



A FAMILY AFFAIR

Dr Shilpa McQuillan of Berkshire Menopause Clinic, Henley, shares some valuable advice to help ensure no woman goes through the menopause without the support needed

I was recently asked by someone at a party what kind of doctor I was. My response was greeted with a jokey remark about how his wife was 'always moaning about the change'.

When I elaborated on why I was so passionate about being a women's health expert, his smile turned serious with the realisation his wife might be suffering some really distressing symptoms. The more we talked, the more it became apparent he felt helpless and just used humour to cope.

Her symptoms were affecting both their lives, and he barely recognised the bubbly, outgoing woman he once knew. She wasn't at the party because she had lost confidence, was always tearful, and tired, just some of the many changes she felt. What an eye-opener this was. I support many women with menopause symptoms but what education is there for their loved ones?

Menopause has many physical and emotional changes. It can be a complex and challenging time, having a huge impact on those closest, and sadly the cause of relationship breakdowns. A recent national survey showed 40 per cent of partners struggled with knowing how to show support. Could this be you? Maybe you just don't know where to start. Here are my tips:

- Show interest: Read about the menopause to better understand it and recognise how symptoms vary.
- Don't take it personally: Some genuine physical and psychological symptoms can result in

mood changes, forgetfulness, insomnia, and exhaustion to name a few. I appreciate it is not fair to expect loved ones to constantly walk on eggshells but try to show sympathy and equally don't put everything down to the menopause.

- Work as a team: Navigating a busy lifestyle, all while battling debilitating symptoms can be a challenge. Don't just sit on the sidelines, offer to cook healthy meals together, exercise as a family, and offer to attend health appointments with your partner. Remember, it's okay to seek help from a specialist who can guide you through the challenges together.
- Take menopause in the workplace seriously: If you are an employer, don't treat menopause care as a tick box exercise with a policy nobody knows exists. Staff who feel heard, supported and valued are more productive and less absent. Have menopause champions, raise awareness through educational events, provide occupational health assistance, and encourage an open, sharing culture.
- Communication is key: Listen to personal experiences, ask specific questions about the support they would like. Everyone's journey is unique and there is no one size fits all solution.

By raising awareness about menopause, I hope women will get the best support they can through this natural but important chapter.

● Dr Shilpa McQuillan is a British Menopause Society accredited specialist, women's health GP, and community gynaecologist. Visit berkshireremenopauseclinic.com for more.