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Chronic Pain at Midlife: A Symptom We Need to Talk About

Every year, World Menopause Day gives us an opportunity to improve understanding of menopause and the many ways it can affect a woman's health and wellbeing.

The 2026 theme, **"Chronic Pain at Midlife — From Recognition to Evidence-Based Care,"** draws attention to an aspect of women's health that can sometimes be overlooked.

When we think about menopause, we often think first of hot flushes, night sweats and changes in periods. But for some women, the experience is much broader.

Joint aches, muscle discomfort, stiffness and persistent pain may become more noticeable during the menopausal transition. At the same time, disrupted sleep, changes in mood, reduced physical activity and other health conditions can influence how pain is experienced.

Pain should not simply be dismissed as "part of getting older"

Persistent pain deserves proper assessment.

Not every new ache or painful joint during midlife is caused by menopause. Osteoarthritis, inflammatory conditions, osteoporosis and fractures, thyroid disease, vitamin deficiencies and other medical conditions may need to be considered.

This is why an individual clinical assessment is important.

Looking at the whole woman

Good menopause care is not simply about treating an isolated symptom.

A consultation provides an opportunity to consider:

- menopausal symptoms and their impact on everyday life
- musculoskeletal and bone health
- sleep
- emotional wellbeing
- cardiovascular and metabolic health
- physical activity and muscle strength
- genitourinary and sexual health
- nutrition and lifestyle
- whether HRT or other treatments may be appropriate

HRT can be very effective for recognised menopausal symptoms for appropriately selected women, but persistent pain should still be assessed rather than automatically attributed to hormonal change.

Midlife is also an opportunity

Menopause is an important health transition, but it can also be a valuable time to take stock. Protecting bone and muscle strength, remaining physically active, eating well, prioritising sleep and addressing cardiovascular risk factors can have benefits extending far beyond the menopause years.

Most importantly, women should feel able to talk about symptoms that are affecting their quality of life — including pain.

This World Menopause Day, the message is simple: listen to the symptoms, look at the whole woman, and provide individual, evidence-based care.

**This article was developed with the assistance of artificial intelligence and reviewed and approved by Dr Sharma to ensure medical accuracy.*

***This article provides general health information and is not a substitute for individual medical advice. New, severe or persistent pain should be medically assessed.*

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