

My first night sweat, about two years ago, caught me off guard. I was in my quiet, cool bedroom, when suddenly I was perspiring profusely and wide awake. This was it: the menopause. Why hadn't I seen it coming?

And it wasn't just me feeling the fear: a straw poll among friends suggested that many of us fret way too much about 'The Change'. However, a recent study of women either going through, or having been through, the menopause, found that one in 10 reckons they're having more fun than they did in their 30s (and two out of five are having even more boudoir fun than before!). It's no surprise, really, after decades of painful periods and PMT.

So perhaps it's time we were more relaxed. Yes, there will be physical challenges, but the menopause is just that: a two- to five-year pause for your body to adjust and prepare for the next chapter of your life, free from hormonal fluctuations. I think that's something to celebrate, no?

Still anxious about what to expect? Here we debunk some of the myths and suggest smart measures to help see you through...

Meno-worry 1

My skin will shrivel

It may well feel drier (post-menopause skin is thinner, and collagen production falls), but some women also rejoice in a complexion that's less oily once there are fewer hormones to stimulate cell growth. If drier skin really is bothering you, Lesley Reynolds from London's Harley Street Skin Clinic suggests layering your creams. 'I use a light rose oil, massaging up from my décolletage and neck to my face,' she says. 'Then I apply a rich night cream.' She also advises using a gentle exfoliator twice a week, as cell turnover is slower in mature skin.

Consider There's a raft of products to help promote radiance, including: Clarins Super Restorative Day Cream, £68/6,800 points (50ml); and Night Wear, £73/7,300 points (50ml); and Elizabeth Arden Ceramide Premiere Intense Moisture And Renewal Activation Cream, £70/7,000 points (50ml).

Always consult your GP before taking herbal treatments.

Shop online at **boots.com**

Meno-worry 2

I'll be constantly sweaty and flushed

Concerned that people at work have noticed you fanning yourself with a mouse mat and re-applying your deodorant? Registered nutritionist Dr Marilyn Glenville, author of *Natural Solutions To Menopause* (Rodale, £12.99), says there are triggers, such as hot drinks (including caffeine), alcohol and spicy foods, which may be worth avoiding. Several traditional herbal remedies have been shown to provide some women with relief from symptoms – one study found that red clover supplements may help to reduce daily hot flushes and the overall effects of menopause, while another suggested that sage extract may help relieve hot flushes and the associated symptoms.

Consider Vitabiotics Menopause Flod Clover Capsules, £21.99/2,199 points (30).

Meno-worry 3

I'll be creakier than an old door

OK, you might not be able to jog for miles without a few twinges, but that's normal. Why? Studies suggest that oestrogen helps reduce inflammation and repair muscles, but levels fall during menopause, so you may ache more. You'll also have an increased risk of developing osteoporosis, a condition that weakens bones. But don't pack away your gym kit. Dr John Dickson of the Primary Care Rheumatology Society says: 'Take a Pilates class or do weight-bearing exercises to help build muscle to support your joints.' If you think your diet lacks sufficient calcium or vitamin D to support bone health, you may want to think about taking a supplement.

Consider New Boots Pharmaceuticals Calcium With Vitamin D, £3.59/359 points (90 tablets), can help maintain normal bones and teeth. Flexiseq Gel, £18.49/1,849 points (50g), helps treat pain associated with osteoarthritis.

Meno-worry 4

I'll be hairier than a Tasmanian Devil

Yes, those fluctuating hormones mean you may need to become closer friends with your tweezers, but don't worry, we're not talking beard territory – not by a long shot. 'A few masculine-type symptoms, such as slight thinning of the hair on the head and maybe the odd stray hair on the chin, are common, but usually mild,' reassures consultant gynaecologist Nitu Bajekal. She recommends a diet of foods rich in phytoestrogens, which may help keep hormones balanced. These plant-based compounds are oestrogen-like (your oestrogen levels fall during the menopause) and they're found primarily in some pulses, tofu and other soya-based foods.

Consider The Philips Lumea Compact SC1881/03 IPL Hair Removal System, £200/20,000 points, can be used on the face as well as the bikini line, underarms and legs.

Meno-worry 5

My poor body will go through hell!

This is what I thought that first night, when I was lying in bed, sweating. But once I found practical solutions – such as linen nighties and swapping the double duvet for two singles (so I can throw off my side without disturbing my other half) – I realised that night sweats don't have to be nightmares. Talking to friends, we all had some symptoms (bloating, hair loss and dry skin) as our bodies adjusted to reduced levels of oestrogen. But we found ways to deal with them. Nitu says: 'In my experience, 50% of women cope with no problem.' But, she also adds, 'If you're one of the small number of women whose symptoms are tough to handle, talk to your GP.'

Consider Phyto Soya High Strength Menopause Capsules, £19.99/1,999 points (50).

Photography: Underwood Photo Archive/SuzanneCook