that new cervix fitted in the kitchen?"



A word from the wise

That's the other reason I wanted to take a look at menopause through the eyes of man. Because we all need to be talking about it more openly.

Based on just my own experience, I've put together a few observations, watch-outs and definite dos and don'ts. I've also got a few suggestions, ideas and solutions that work for me and Michelle. Mostly.

Now there's an old philosophical question that says...

If a tree falls in a forest and no one hears it, did it happen?

There's another one that asks...

If a man speaks his mind in a forest and no woman hears him, is he still wrong?

Well, yes. Which brings me to my first point.

If you're a husband, boyfriend or partner, you will be wrong like never before.

Get over it. And embrace the fact that you will irritate your other half even more than you do already.

I know, that's hard to believe. But during menopause there's a logical reason for that. The usual levels of irritation can rise, and she may be snappier than usual. A lot snappier.

Take it in your stride. Be patient, understanding and extra mindful of what you say, what you do and what you don't say and do. And always remember she still loves you, even though she thinks you're a clueless idiot.

Tread carefully. Menopause is a minefield

I know it's usually the little things that drive my wife mad. So, when I shave, I don't leave hairs in the sink. I try very, very hard to not snore. And I always, always make sure I put the toilet seat down. Now this is really important, because if my wife's struggling with night sweats, she's knackered through lack of sleep and dying for her 7th wee of the night, she won't want to sit on the cold rim of a toilet. For my own safety, I don't want her to either.

If things do blow up, don't get defensive. Maybe just give her a bit of space and let the atmosphere calm down.

At the other end of the scale, there might be a lot of tears. They can come out of the blue. And there might not even be a reason. Or what looks like a reason to you. All you can do is give your wife some love and understanding. Even though you don't understand.

For f***'s sake!

When the woman in your life is going through the menopause, she won't be feeling too good about herself. Particularly if she's found some grey hairs in her pubes.

There's every chance she'll be sad she can't have any more kids. Or it might just be she's fed up they haven't left home yet. You decide.

Her weight might be another concern. Which means it's an even touchier subject than usual. But a few extra pounds around the waist is only natural. And you need to get your head around the fact it could happen, even if your wife's eating healthily and still smashing the gym.

That's another thing. Women can be very low on energy and motivation during the menopause so it's a bit of a double whammy. If your wife's lost interest in Joe Wicks (or at least his workouts). Or doesn't want to go to body-pump. Or sign up for a Tough Mudder, you'll need to be sympathetic. She's not being lazy. She's just worn out.

Having said that, if someone's feeling a bit low, more comfort-eating and more Sauvignon Blanc are watch-outs.

As a husband or partner, just make sure you support rather than judge. And offer encouragement, not criticism.



Begin an epic charm offensive

Most women beat themselves up enough already: on the scales, in front of a mirror, or in a changing room. And if they worry about how they look normally, menopause turns every negative opinion and self-doubt up to 11. It can also make women feel very unsexy. Again, be sympathetic. Be kind. Keep telling your wife she looks great. Let her know she's still super attractive. Make her feel desirable, sexy, hot. You've got to keep saying it to make her believe it. It's all on you.

Spoiler alert: every woman needs to feel like a sensual woman before they'll feel like a sexy woman. So, it's simple: treat her as one and you'll both enjoy the benefits.

There are lots of other physical changes, too.

I've discovered that fluctuating oestrogen levels can make nails more brittle. This can affect their strength and appearance. Weaker or thinning hair are a couple of other symptoms. If Michelle says her nails don't feel right or she's having a bad hair day, I don't roll my eyes anymore. Because now I know it's true.

With that in mind, don't balk at the cost of a cut and colour (which is like going to the barber only more complex, time consuming and expensive. Plus, you get a skinny latte and don't talk about football).

The way I look at it, the price of this pampering is worth every penny if it helps my wife feel the way she used to. And with a little bit of extra effort and creative thinking, this feel good factor can be made even more...feel good.

For instance, I try to pick Michelle up from the salon just before she's finished. I walk in and tell her: "You look amazing." Park your embarrassment and make a fuss in front of everyone. Trust me, it can go a long way and it'll mean the world to your wife.

Of course, old habits die hard. So after that big entrance, perhaps make sure you're out of earshot when the receptionist delivers the bill.

Sex. Sex Sex.

Table for two please

Now, there is the tried and trusted way to make your wife feel special: take her out for a romantic meal. But that does come with a caveat. Caffeine, alcohol and spicy foods can all trigger hot flushes. If you plan to go out for a curry, a nice bottle of wine and an espresso, it could make things worse. Or not. Everyone's different so you'll just have to suck it and see.

Blowing hot and cold

Personally, I've found my wife's hot flushes and night sweats really upsetting. Because there's literally nothing I can do about it. And like me, you'll just have to get used to the fact that one minute she'll cling to you for warmth. The next moment, she'll shove you away and chuck the duvet back like you've just done a massive fart.

The only thing that helps, bigger picture, is get some early nights in. Lack of sleep's a killer. Chances are if she's awake, you will be too. Then both of you are ratty in the morning.

I've found out there's a reason for all those wee-wees in the night too. There are oestrogen receptors in the urinary tract. Menopause messes with them. Which is why your wife is often busting to go. Go more often. And go round the clock.

Like I said. Get some early nights in.

Now that's a biggie. Because loss of libido can really put a strain on a relationship and it throws up a lot of doubts and questions.

For me, I wondered if Michelle had stopped fancying me. Or maybe started fancying someone else. Like Joe Wicks. Or worse: Paul Hollywood. I worried she was bored of me, unhappy with my 'performance', couldn't be bothered, or would rather read her Kindle. For Michelle, she was just wondering what the hell had happened.

Losing her sex drive almost overnight was a scary thing. It made her confused, sad and angry. She said she felt old, past-it and less of a woman (as if there wasn't enough to deal with already).

My wife's a generous lover and we've kept the flame alive. So she also worried about me, how I'd react, whether I'd see her differently and whether I'd fancy someone else: someone younger obviously.

When we did get jiggy, I worried she was going through the motions just to keep me happy. Which isn't a great place to be if you're in love and partners in crime. It seemed we were drifting apart. Confusion, frustration, resentment: it all builds-up. And we started wondering if that was it: our sex life was dead in the water. If you lose your libido, you can quickly find yourselves in a world of pain. That's why it's so important to talk, share your thoughts, get everything out in the open. Don't make your wife feel guilty or let her think you're disappointed in any way. Don't be a sex pest either.

Good communication sounds like a cliché. But it's the only way to get through menopause together. Of course, there's only one thing worse than a low sex drive. And only two words worse than menopause.

Vaginal dryness

Now there's a taboo to end them all.

But I've long got over the embarrassment of talking about it. We all should.

Again, it's all down to low oestrogen levels in receptors that line the vagina. And the cervix won't make as much mucus down there as it used to. Hence, more chance of irritation, soreness and even bleeding. Also, cuts are more likely.

If you're even thinking about having sex, no wonder both of you might think twice.

%?!

What's amazing to me is about 70% of women going through the menopause suffer from vaginal dryness. But apparently, only about 7% go for some treatment. Which is mad when all the experts say that treatment can be really simple. There's HRT, oestrogen pessaries and cream. There's also an Estring which is designed to: "restore vaginal tissue to a healthier condition". It works by providing a low, continuous dose of oestrogen straight into the vagina via a soft flexible ring. Head's up, it's a ring you can't get from Ernest Jones or Argos. Get some oestrogen back down below and it can work wonders. The vagina thickens, it becomes more moist (horrible word) and sex is less uncomfortable all round.

Learn to love lube

Lubricants and moisturisers might help. And the good news is, lube can increase a man's sensitivity and pleasure too. Just don't squirt it up her like it's a sealant or slap it on your cock like it's sun cream. Take it slow and make it part of your foreplay. It can be sensual, erotic and just downright sexy.

It's one area you can definitely own, so get involved.

Just one word of warning: do your homework and choose wisely. Some of these lubes can actually make things worse. So get some proper advice before you look on Amazon. Or eBay.

What's worked for us is longer foreplay. Take more time stroking, massaging, kissing: it's worth the effort whether you're going through the menopause or not. Quickies might be a bit tougher, but you can't have it all.

Whatever treatment you get, there's an easy and natural way to make it even more effective. And as a husband or partner, you can definitely go halves on this one.

Don't stop having sexual intercourse and maybe even try to have it as often as possible. Why: because a good old shag can increase blood flow to the vagina. It also helps stimulate the production of natural lubricant. The flipside is that not having sex can make vaginal dryness worse. If either of you really need a good reason to have it off, this is it.



You don't need balls to talk about vaginas

If I can bring up the subject of dry vaginas, I'm sure you and your wife can talk to your GP, a gynae (that's a gynecologist to you and I), or a specialist nurse. Michelle did. She started HRT, I got some lube and now she's like a new woman. It feels like we've got our lives back too.

There's a lot more to say about menopause. But this where my knowledge and experience runs out. So, for what it's worth, I'll end with advice I'd give any man: be sympathetic, be kind, be loving, be gentle, be patient, be understanding and just be there.

About the author:

Nigel Edginton-Amor is an advertising Creative Director and copywriter. He's dad to three kids (who are now far from being kids) and is blissfully married to the love of his life, Michelle.

Designed and illustrated by Imogen Clowes



AgeAmazing
rejuvage

rejuvage.com