

Menopause and the link with digestive health

Nigel Denby, RD, Founder Your Menopause by Harley St at Home

Perimenopause /menopause

Perimenopause average age 46yrs

- oestrogen levels fluctuate/decline
- symptoms may appear/ disappear as oestrogen fluctuates
- periods may be regular, sporadic, heavy, lighter or longer

Menopause average age 51yrs

- 12 months without a period
- symptoms may persist for many years into menopause

Menopause

Symptoms

- over 40 recognised symptoms
- from the top of her head to the tips of her toes
- some well recognised others not
- 25% of women experience severe, debilitating symptoms, 1-10 women receive treatment
- Hormone Replacement Therapy (HRT) remains first line approach to managing menopause symptoms British Menopause Society, NICE 2021
- 40-60% of women choose not to, or cannot take HRT Menopause Market Research report 2023 <https://gen-m.com/>
- digestive symptoms rarely appear on symptom checklists
- does not correlate with clinical experience

NICE Menopause Guidelines

NG23 : Revised November 2024



- Management of women with menopause should include advice on **lifestyle measures** for symptom relief, such as exercise, weight loss, adequate sleep, and stress reduction.

Menopause landscape

Until 2021 Menopause remained a taboo topic

- Davina affect 2021 – 30% ↑ in demand for HRT
- Menopause Workplace Pledge – now over 2,000 employers signed up to support staff
- NHS pre-payment certificate
- “The Menopause Market” \$600 Billion globally Mintel 2023
- 13 million women in the UK – continually renews
- Menopause skincare, shampoo, chocolate, supplements.....
- How do we support women with credible, evidence-based information and advice?

How can we support women?

Nutrition and health concerns at Menopause

What worries women?

- Weight gain
- Bloating and digestive symptoms
- Sleep
- Brain fog, low mood, depression

What worries us?

- Cardiovascular disease
- Bone density and osteoporosis
- Insulin resistance / metabolic syndrome
- Cancer
- Histamine intolerance

Current state of the UK diet

Public Health England 2020

- Only 33% adults consume 5-a-day
- Free sugars x2 recommendation
- Saturated fat 20% higher than recommendation in adults
- Only 9% adult meet daily fibre recommendation
- Adults still consume 40% more salt than recommended
- Vitamin D status, iron and calcium all a concern
- 20% women aged over 40yrs exceed 14 units of alcohol per week

Harley Street at Home lifestyle survey, 2023

- 107 women
- 52% don't eat 5-a-day
- 40% exceed 14 units of alcohol per week
- Reliance on processed foods
- 52% less than 5,000 steps a day
- 68% no formal exercise
- 79% no self care
- 83% nothing to support emotional wellbeing

Your Menopause by Harley St at Home

Evidence based support and information for women

- Online community, access to BMS specialist Menopause Drs, lifestyle coaching and self-care classes
- Established during the COVID-19 pandemic
- Now supporting > 75,000 real women, living real lives
- Services to organisations and employers
- Supporting HCPs through educational programmes
- Provide menopause lifestyle programmes to NHS Primary Care Practices and their patients



Menopause and digestive health

Is it a thing?

Clinical experience

- Pre-existing digestive health issues – symptoms exacerbate or change
- New digestive health issues- bloating, pain, altered bowel habit
- No issues at all

Harley St at Home Digestive Health Survey 2023 (n=59)

- 85% suffering from bloating
- 53% abdominal pain
- 52% constipation
- 39% incomplete evacuation
- 39% diarrhoea
- 34% straining
- 24% urgency
- 14% mucus
- 80% symptoms >3months, 60% pre menopause symptoms, 28% symptoms at onset of perimenopause

Menopause and digestive health

What's the evidence?

Prevalence of Digestive health issues and IBS amongst women during perimenopause and menopause

MSc Dietetics project, Anya Mustard, RD

- **Aim:** establish a clearer view of the prevalence and impact of IBS and digestive health issues in perimenopausal and menopausal women. The progression of digestive symptoms and support sought by women
- X-sectional, online survey collected from women self diagnosed peri/menopausal, with or without Hx of IBS or digestive health issues
- Add to the scarce evidence base to align with Women's Health Strategy for England, 2022
- 564 women, aged between 44-73years

Results:

- 94% respondents reported digestive health issues
- Statistical significance ($P=0.011$) between those diagnosed menopausal & bloating
- 82% reported digestive health symptoms started or worsened at (38%) perimenopause or (44%) menopause
- Most common symptoms: bloating (77%), constipation (54%), abdominal pain (50%) and acid reflux(49%)
- Only 33% formal diagnosis of IBS
- 89% self managing, 53% help from HCP (58% unhelpful)
- 85% respondents said they wanted information and help

Support for women

On demand, evidence based support, when women want it, in a format that suits them



- Common digestive health symptoms in menopause
- Finding your digestive health triggers
- Your gut microbiome
- Are you eating enough fibre?
- Could prebiotics and probiotics help your digestive health?
- Top tips for specific symptoms
- Could the Low FODMAP diet help your digestive health symptoms?

Recap - the story so far

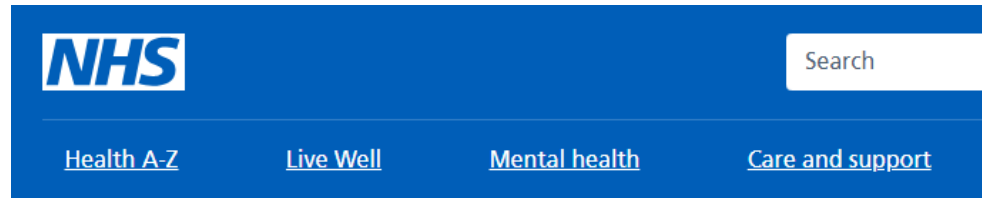
- Women are more aware than ever before about their menopause, although many remain confused by mis information
- Symptoms are wide and varied- digestive symptom often missed – but definitely “a thing”
- There’s something going on with the microbiome at menopause
- Menopause “business” is making it challenging to sort the wheat from the chaff
- **Large proportion of women are self managing symptoms**
- **The majority of women are not getting their information from us**

Menopause and the microbiome- what do we know?

Oestrogen-gut microbiome axis or 'Estrobolome' – bi-directional relationship

- Gut microbiome regulated by oestrogen levels – oestrogen levels regulated by the gut microbiome Santos-Marcus et al 2018
- Circulating endogenous oestrogens are conjugated in the liver, but can be deconjugated when needed by the gut microbes
- Specific Microbiome dysbiosis during perimenopause / menopause could be exacerbated by diminishing hormone levels Liu et al, 2022, Yang et al, 2022
- High gut permeability, elevated inflammation markers established in post menopausal women vs menstruating women Santoro and Sutton-Tyrell 2011

Probiotic information from the NHS¹



[Home](#) > [Health A to Z](#)

Probiotics

Probiotics are live bacteria and yeasts promoted as having various health benefits. They're usually added to yoghurts or taken as food supplements, and are often described as "good" or "friendly" bacteria.

Probiotics are thought to help restore the natural balance of bacteria in your gut (including your stomach and intestines) when it's been disrupted by an illness or treatment.

There's some evidence that probiotics may be helpful in some cases, such as helping to ease some symptoms of irritable bowel syndrome (IBS).

Issues to be aware of

If you're considering trying probiotics, there are a few issues you need to be aware of.

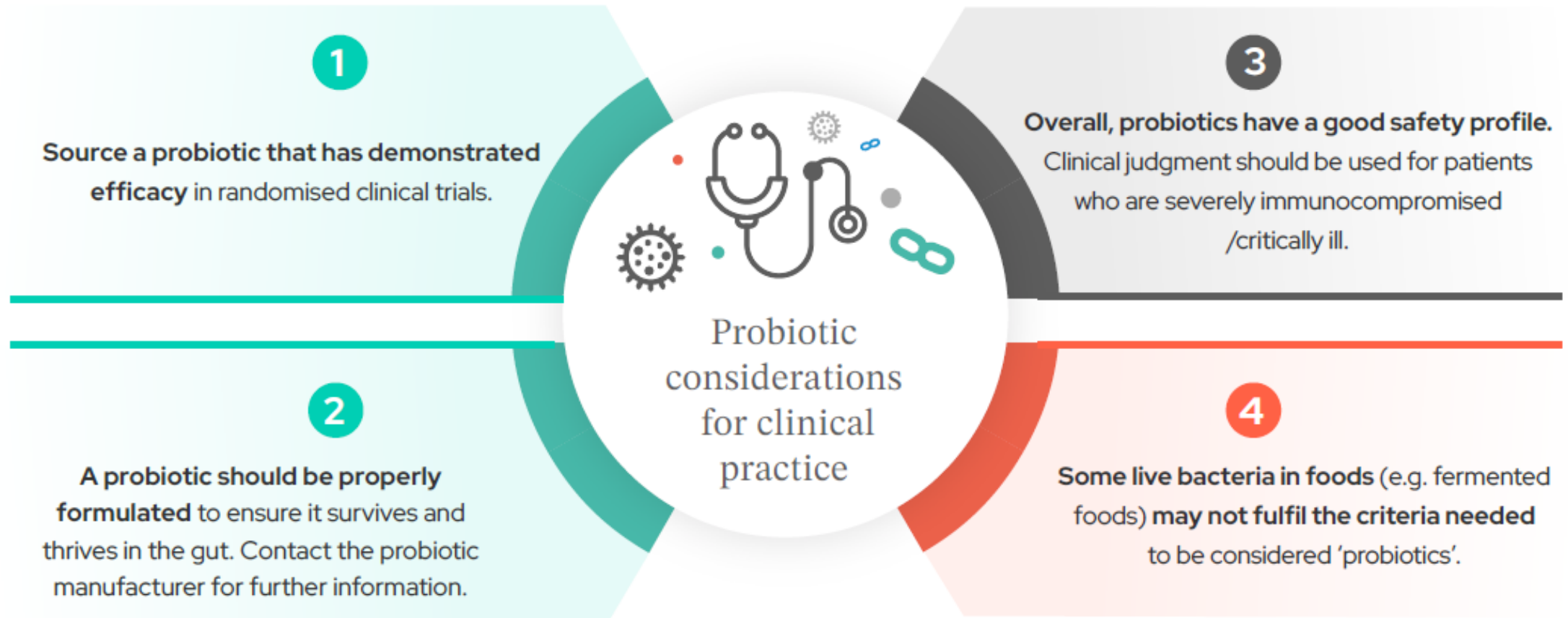
Probiotics are generally classed as food rather than medicine, which means they don't go through the rigorous testing medicines do.

Because of the way probiotics are regulated, we can't always be sure that:

- the product actually contains the bacteria stated on the food label
- the product contains enough bacteria to have an effect
- the bacteria are able to survive long enough to reach your gut

And there's likely to be a huge difference between the pharmaceutical-grade probiotics that show promise in clinical trials and the yoghurts and supplements sold in shops.

Choosing a probiotic



Independent UCL study demonstrated Symprove is the only probiotic to ‘arrive, survive and thrive’¹

All tests were performed independently from each other and not in cascade

	Actimel	Alflorex	Biobalance	Bio-Kult	Probio7	VSL#3	Yakult	Symprove
Arrive Delivers at least 75% of the amount claimed for the product	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●
Survive After 120 minutes exposure, are there still more than 1 million bacteria per ml?	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●
Thrive After 30 minutes exposure, can the bacteria grow strongly within 10 hours to colonise the gut?	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●

“ Symprove is different from other probiotics because it is water-based, which means it limits exposure to gastric juices and digestive enzymes in the stomach... This means when a patient swallows Symprove, the bacteria are able to survive the stomach acid and then thrive in the colon ”

PROF SIMON GAISFORD, Head of Pharmaceutics at UCL School of Pharmacy

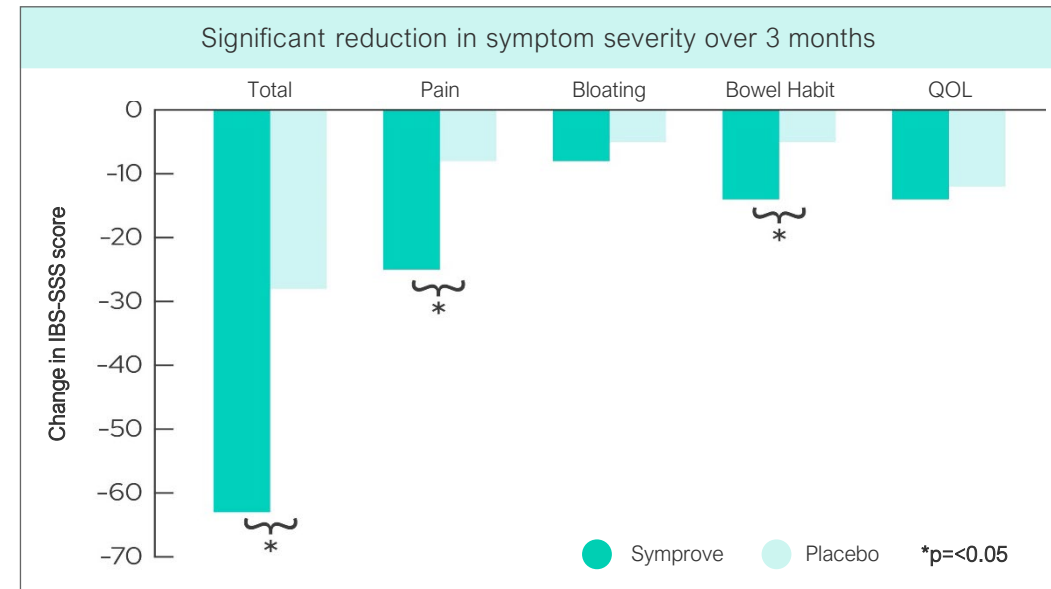
1. Fredua-Agyeman M and Gaisford S. Beneficial Microbes 2015;6(1):141-151.

Significant improvement demonstrated in IBS-SSS in randomised controlled trial¹

Randomised, double-blind, placebo-controlled trial conducted at King's College Hospital, London (n=186)

- Overall symptom severity reduced significantly, including pain – the most common symptom
- Improvement continued over 3 months
- Good response moving patients to mild or symptom-free
- Shown to be well tolerated and safe
- Patients reported improvement in their bowel habit – both constipation and diarrhoea

Supported by 92% of people reporting a benefit in real-world after 3 months of Symprove²



“ 70% reduction in symptoms will come as a significant respite for patients

PROF INGVAR BJARNASON
Consultant Gastroenterologist, King's College Hospital, London



What's next for the microbiome/ menopause connection?

Hot off the press.....

Aim: Perimenopause study to assess the impact of Symprove on QoL and perimenopause symptoms

Objective: Undertake a 12 week, single-arm feasibility study in 500 perimenopausal women

Recruiting: women who are experiencing one or more perimenopause symptom, with or without Hormone Replacement Therapy (HRT) treatment-

Exclusion criteria Hx IBD, pregnancy, psychological disorders, already taking probiotics

Intervention: 12 week 70ml/daily course Symprove

Menopause specific QoL questionnaire baseline, 4, 8 and 12 weeks

Results: Summer 2025

Want to get your practice and patients involved?

Free to you, your practice! Free to your patients!

- Nigel@harleystathome.com
- Take part in our new study
- Access the Digestive health on demand video series
- Join our HCP database