

HCF CONSUMER INSIGHTS SERIES

**Menopause Matters:
A report into the impacts of menopause
and perimenopause on Australians**



TABLE OF CONTENTS

Menopause Matters: A Report into the impacts of menopause and perimenopause on Australians	3
Help for our Members	3

KEY FINDINGS

1. Symptoms: Awareness, or a Lack of?	5
2. Facing Change: Real Experiences	Error! Bookmark not defined.
3. Attitudes to Conversations About Menopause	7

MENOPAUSE MATTERS: A REPORT

Welcome to the latest in HCF's series of consumer insights reports that help start conversations about the healthcare issues and trends that matter most to Australians.

At HCF we're committed to showing members a level of care that's uncommon, through every phase of their health and wellbeing journey.

For women, Menopause is the time of life when your menstrual cycle has officially stopped for a year. Perimenopause refers to the natural process leading up to menopause when your ovulation and periods may become irregular or stop.

These years can bring great change and symptoms which can affect you emotionally, mentally and physically. Some women may hardly notice any changes, but for others it can be a difficult and confusing period of life.

That's why, this time, we've surveyed Australian women as well as men to find out more about the issues they're facing in relation to this time of life.

We've published this consumer insights report to coincide with the release of our fifth podcast series, Menopause Matters.

In the six, expert-driven episodes, the host and guests delve into the many aspects of perimenopause and menopause including weight change, sex and the career impacts.

Hosted by Alison Brae-Daddo, actor, producer and author of *Queen Menopause*, the podcast includes conversations with comedian and author of *You're Still Hot to Me*, Jean Kittson; author Kathy Lette; perimenopause specialist Dr Fatima Khan; and founder of 'Menopause At Work', Thea O'Connor.

Menopause Matters is available through [Apple Podcasts](#), [Google Podcasts](#) and [Spotify](#).

WHO DID WE TALK TO?

This consumer insights report details the findings of a survey of 1,604 Australian adults conducted on behalf of HCF Australia by YouGov.

The study was conducted online in April 2023, and included a boost sample of 500 women aged 45 years and older. Following completion of the interviewing, the data was weighted by age, gender and region to reflect the latest ABS population estimates.

HELP FOR OUR MEMBERS

While the type and severity of symptoms of menopause and perimenopause will vary between women, HCF offers eligible members a range of tools to help manage symptoms, alongside help from a GP or medical professional.

To help you build better sleep habits we've partnered with [Sleepfit Solutions](#), who deliver an app that can help you identify sleep issues, recommend improvements and give you access to personalised tools. Eligible members with hospital or extras cover* can get a 20% discount on a 12-month Sleepfit subscription.

HCF members also have access to video sessions with a [Healthy Minds Check-In](#) by *PSYCH2U*, for those requiring additional support in managing the impact on their mood and mental health.

For eligible members looking for support in achieving and maintaining a healthy weight, HCF offers free access to the [Healthy Weight for Life Essentials program](#)[^] to help develop healthy habits, increase energy levels, and prevent the onset of chronic conditions later on.

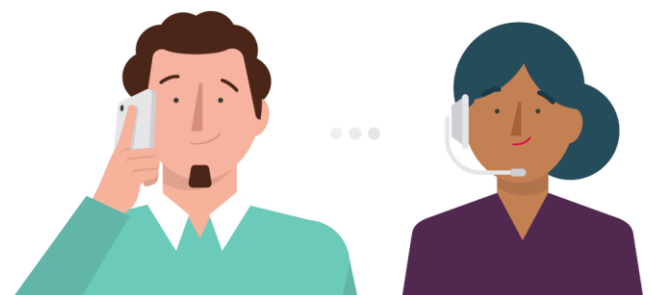
our partnership with [GP2U](#), an online video GP service, also makes it easier to access telehealth services and chat to a GP from the comfort of your home. All HCF members have access to online GP standard consultations through GP2U for free+ for a limited time.

See hcf.com.au/gp2u for offer end date.

EDITORIAL NOTE FOR JOURNALISTS AND MEDIA

When referencing this data, please attribute the source: HCF Australia.

All statistics, findings and results are from a survey conducted by HCF, Australia's largest not-for-profit health fund.





KEY
FINDINGS



1. SYMPTOMS: AWARENESS, OR A LACK OF?

The University of Pennsylvania developed a staging system, which divides the menopause transition into four stages:

Pre-menopause (regular menstrual cycles of 21 to 35 days)

Early transition (there's a decrease in predictability, and the length of a 'usual cycle' has changed by several days)

Late transition (two to 11 months without a period)

Postmenopausal (greater than or equal to 12 months of no periods)

In our podcast, guests discuss what the symptoms are in each of those stages, how to destigmatise those symptoms, and what their experiences have been.

Symptoms might include:

- Hot flushes
- Heavy, irregular or unpredictable periods
- Vaginal dryness
- Insomnia
- Mood problems
- Exhaustion
- Low libido
- Loss of bone density
- Weight gain
- Joint pain
- Incontinence
- Itchy, dry skin

We wanted to ask Australians what they already knew about the symptoms, and to determine where the gaps are, so that we can shine a light on where women might be better supported. Here's what we found:

AWARENESS OF SYMPTOMS OF PERIMENOPAUSE AND MENOPAUSE

- The majority (92%) of Australians are aware of at least one symptom of perimenopause and menopause
- Mood problems (68%) and hot flushes (66%) are the symptoms that Australians are most commonly aware of

- Other symptoms that also have a relatively high level of awareness are weight gain (52%), low libido (52%), vaginal dryness (50%), heavy, irregular or unpredictable periods (49%) and exhaustion (45%)
- While lesser-known symptoms include insomnia (40%), loss of bone density (35%), joint pain (31%), itchy, dry skin (31%) and incontinence (27%)
- Women are more likely than men to be aware of symptoms of perimenopause and menopause (95% compared to 88%)
- With women aged 45 years+ also more likely than those aged 18-44 years to be aware of symptoms (97% compared to 92%) as well as all the symptoms listed.

WHAT ABOUT WOMEN AGED 45+?

AWARENESS:

- Those currently in perimenopause and menopause are more likely than those who have not started perimenopause or are in post-menopause to be aware of joint pain (58% and 55% compared to 23% and 38%)
- While those in menopause are more likely than those who have not started perimenopause or are in post-menopause to be aware of insomnia (75% compared to 51% and 63%) and exhaustion (67% compared to 47% and 57%)



2. FACING CHANGE: REAL EXPERIENCES

"71% of pre-menopausal women over 45 do not feel well informed or prepared"

Despite being a natural biological process that every woman will experience, menopause has historically often been shrouded in secrecy and misconceptions, leaving women feeling unprepared and uncertain about what to expect.

To shed further light on exactly what women experience and how they were, or were not prepared, we asked Australian women aged 45+ about their thoughts, feelings and experiences.

This is what we found:

PREPARING FOR THE UNEXPECTED?

- More than half (51%) of women aged 45 years and older say they did/do not feel well informed and prepared for perimenopause or menopause, which increases to 71% for those women who have not yet started perimenopause
- Less than half (49%) of those in post-menopause say they felt well informed and prepared for perimenopause and menopause, which decreases to just two in five (39%) of those currently in menopause, just over one in three (35%) of those currently in perimenopause and just one in five (20%) of those that have not yet started perimenopause
- Irrespective of their current stage, six in ten (60%) women aged 45-54 years say they did/do not feel well informed and prepared for perimenopause and menopause.

THE SOURCE OF THE SECRET – SEEKING INFORMATION

- The majority (83%) of women aged 45 years and older have sourced information about perimenopause/menopause
- Over half (53%) have sourced information about perimenopause and menopause from their GP/doctor, while as many as two in five women are turning to female friends (40%) and online searches (38%) and three in ten (30%) are turning to female family members for information
- A further 7% source information from their pharmacist/chemist and just 2% of women have sought information from a specific website about perimenopause/menopause

- And, more than one million women (17%) have not sought any information
- Three in ten (31%) of those that have not yet started perimenopause have not sought any information about the subject as yet, which is more likely than those in perimenopause (4%), menopause (7%) or post-menopause (18%)
- While those in perimenopause (64%) are more likely than those in any other stage to have sourced information through online searches
- Those in menopause are more likely than those in any other stage to have sourced information from their GP/doctor (67%), while for those in post-menopause, 57% sourced information for their GP/doctor, however as many as one in five (18%) say did not seek information from anyone/source.



3. ATTITUDES TO CONVERSATIONS ABOUT MENOPAUSE

"Men are twice as likely as women to feel that conversations about perimenopause and menopause can be very personal and people's privacy should be respected, and they should not be normalised"

REMOVING THE TABOO – SPEAKING ABOUT MENOPAUSE TO OTHERS

- Our research reveals that the topic of perimenopause and menopause is still very much a taboo/sensitive topic for women, as Australian women 45 years + admit to feeling most comfortable talking about perimenopause /menopause with their GP/doctor (80%) and female friends (68%) and female family members (59%)
- While less than two in five (38%) feel comfortable speaking to their partner about it and are far less feel comfortable talking about it to male family members (9%), male friends (9%)
- Just one in four (26%) say they would feel comfortable speaking about perimenopause/menopause with their pharmacist/chemist and 6%, the equivalent of 390,000 women, say they do not feel comfortable speaking about it with anyone
- Those who are currently in menopause or post-menopause are more likely than those who have not yet started perimenopause or are unsure if they have, to say they feel comfortable talking to female friends about the topic (74% and 72% compared to 52% and 49%)
- While those in post-menopause (43%) are more likely than those who have not yet started perimenopause (25%) or are unsure if they have (21%) to say they feel comfortable talking to their partners about the topic, it still represents less than half of women who have gone through the menopause journey without feeling comfortable to talk to the person most close to them
- Furthermore, just one in four (24%) of those working say they would feel comfortable talking to their work colleagues about the topic
- Those who feel/did feel prepared for perimenopause and menopause are more likely than those who don't/did not feel prepared to say they feel comfortable talking to female family members (68% compared to 53%), their partners (48% compared to 32%) and their pharmacist (32% compared to 22%)
- While over a third (37%) of Australians feel that conversations about perimenopause and menopause should be normalised, others are more considered in their views, with more than two in five (41%) Australians feeling that the topic of perimenopause and menopause can be personal so needs to be treated with sensitivity, however, they do think we should be talking about it more
- While just one in seven (14%) think that conversations about perimenopause and menopause can be very personal and people's privacy should be respected, and they should not be normalised and a further one in ten (9%) are unsure in this regard
- Women are more likely than men to feel that conversations about perimenopause and menopause should be normalised (40% compared to 33%) and that as personal, they need to be treated with sensitivity, but that we should be talking about it more (44% compared to 37%)
- In contrast, men are twice as likely than women to feel that conversations about perimenopause and menopause can be very personal and people's privacy should be respected, and they should not be normalised (19% compared to 9%)
- The research suggests that the tide may be turning as Millennials and Gen X are more likely than Baby Boomers and the Silent Gen to feel that conversations about perimenopause and menopause should be normalised (both 41% compared to 32% and 21%).

BENEFITS OF SPEAKING UP

The majority (92%) of Australians feel that there are benefits to perimenopause and menopause being talked about more / being normalised.

- The main benefits are thought to be an increased awareness and understanding amongst partners and children about what women could be experiencing when going through perimenopause and menopause (60%), a deeper understanding about how to support women going through perimenopause and menopause in the workplace (60%) and an increased awareness amongst the general population of the symptoms of perimenopause and menopause that women may be experiencing (59%)
- While more than half of Australians also cite increased empathy for women generally who are going through perimenopause and menopause (55%) and more support from Government for specialised medical and counselling services for women going through perimenopause and menopause (49%)
- Women are more likely than men to feel that there would be benefits to perimenopause and menopause being talked about more/ being normalised (94% compared to 90%)
- In particular, two thirds of women aged 45 years and older feel that benefits would include: a deeper understanding about how to support women going through perimenopause and menopause in the workplace (65%),
- An increased awareness and understanding amongst partners and children about what women could be experiencing when going through perimenopause and menopause (65%)
- An increased awareness amongst the general population of the symptoms of perimenopause and menopause that women may be experiencing (65%)
- While women aged 18-44 years are more likely than those aged 45+ and men to feel that more support from Government for specialised medical and counselling services for women going through perimenopause and menopause would be a benefit (59% compared to 51% and 44%)



- Interestingly, those who are retired are more likely than those currently working to feel that a deeper understanding about how to support women going through perimenopause and menopause in the workplace would be a benefit to perimenopause and menopause being talked about more or being normalised (66% compared to 59%).

OF AUSTRALIAN WOMEN AGED 45+

Almost eight in ten (78%) of those currently in perimenopause feel that increased awareness amongst the general population of the symptoms of perimenopause and menopause that women may be experiencing would be a benefit, which is more likely than those in menopause and post-menopause to (64% and 65% respectively).

WHAT'S CONCERNING US:

Research reveals that while women over the age of 45 years do want more conversations to be had about perimenopause and menopause, it doesn't come without concerns as more than half (58%) say they would have concerns about it being discussed more / if conversations were normalised.

- Those currently in perimenopause are more likely than those in menopause and post-menopause to say they would have concerns about perimenopause and menopause being discussed more / if conversations were normalised (70% compared to 50% and 57%)
- With more than one in five (22%) of those who have not yet started perimenopause saying they wouldn't want other people to initiate a conversation about perimenopause and/or menopause with them
- In contrast, those living through it/have lived through it already are more likely than those starting their journey to say they would not have any concerns with it being discussed more / if conversations were normalised (post-menopause 43%, menopause 50% compared to perimenopause 30%)

- Furthermore, preparedness alleviates concern as those who feel/did feel prepared for perimenopause and menopause are more likely than those who don't/did not feel prepared to say they would not have any concerns with it being discussed more / if conversations were normalised (45% compared to 37%)
- Two in five of those who don't/did not feel prepared for perimenopause and menopause said they wouldn't want people to jump to conclusions and think that what they are saying and/or doing is not 'real' but rather the consequence of perimenopause and/or menopause (41%) and feeling that it could have a negative impact on the perception of women's productivity or performance in the workplace (40%).



IN THE WORKPLACE

- More than one in three Australian women over the age of 45 years say the main areas of concern are that they feel that it could have a negative impact on the perception of women's productivity or performance in the workplace (35%) and in not wanting people to jump to conclusions and think that what they are saying and/or doing is not 'real' but rather the consequence of perimenopause and/or menopause (35%), while three in ten (30%) are concerned that their colleagues/managers may think that they can't do their job properly if they let them know they were struggling because of perimenopause or menopause symptoms
- More than three in five (62%) of those working say they would have concerns about it being discussed more / if conversations were normalised, with those working full-time much more likely than those working part-time to cite their colleagues/managers potentially thinking that they can't do their job properly if they let them know they were struggling because of perimenopause or menopause symptoms (42% compared to 29%)

"More than a third of Australian women over 45 are concerned talking about menopause in the workplace could have a negative impact on the perception of women's productivity, and wouldn't want people to jump to conclusions"



