



## How to date during menopause

By Margot Carmichael Lester

“I was at a cocktail party exchanging conversation with a charming man when all of a sudden, my face turned red and perspiration poured down my face,” recalls Kathy Miller, communications director for a research and advocacy think tank in Evanston, IL. “Standing within inches of this man, I did not want to use my cocktail napkin as a sponge. Before I could politely excuse myself, he said, ‘Are you shvitzing?’ That’s Yiddish for sweating! I didn’t have another conversation with that guy.”

If you’re just entering into or are currently going through menopause, this has probably happened to you. Or maybe you’ve gotten a migraine or dealt with some cognitive problems. Perhaps you’re cranky from having sleep interruptions or unpredictable periods. Maybe you’ve noticed your sexual desire has declined lately, too. Dealing with all these symptoms can make dating in the premenopausal stage and during menopause itself an adventure.

### How menopause affects your dating life

“These symptoms can interfere [with your dating life] on two levels,” explains Elizabeth Lyster, M.D., a board-certified OB/GYN and author of *Dr. Liz’s Easy Guide to Menopause: 5 Simple Steps to Balancing Your Hormones and Feeling like Yourself Again*. “First is the obvious [level]: being tired and cranky doesn’t make for great dates. Vaginal dryness makes for uncomfortable sex. Hot flashes and night sweats are often bothersome and not romantic. The second and less obvious level is that, when women don’t feel and look their best, they don’t bring what they want to bring to their relationships: happiness, patience, vitality and sexiness.”

The statistics from a recent survey by Estroven® — a natural supplement for menopause symptom relief — bear that out:

- 58% of premenopausal women believe menopause symptoms will make them feel *less sexy*
- 37% of women believe that menopause could be having a negative affect on their personal relationships

But it doesn’t have to be that way! In honor of Menopause Awareness Month this September, here are some tips for handling (or avoiding) menopause-related dating disasters:

- 1. Avoid any obvious triggers during dates.** “Avoid triggers for hot flashes, like alcohol, spicy foods and certain cold medications [containing] pseudoephedrine,” suggests Karen Giblin, founder of Red Hot Mamas, a menopause education group.
- 2. Being prepared will help you stay cool.** “Avoid wearing a turtleneck or tweed, and dress in layers so you can ‘un-layer’ without getting arrested for indecent exposure,” says Giblin. “Keep cool wipes in your purse for your neck and face, and hang on to your glass of ice water. Drinking water is cooling, and you can put your wrist on the cool glass surface.”
- 3. Take a symptom-reducing supplement.** Natural remedies (like Estroven® and other supplements) can mitigate some symptoms. “Every morning, take a capsule of flax oil and evening primrose oil along with your daily vitamin,” suggests Barbara Mendez, a registered pharmacist and nutrition expert in private practice in Manhattan. “These naturally occurring oils have been proven in studies to relieve menopausal symptoms, like the irritability that comes with hot flashes. If you’re going on a date, take an extra dose to help counteract menopausal ‘meanies’ — like hot flashes.”
- 4. When all else fails, get professional help.** “If you’re really frustrated or upset, or feeling depressed or having sleep problems, you should seek a consultation with your OB/GYN or a psychologist who can provide care that works for you,” says Helen Coons, a health psychologist near Philadelphia, PA. There are many prescription drugs that can reduce vaginal dryness, control hormonal spikes and make periods more predictable.

### How to discuss it with your date

“For whatever reason, we’ve created all these taboos around talking about menopause,” says Lissa Rankin, OB/BGYN and author of *What’s Up Down There? Questions You’d Only Ask Your Gynecologist if She Was Your Best Friend*. “Most women are unlikely to stand up and say, ‘I’m in the middle of a hot flash, give me a second.’ They’re afraid this will demonstrate their age. We want the guy

we're dating to think we're the sexiest, hottest thing, and our culture [equates] sexy and hot with young."

But since the linchpins for any successful relationship are authenticity and honesty, explaining your symptoms and needs is key. To make it easier, write down what you want to say, suggests James Simon, clinical professor of obstetrics and gynecology at George Washington University. "You're not going to read this word-for-word, but put down three or four points you definitely want to hit. If he seems uncomfortable, take it slow. If there's a real intimate connection on an emotional level, he will want to have the conversation because he's ready to go to the next level, too."

To ease your nerves about having these kinds of discussions, remember that he probably has health concerns of his own. "Many women are sitting there thinking that their dates couldn't possibly have any health issues," Coons says. A more mature man may have his own challenges affecting his dating life, like erectile dysfunction, hair loss and prostate problems, among other things. "These are naturally occurring processes, not necessarily health issues. Remember that you're not the only one feeling self-conscious," Coons explains. "The talk *could* be a good screening tool," Rankin says, laughing. "Do you really want to date someone who'll reject you for [going through] menopause? If I'm being real and he doesn't like the real me, then let's not waste our time."

*Carrboro, N.C.-based writer Margot Carmichael Lester, is the author of The Real Life Guide to Life After College and coauthor of Be A Better Writer.*