

Menopause Matters!

**What local people told us about going
through the menopause**





Introduction

Healthwatch Rochdale is the local independent health and social care champion for the Rochdale borough.

Following Healthwatch Rochdale's Advisory Group's decision to speak to local people about their experiences of perimenopause/menopause a survey was carried out which ran from 5th September until 31st October 2022. The aim of the survey was to understand how perimenopause/menopause affected local people, what information and support was available to them and where they thought things could have been better.

Alongside this we spoke to seven people to hear their story in more depth. All those who spoke to us and took part in our survey identified as female. Quotes from the survey and highlights from people's stories will be shared within this report.

Key Findings

Lack of awareness

The majority of people we spoke to were not aware that some of the symptoms they were experiencing were due to perimenopause/menopause. People told us they were aware of some of their perimenopause/menopause symptoms but not others, and some we spoke to were not aware of the treatments available to them, more specifically Hormone Replacement Therapy (HRT).



Lack of Information

People felt there was a lack of information around perimenopause/menopause. People told us they were unaware of the signs & symptoms, and some felt health professionals had a lack of knowledge around symptoms and treatments such as Hormone Replacement Therapy (HRT).

Lack of support

Some felt there was a lack of support available. The majority of people accessed traditional health services, but some felt they weren't supported or listened to, and that advice & support given was not personalised or health professionals were dismissive. A small number accessed support groups & social prescribers but none accessed a well woman clinic.



Our findings

Average age of perimenopause/menopause

135 people answered our survey, of those 36% were currently experiencing perimenopause, 43% were currently experiencing menopause & 21% had experienced menopause in the last three years.

Slightly over half, 55%, first experienced their symptoms at the age of 41-50, with a further 32% at ages 51 – 60. Some respondents, 12%, experienced menopause symptoms early at the ages of 31-40.

Of those who had early symptoms 25% had gone through the menopause in the last three years. 44% were currently experiencing menopause & 31% were currently experiencing perimenopause.

“I have been experiencing perimenopause for the last 2 years since I was 46. Two years ago, was when I noticed things weren't quite right.

I initially put the signs and symptoms down to the Covid pandemic as I had been furloughed, was home schooling, was anxious and distressed”.

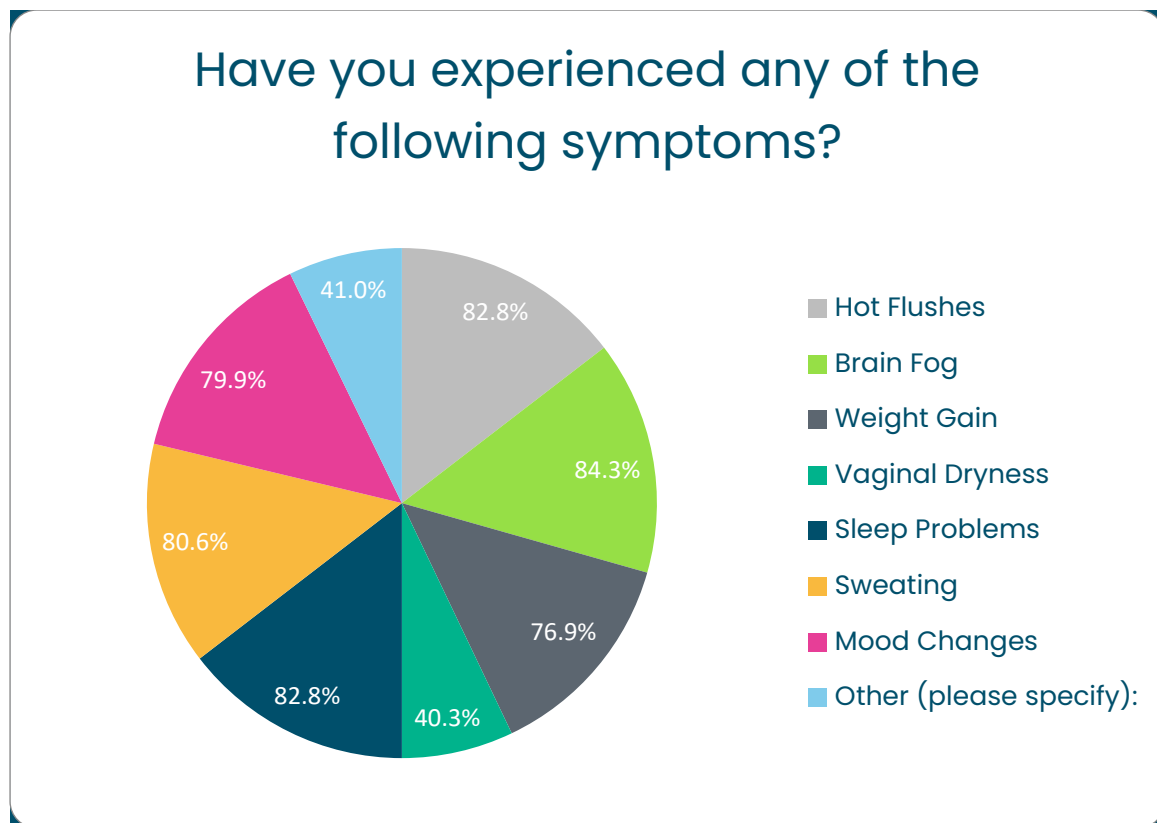
I first got symptoms in my early 40's, I actually thought I was dying, that there was something seriously wrong with me”.





Symptoms

The most common symptom people experienced was brain fog (84%) followed by sleep problems (83%) & hot flushes (83%) Other symptoms included anxiety, joint & muscle pain, dry eyes, hair loss & fatigue.



“I initially feel that I started perimenopause when I was around 46 or 47 years old. This was when I started not to feel too great and I just thought I was depressed as my periods were more erratic when I reached about 49 years old and I had anxiety, low moods, depressive thoughts”.



69% of responses were aware that their symptoms were due to the perimenopause/ menopause and 31% were not.


Respondents told us that they were aware of some symptoms but not others and only became aware after doing further research. Asian British Pakistani women who spoke to us were not aware these symptoms were due to perimenopause/menopause which may suggest a need to raise awareness of symptoms within other cultures.

These findings suggest that more awareness of perimenopause/menopause symptoms needs to be raised for all in the Rochdale borough.

“Knew about hot flushes but not very much about the rest.”

“I didn't put them together until a discussion in work made me realise.”

“I thought I was going crazy! I read more and spoke to other people and then realised I was not, and it was all part of the process”



“I initially had symptoms of brain fog, hair loss, mood swings, digestion issues, hot sweats. I still have erratic periods. I researched all these symptoms online after a conversation with my sister who said she thought it was more likely I was peri-menopausal than anything else. It was something I had never really heard of”.



Going through the perimenopause/menopause has affected local people in various ways. 70% said their work life had been affected, 70% said their family life was affected, 70% said their mental health was affected and 48% said it had affected their partners. Other areas of life affected were social life & libido.

"My hot flushes were extremely severe. I felt I didn't want to socialise as they could happen at any time and were very unpleasant".

"Lost confidence in socialising".

"I have zero libido and don't want my husband to touch me"

"I really struggled at work and home and lost my confidence in myself, this led to me being extremely frustrated, with a mixture of anxiety and anger. I didn't realise all this was symptomatic of perimenopause"

"Hair loss has been one of my biggest things to have affected me. I dread washing my hair, handfuls seem to fall out and it has massively reduced in thickness. This has had a huge impact on me - your hair is the first thing that someone notices, it is your identity...no one mentions the hair loss"

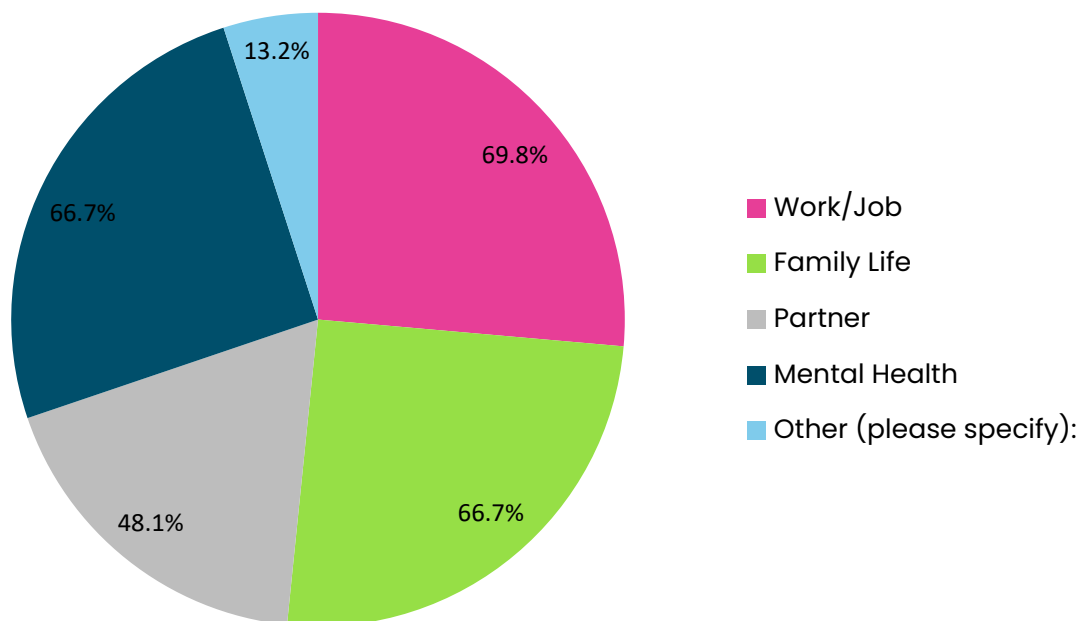




The majority of respondents (77%) accessed their GP, the nurse was accessed by 10% and the hospital by 7%. Only 3% got support from a local group and 3% from social prescribing.

This shows that people still access traditional health services when going through the perimenopause/menopause and are less likely to access support groups & social prescribing services. This could be due to a lack of availability of these services or knowledge around what services are available.

Have your symptoms affected:





50% of those who accessed services said that it met their needs and 50% said it did not.

This 50% split was across all services accessed except the social prescribing service with all those who used this service stating it met their needs. For those who used a GP service people said they felt that having a male GP affected the quality of their experience. Some felt their GP didn't offer any support or help, others praised their GP for their reassurance & for listening to them.

"My GP was excellent when I went to see her. She was patient and listened. Reassured me that the symptoms were normal for perimenopause. Discussed various treatment options and we jointly agreed the way forward based on the discussions we had".

"I found it difficult to explain to a male GP who will never experience the perimenopause or menopause. No advice to deal with symptoms were given".

"GP didn't offer any help, said I was too young for perimenopause and just sensitive to hormone changes. Gynaecologist confirmed it was perimenopause".

"Very helpful female GP who prescribed hormone therapy. I would not have asked at the GP though if it hadn't been for a TV documentary. I had previously been prescribed anti-anxiety medication and regular migraine meds".



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People told us that they felt more information on perimenopause/menopause was needed. People also told us they wanted health professionals to have more knowledge around menopause and to feel like what they were being told was specific to them and their symptoms and not generic advice.

People wanted to feel listened to & more supported. Suggestions for improvement included having a dedicated menopause expert at each GP practice.

“More accessible information from public places. GP surgery, local library, hospital waiting areas, chemists, supermarkets etc”

“There should be a specialist menopause qualified doctor at every surgery or a clinic you can go to for help, someone who really understands, preferably a woman”

“GP’s need more training as they don’t seem to know enough about the way symptoms affect your life”

“Specialist trained medical professionals who you can speak to and they truly understand what you are going through. There are no specialists available”.

“I have never accessed health care services for this, but I know in our GP Practice, there are no posters or leaflets about the menopause. I have never been called for a well woman check-up or been asked about menopause at any appointments”.



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To help with their symptoms **73%** had used Hormone Replacement Therapy (HRT) & **47%** had used alternative/ holistic treatments.

When asked if anything had prevented them getting HRT **42%** said they were not offered it, **32%** said getting to see their GP prevented this & **11%** said for a medical reason.

Other reasons included not having enough information on HRT, worrying about side effects and unavailability.

“Really worried about the side effects of HRT, I do not want this, or maybe I need to know more. I don’t feel that my GP can reassure me nor offer me an alternative!”

“Prescribed but worried about the risk of breast cancer as my grandmother died from it”

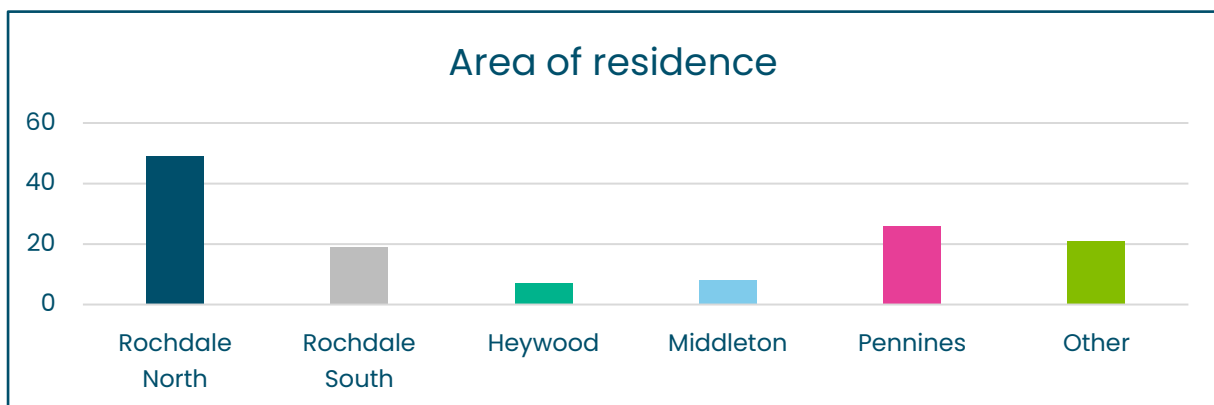
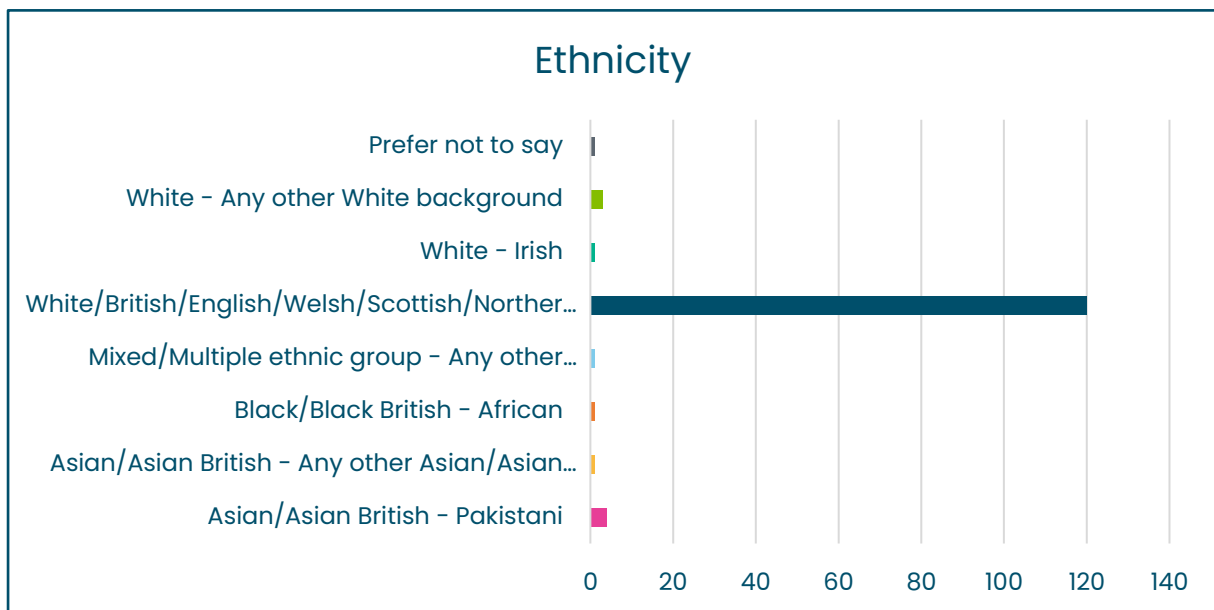
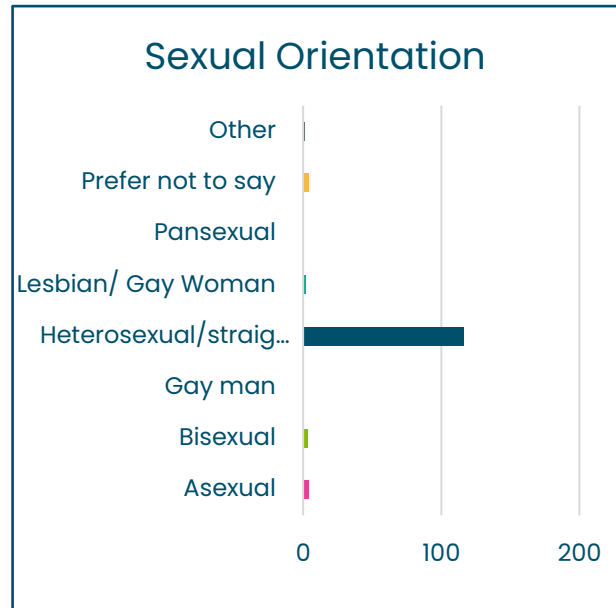
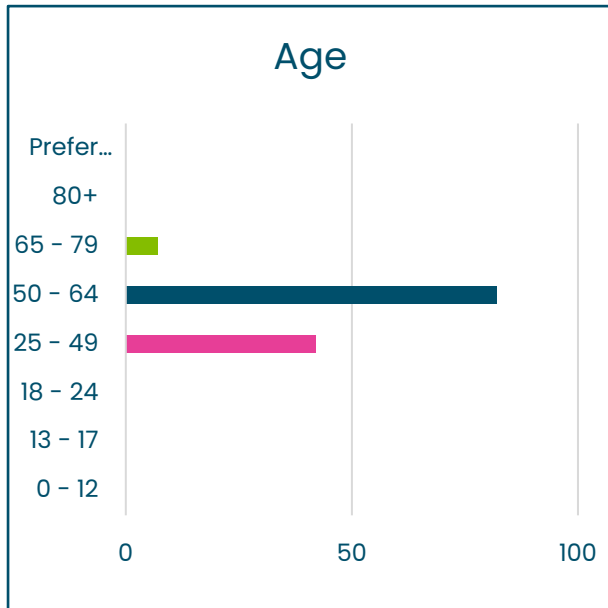
“Sometimes out of stock and needs ordering in from pharmacy”

“When I finally did get to see a male GP face to face, he prescribed me HRT but never told me any further information, alternatives or even side effects. This was 12 months ago, I have never had one single check-up since, no one has monitored my weight etc or even asked me to go in for a review”.

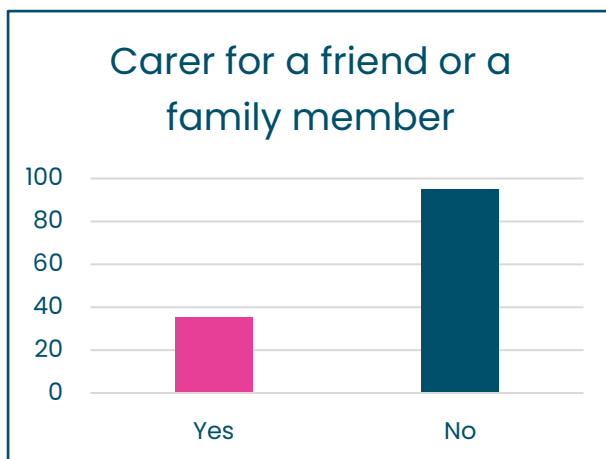
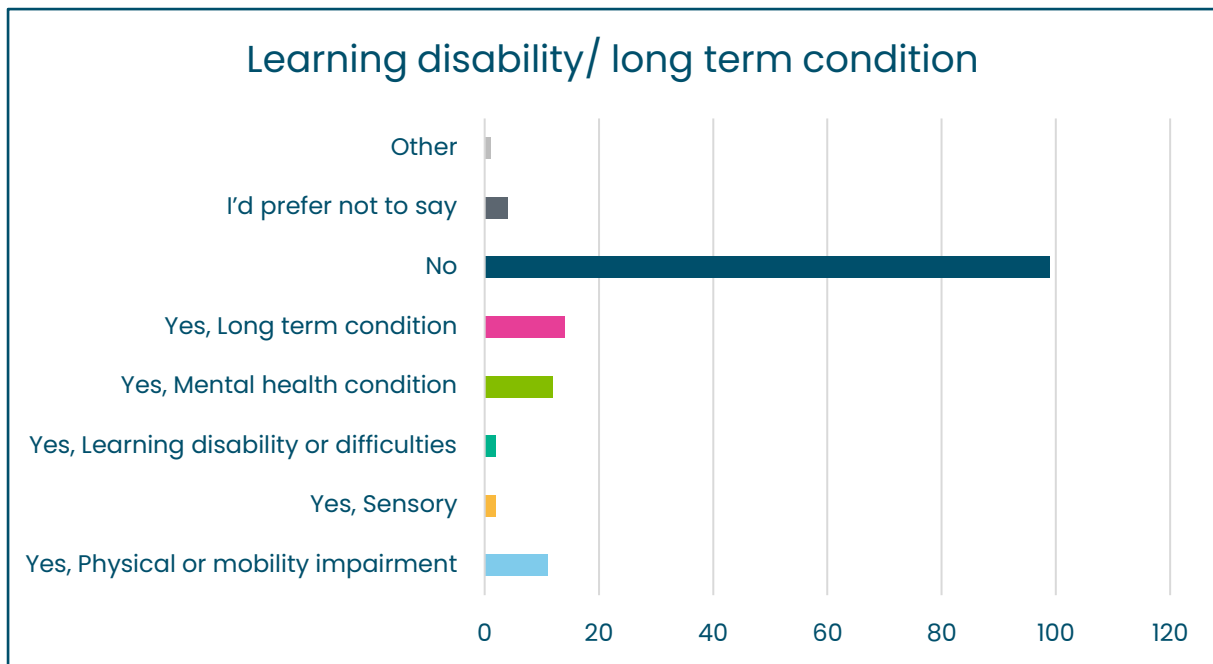
“I spoke to my mum a lot about my experiences of perimenopause. She had lots of her own thoughts around HRT and I think that is down to side effects, bad press previously, she didn’t take it, etc. I must admit that I have never been offered it”



Who spoke to us



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Recommendations

Findings from this survey show that people experiencing perimenopause/menopause are not always aware of all the symptoms associated with this period of life. Some of the women put their symptoms down to other issues and only became aware after doing research or talking to others. This lack of awareness could prevent people accessing the support, advice & treatment they need.

- **Recommendation** – Information leaflet on perimenopause/menopause & symptoms to be co-produced with Healthwatch Rochdale and Heywood, Middleton & Rochdale Integrated Care Partnership. This leaflet to be made available within traditional health care settings and in the community.

Some people spoke about the effect perimenopause/menopause had on their life including their work life. In recognition of this Healthwatch Rochdale have committed to sign up to the Wellbeing of Women Menopause Workplace Pledge, to make sure everyone in the workplace going through the menopause is supported.

- **Recommendation** – For Healthwatch Rochdale and health services commissioned locally to sign up to the Wellbeing of Women Menopause Workplace Pledge.

Some people felt that the health professionals they spoke to weren't knowledgeable about menopause and HRT and were



being given generic advice that wasn't personalised to them. Some people felt that having access to a dedicated menopause expert would be beneficial.

- **Recommendation** – For GPs to have training to raise awareness of the symptoms of perimenopause/menopause.
- **Recommendation** – For each Primary Care Network area to have a menopause expert who can give advice, support and treatment to help with perimenopause/menopause & symptoms.

Thank you to the following organisations for sharing & supporting this piece of work.

- Action Together Networks
- Better Health 4 Middleton
- Cartwheel Arts
- Home Instead
- Living Well Rochdale
- Rochdale & District Mind
- Rochdale & Oldham Maternity Voice Partnership
- Rochdale Stroke Association
- The Lighthouse Project
- The Proud Trust
- Touchstones Rochdale
- Women of Whitworth

Contact us



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