

You are **AMAZING**

# 'We need to talk about the menopause!'

Meet Menopause Café founder Rachel Weiss, who's giving women across the UK the chance to meet up and fan down hot flushes over a cuppa

By Carole Richardson

At 52, Rachel Weiss has yet to encounter the full-blown symptoms of the menopause that are inevitably round the corner.

Whether she'll be plagued by debilitating mood swings, hot flushes and brain fog or be one of the 20 per cent of women who sail through 'the change' is anybody's guess. What's for certain though is that she'll be well-versed on the subject.

"I'm actually quite curious because I don't know what it will be like for me," admits Rachel, who was inspired to set up the world's first Menopause Café.

The idea of creating a welcoming environment where women - and even men - can meet up to discuss anything menopausal came to her while watching a documentary on the subject by journalist Kirsty Wark (pictured).

The programme set her thinking. "It struck me that it was a bit odd how

nobody talks about menopause given that it affects half the population. There aren't many certainties in life but, if you're a woman, the menopause, like puberty, is one of them," she says.

As a secondary school teacher who retrained as a counsellor, Rachel was confident about one thing. "I know talking helps," she adds.

And if she needed any further proof of that, she only had to look at the success of the Death Café she'd already set up in her home city of Perth, Scotland, which gives people the chance

**'It's possible to be serious and have fun. We absolutely want to raise people's spirits'**

to get together to talk about another of life's certainties. "I then wondered if that same model would work for a menopause cafe," she adds.

Tentatively, Rachel put out a post on Facebook asking whether anybody would be interested in such a café where they could chat about potentially embarrassing menopausal problems.

"To my amazement, loads of women said yes and two women - Gail Jack

and Lorna Fotheringham - said they would help me," she recalls. "At the first meeting in a local coffee lounge, we wondered if anyone would actually turn up. To our surprise, 28 people did."

The format was simple. Rachel explained that there was no agenda other than to chat together and share concerns, experiences and tips for coping with any menopausal worries, from migraines to incontinence.

The aim was to learn more and become more empowered to deal with their own menopause symptoms over coffee and cake. "Tell what works for

you but don't tell everybody else what to do," she advised.

"I am not a medical person but it seems to me that not everyone has the same experience. There isn't a clear-cut solution apart from common sense," she adds.

The chance to share the common sense from women who are going - or have gone - through the same thing proved instantly popular. At the next café meeting, more people turned up and its popularity continued to grow.

A Facebook group and a publicity campaign followed and Rachel's

**'At our first meeting we wondered if anyone would turn up, but 28 people did!'**

husband Andy (51), who works in IT, agreed to create a website for them encouraging others to set up Menopause Cafés in other areas. A year later, 60 had popped up, including one in Toronto. And the world's first menopause festival, held in Perth in March where attractions included talks, group singing and lots of chances to get together to chat.

Today, with Rachel at the helm and Kirsty Wark as its patron, the charity is going from strength to strength. While acknowledging that her original idea could actually have turned into something gloomy, Rachel is glad her fears

Having a cuppa together and talking things through really helps



It's good to talk: Menopause Café founder Rachel Weiss



**■ If you would like to find out more about setting up a Menopause Café in your area, or find one near you, visit [www.menopausecafe.net](http://www.menopausecafe.net)**