



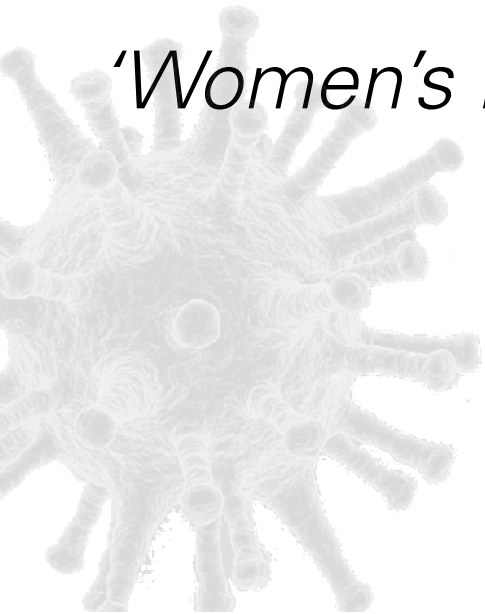
The  
Queen's  
Nursing  
Institute

# Long Covid Nurse Group Meeting

## SUMMARY

*'Women's Health: Long Covid and the Menopause'*

Friday 22 September 2023  
10am - 11.30am, via Zoom



# 1. Welcome and Introductions

Helen Donovan, QN, Long Covid Programme Lead, The QNI, @HelenDon\_RN

- Welcome everybody to this meeting.
- According to Office for National Statistics (ONS): an estimated 2.0 million people living in private households in the UK - 3.1% of the population - are living with Long Covid.
- The Long Covid Nurse Group (LCNG) is a community of practice for nurses in the community to improve care and increase understanding about the physical, mental and emotional effects of Long Covid.
- The network was created in 2021 by the QNI, funded by NHS England until March 2023 and since then by the QNI. It offers an online network of nursing colleagues; bimonthly meetings with expert speakers; regular newsletters; dedicated pages on the QNI website; Long Covid resources.
- Contact me at [helen.donovan@qni.org.uk](mailto:helen.donovan@qni.org.uk)
- To find out more or join the network, go to: <https://qni.org.uk/nursing-in-the-community/long-covid-nurse-group/> or scan the QR code below:



## 2. Long Covid and the Menopause

Ruth Bailey MSc BSc (Hons) RGN DFSRH FRT Queen's Nurse, ANP Sexual Health Chair, RCN Women's Health Forum @RuthRGNBrighton

- The aim of our session today is to explore the relationship between Long Covid and the Menopause and identify signs/symptoms and diagnosis and give an overview of management options
- There is a crossover between Long Covid and Menopause, we know so little about Covid and it's under research - we're trying to draw together what we know about these two conditions that have a massive impact on our patients and colleagues and ourselves
- Definitions of menopause: 2 years without a period under 50; 1 year without a period over 50. Average age is 50 or 51 but that changes across the world.
- Women from different ethnic backgrounds may have different experiences. (for example, 74% of Japanese women experience shoulder pain/frozen shoulder as a symptom of menopause)
- No need for blood tests to confirm over age 45, diagnosis based on symptoms.
- Early menopause between 40 and 45 is key because if women are experiencing early menopause we need to think about long term impact of less estrogen in term of cardio protection and bone protection.



## 2. Long Covid and the Menopause

Ruth Bailey ANP Sexual Health Nurse lead on the FSRH board and Katharine Gale Chair of the RCN Women's Health Forum

- Definition of Long Covid: symptoms that carry on for 4 weeks or more after Covid infection; post covid syndrome: symptoms over 12 weeks
- Symptoms of Long Covid can change over time and new ones develop
- Over 200 symptoms have been reported, 45% respondent needed a reduced workload of some kind.
- See <https://patientresearchcovid19.com/> (created by Long Covid patients who are also researchers)
- See list right, symptoms in white are menopausal, those in black are Long Covid: the symptoms of menopause and Long Covid are very similar
- The first three in black writing are not classic menopause symptoms
- Some comments from patients include, 'I was getting on with it, but covid has made everything worse'; 'I sleep for hours and I still feel exhausted'; 'I just want to be back to my old self'.



**“Which is what ?”**

Royal College of Nursing

Hot flushes/ night sweats	▶ Breathlessness
Low mood/mood swings	▶ Chest pain
Anxiety	▶ Cough
Insomnia	▶ Fever
Fatigue	▶ Palpitations
Brain fog	▶ Fatigue
Palpitations/dizziness/tinnitus	▶ Insomnia
Headaches	▶ Headaches
Dry eyes/hair loss /itchy skin	▶ Loss of libido
Loss of libido	▶ Menstrual changes
Menstrual changes	▶ Pins & needles numbness
Joint aches & pains/pins & needles	

## 2. Long Covid and the Menopause

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- We need to look at the symptoms, which are different for everyone. It's finding what's the most troublesome symptom for YOU?
- As a nurse it's a fantastic opportunity for health promotion: you've got someone in mid-life so let's support them to be as healthy as they possibly can. Let's take the opportunity to make sure they are up to date with cervical screening, breast screening, prevention of heart disease and maintaining bone health. We want people to be able to function and flourish.
- HRT is an option which can be very useful in terms of symptom management. Some symptoms can be so disruptive particularly when people are trying to work for eg night sweats which disrupt sleep
- I don't often prescribe oral HRT as it has more of a risk of thrombosis than transdermal HRT but it is popular with younger women.
- Vagifem is a vaginal estrogen: one symptom that women struggle with and don't talk about, is a dry itchy vaginal area, this can be very uncomfortable, and can make sex very uncomfortable. Vaginal estrogen is a great choice for this.
- Testosterone is also sometimes used, especially against a low sex drive.



## 2. Long Covid and the Menopause

Ruth Bailey ANP Sexual Health Nurse lead on the FSRH board and Katharine Gale Chair of the RCN Women's Health Forum

- Long Covid and Menopause can be difficult to separate, a thorough assessment is needed to exclude other causes
- Life style strategies which Katharine will talk about can help both Long Covid and Menopause
- Resources: Experiences of menopause for women of colour is often different, really recommend Diverse Minds Black Women in Menopause: <https://tinyurl.com/42cuukdf>
- Women's Health Concern also very helpful: <https://www.womens-health-concern.org/>
- Sleep station is also very effective at helping with sleep issues: <https://www.sleepstation.org.uk/>
- RCN also have good resource on menopause at work: <https://www.rcn.org.uk/clinical-topics/Womens-health/Menopause/Menopause-at-work#:~:text=All%20organisations%20should%20have%20a,inclusing%20working%20with%20trade%20unions.>





## 2. Long Covid and the Menopause

Katharine Gale, Founder and Director of FluxStateLtd, Nurse Consultant in women's health

- As a coach, I have found that self-compassion is very important: self kindness. It's about being able to relate to yourself in a way that's forgiving, accepting and loving.
- I walked out of my job when I was 40 because of peri-menopausal symptoms and I want to make sure others don't have that experience.
- How often do you put your mobile on charge? Think of it that way, you checking in with yourself making sure you have enough reserves.
- You need to fill up your cup first before you can help anyone else, otherwise you come from a place of empty. Doing the things you love, will fill up that cup.
- The biggest lesson for a lot of my clients is saying no. Saying yes is often saying no to yourself. I hear so much about guilt - fill up your own cup first.
- Sleep is very important, it's one of the biggest things I teach. Have a cool room, bed is for sleep and sleep only: put away the phone and the laptop.
- I'm an insomniac and CBT has been a great help for me. We often underestimate the amount we sleep, we can reframe our thinking with positive self talk, for example telling yourself: 'if you're awake you've probably had the sleep you need, not the sleep you want but what you need.' That readjustment of thinking, that self-compassion is key.



## 2. Long Covid and the Menopause

Katharine Gale, Founder and Director of FluxStateLtd, Nurse Consultant in women's health

- Other life style choices (see below) it's about making sure you're eating enough proteins, healthy fats, getting enough Vitamin D
- What causes weight gain is eating more, high levels of stress. HRT does not cause weight gain.
- We all know we need to move more but I think we often think that it needs to be high impact, lots of sweating etc. It doesn't: low impact is key, frequency and building up to it slowly. I try 2.5 hours of movement a week, might be walking or being on my bike or with kettle bells, its' about building strength, finding our balance, being flexible and getting out of breath: it's OK to be out of breath, it's good for our hearts and good for our lungs.



### MANAGING THE MENOPAUSE



#### DIET

- A healthy balanced rainbow diet rich in
- calcium
  - vitamin B, D & E
  - wholegrain foods



#### LIFESTYLE CHOICES

- Reduce
- Caffeine
  - Alcohol
- Stop smoking



#### EXERCISE

- Balance & flexibility
- Cardiovascular
- Muscle strengthening

### MANAGING THE MENOPAUSE



#### STRESS

- Breathwork
- Mindfulness
- Writing a list
- Saying no
- Doing things you



#### SLEEP

- Bedtime routine
- Downtime
  - Cool room
  - Cold water to drink



#### MINDSET

- Positive self talk
- Make time for yourself
- You have choices
- Self compassion



## 2. Long Covid and the Menopause

Katharine Gale, Founder and Director of FluxStateLtd, Nurse Consultant in women's health

- Tune into your body, you are the best judge of your body. The NHS uses the criteria from the Greene Climateric Scale but that was created in the 60s. You need to build a picture and listen to all your symptoms and join up those dots.
- Be clear about your needs, choose the right 'fuel' for you
- Reframe your thinking: what if you were to reframe your fatigue, like a mobile phone that's on 10% low battery. Catch yourself when you use the word 'lazy' to describe yourself, you are choosing to be leisurely, that thought about being lazy impacts your behaviour. Don't believe everything you think.

**SIGNS & SYMPTOM AWARENESS**

<p><b>PHYSICAL</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• HOT FLUSHES</li> <li>• NIGHT SWEATS</li> <li>• IRREGULAR PERIODS</li> <li>• HEADACHES</li> <li>• PALPITATIONS</li> <li>• JOINT PAIN</li> <li>• DIGESTIVE</li> <li>• BLOATING</li> <li>• FATIGUE</li> <li>• SLEEP</li> <li>• WEIGHT GAIN</li> <li>• OSTEOPOROSIS</li> <li>• HAIR LOSS</li> </ul>	<p><b>PSYCHOLOGICAL</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• ANXIETY</li> <li>• LOW MOOD</li> <li>• PANIC ATTACKS</li> <li>• MOOD SWINGS</li> <li>• MEMORY ISSUES</li> <li>• BRAIN FOG</li> <li>• CONCENTRATION</li> <li>• IRRITABILITY</li> </ul>	<p><b>INTIMATE</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• BREAST SORENESS</li> <li>• BLADDER ISSUES</li> <li>• LOW LIBIDO</li> <li>• VAGINAL DRYNESS</li> <li>• URINE INFECTIONS</li> </ul>
<p><b>LESS WELL-KNOWN SIGNS</b> BRITTLE NAILS, BODY ODOUR ALLERGIES, GUM ISSUES, ITCHY SKIN, ELECTRIC SHOCKS</p>		

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**Is it Long Covid?**

- ✓ Fatigue
- ✓ Joint pain
- ✓ Palpitations
- ✓ Depression

**Could it be the perimenopause?**

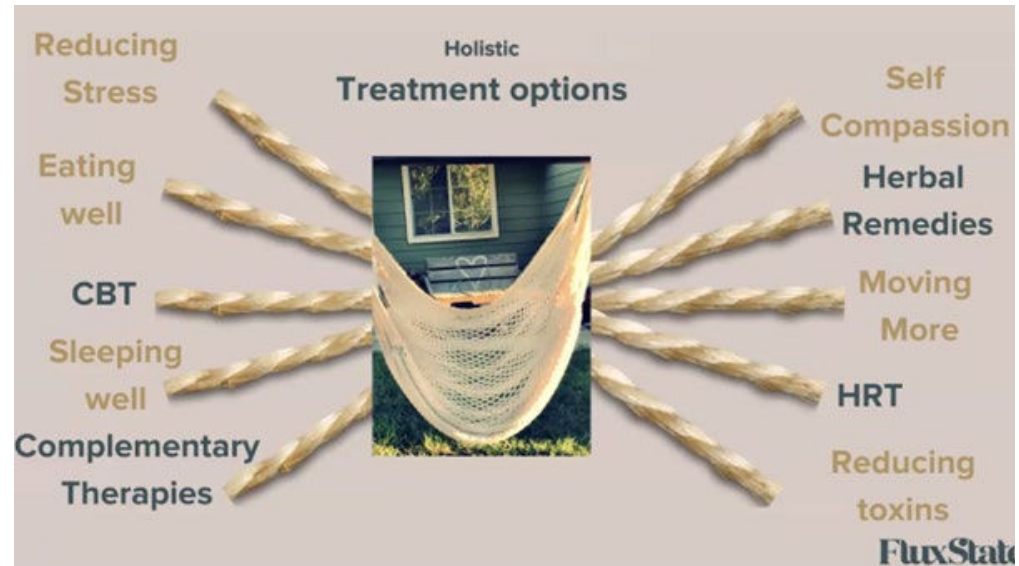
- ✓ Anxiety
- ✓ Low Mood
- ✓ Brain fog
- ✓ Insomnia
- ✓ Irritability
- ✗ Hot flushes

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## 2. Long Covid and the Menopause

Katharine Gale, Founder and Director of FluxStateLtd, Nurse Consultant in women's health

- There's a lot of research into gut health: how it reduces inflammation and improves energy. Look at all the food groups, making sure you eat the rainbow, include pro-biotics and fermented foods.
- 6 foods that improve gut health: yoghurt, miso, kimchi, sauerkraut, kombucha, almonds
- Look at your lunch: what's the fibre, the protein source, the taste? How much are you enjoying it? We are what we eat!
- There are various menopause treatments: complementary & alternative therapies; hormonal and prescribed treatments; mental health and wellbeing. Acupuncture for example can be very useful for hot flushes. There are different options for everyone, make an informed decision.
- See right, the idea of building yourself a support hammock: reducing stress / eating well etc look at what components can help you, rather than relying on one sticking plaster.
- Identify your top 4 symptoms and their impact, tell your GP that you think it could be Long Covid or perimenopause, think of what adjustments you could make. Don't give up, there is always hope!
- It's 26 days till World Menopause Day on 18th October, don't let the menopause be an afterthought, share one thing you've learnt today with another person!



<https://www.bda.uk.com>

## SIGNPOSTING TO FURTHER INFORMATION

**BDA**  
Food Fact Sheet: Menopause and diet

What happens during the menopause?  
Being the postmenopausal state, your body will no longer produce oestrogen, which is the hormone that keeps your body's metabolism working. This can lead to weight gain, changes in cholesterol levels, and an increase in the risk of heart disease.

What can I do?  
A range of lifestyle changes can make significant steps to women to help control these symptoms, however some are easier said than done. The benefits in the long term are well worth the effort. You can control what you eat and how much you eat.

Weight gain  
Being the postmenopausal state, your body will no longer produce oestrogen, which is the hormone that keeps your body's metabolism working. This can lead to weight gain, changes in cholesterol levels, and an increase in the risk of heart disease.

Bone health  
From the age of 30, we lose bone mass every year. This is a natural part of the ageing process. However, after the age of 50, the rate of bone loss increases significantly. This is because the body's ability to produce oestrogen, which is the hormone that keeps your body's metabolism working, is reduced.

**BDA**  
Food Fact Sheet: Long Covid and diet

What is Long Covid?  
Long Covid does not seem to be linked to how long you have had COVID-19 or when you first became unwell. It is a collection of symptoms that can last for weeks, months, or even years.

Common reported symptoms include:

- extreme fatigue (tired)
- memory and concentration problems ('brain fog')
- feeling sick, diarrhoea, stomach aches, loss of appetite
- changes in smell or taste
- shortness of breath
- chest pain or tightness, heart palpitations
- difficulty sleeping (insomnia)
- dizziness
- joint pain
- pins and needles
- depression and anxiety
- tinnitus, ear ringing
- high temperatures, night sweats, sore throat
- rashes

It is important to check ongoing symptoms with your doctor, to make sure they are not affecting your ability to work.

What is the best diet for recovery?  
Eating can be challenging when you are unwell. But your body needs a lot of energy. Eat and drink to keep your energy up and help recovery. A good intake helps and increases your energy levels.

**BDA**  
Food Fact Sheet: Irritable bowel syndrome (IBS) and diet

What happens during the menopause?  
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What can I do?  
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<https://www.womens-health-concern.org>

WOMEN'S HEALTH CONCERN FACT SHEET

Information for women

**The menopause**

WOMEN'S HEALTH CONCERN FACT SHEET

Information for women

**HRT: Benefits and risks**

WOMEN'S HEALTH CONCERN FACT SHEET

Information for women

**Cognitive Behaviour Therapy (CBT) for Menopausal Symptoms**

WOMEN'S HEALTH CONCERN FACT SHEET

Information for women

**Complementary & alternative therapies**  
Non hormonal prescribed treatments

**FluxState**

**Women's Health Forum**  
Advocating for women's health and for the professionals delivering that health care

**Menopause**  
RCN guidance for nurses, midwives and health vis

Second edition

CLINICAL PROFESSIONAL RESOURCE

**Menopause and Mental Health**

**RCN Women's Health Conference**  
06 Dec 2023, 09:30 - 16:00  
20 Cavendish Square, Marylebone, London, W1G 0RN

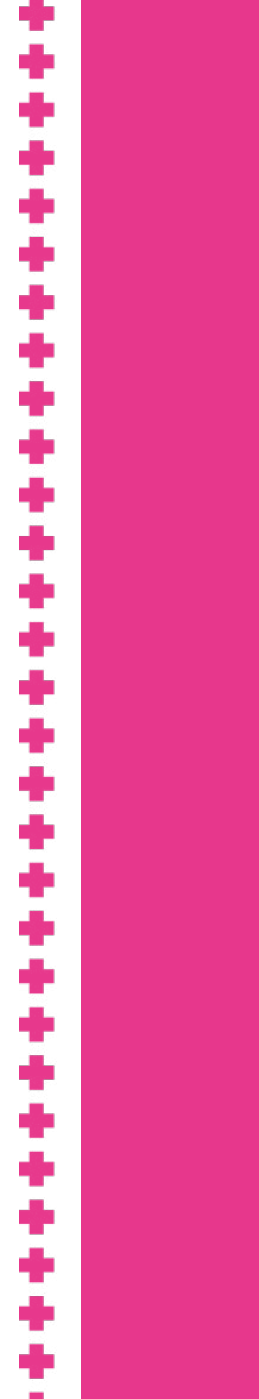
RCN Women's Health Conference  
Inequality in Women's Health: Tackling the Ongoing Challenge

**The Menopause and Work: Guidance for RCN Representatives**

Healthy workplace, healthy you

**Coming Soon: RCN Position Statement on Menopause**

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## Future meeting dates:

- 23rd November 2023, 1.00 – 2.30 pm  
– focus on Community Rehabilitation Alliance Standards

To book your free place on the next meeting, please go to:

<https://qni.org.uk/news-and-events/events/long-covid-nurse-group-meeting/>





Thank you to all delegates who attended today's meeting.

FEEDBACK:

Thank you,  
really useful  
information

That was great-  
really interesting-  
thank you both :)

Great session  
thanks

Really good talks - the info really resonates both personally and professionally. Thank you both. I have just completed a diploma course in Menopause Wellness, and today has really helped embed learning :)

Great  
presentations  
ladies thanks

That was brilliant -  
thanks

Super session -  
really enjoyed it :-)

