



# & MENOPAUSE

When three women set up the first Menopause Café in 2017, they had no idea how successful their idea would become...



**'I WANTED TO CREATE SPACE TO TALK ABOUT THE MENOPAUSE.'**

**Rachel Weiss, 52, had the idea to set up the first Menopause Café in Scotland.**

It was Kirsty Wark's documentary, *The Menopause And Me* (first aired on BBC1 in April 2017), which was the inspiration behind the Menopause Café concept. As a woman turning 51 at the time – the average age for menopause in the UK – I knew it was going to happen soon and I wanted to prepare myself. Kirsty's documentary

highlighted how menopause is something all women experience and yet it's still largely taboo. It happens whether or not you've had children and yet, compared to pregnancy, it is rarely talked about. It's a very awkward workplace conversation when a woman is trying to explain her symptoms and the support she needs

to, perhaps, a younger, male manager.

Being a counsellor and coach (rowan-consultancy.co.uk), I had already seen how beneficial it is to talk, and the thought of women suffering in isolation saddened me.

So, I decided to create a space for informal conversations about menopause to let people share their stories, tips and fears, and to ask questions. Menopause Cafés don't have speakers, nor do they promote any course of action. Women and men of all ages are welcome.

My ultimate hope is that one day Menopause Cafés will die out because menopause is a commonplace topic so women no longer need to feel they have to go to a special support group.



## ‘NONE OF US ANTICIPATED HOW THE CAFÉS WOULD GROW’

**Lorna Fotheringham, 55, helped co-create the first Menopause Café. She lives in Perth.**

I started going through a medically induced menopause at the age of 41, after the removal of my remaining ovary in an attempt to treat severe polycystic ovary syndrome, which I had really suffered with. It was a while afterwards, in 2017, that I saw something Rachel posted on Facebook about her desire to talk about menopause. As a result of that post, I met up with Rachel, and Gail Jack, and the three of us just clicked. From there, we set about creating the first ever Menopause Café, and we advertised it on social media and in local publications.

All we needed was a venue serving refreshments, two people who could cover various roles, such as host and facilitator, and a few people who wanted to talk about the menopause – it was that simple! The whole point was to start a conversation with no pre-set agendas. None of us had any major expectations; we just hoped some people would show up! We were delighted when more than 20 people, aged from under 40 to over 80, came along. One girl was there for a friend, looking for information on how to help her, and a man came to support his partner, which was amazing.

The atmosphere was buzzing and there really was a strong feeling in the room that many people were sharing this part of their lives for the first time. That was exciting. There was lots of conversation, laughter and sharing. Ironically enough, the topic most discussed was the very fact that most of us had never before discussed our menopause!

Coming away from that first Menopause Café, I was relieved and enlightened about my anxiety. I understood more that it was indeed a ‘thing’ connected to my menopause,

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which other people suffered with too, and not just me going crazy, which it really did feel like at times.

Menopause Café has now grown into an organisation with a significant presence. Last year we saw well over 100 Cafés take place all over the UK. We also launched the very first #FlushFest Menopause Festival in Perth last spring, which is set to return again this year. And last June we became a registered charity, with Kirsty Wark as our patron.

The first Menopause Café outside the UK, so far, has been set up in Toronto, Canada, and we’ve even hosted our first ever ‘virtual’ Menopause Café online hosted by Zoom (zoom.us), for those who can’t reach the physical events.

For 2019 we can’t wait to see the Menopause Café phenomenon continue to grow. The more open and honest conversations we can have around menopause, the better.



Menopause Café meetings give women a chance to talk about this phase of their lives.



## ‘SHARING OUR EXPERIENCES IS EMPOWERING.’

Journalist and TV presenter Kirsty Wark, 63, is proud to be the Menopause Café’s patron.

My menopause started suddenly after I had a hysterectomy. When I later came off HRT, it was pretty awful. The severe lack of sleep is very debilitating. I knew about some of the symptoms, like the hot flashes, but I was still quite ill informed.

Making *The Menopause And Me* was very uplifting. I heard stories from women who had never publicly talked about menopause to anybody before, so it was a very big moment for them. I think they thought they were doing something for the common good, which they absolutely were.

I wanted to make the documentary to get more people talking honestly about it. It’s been so associated with

all the wrong things, with women being ‘past their prime’, but women actually go through menopause at the height of their powers. Nevertheless, it can be a very tricky time. So maybe if more people were mindful of it, they might be more understanding.

I think the Menopause Café is a brilliant idea, and I’m delighted to be their patron. There’s nothing better than sharing experiences – it’s empowering, so the more menopause cafés that spring up, the better. The menopause isn’t always debilitating, but it often is, and you’ve got to go through it – it isn’t a life choice. Women need to be comfortable with these conversations.

‘Women actually go through menopause at the height of their powers.’



## ‘I FELT AS IF A WEIGHT HAD BEEN LIFTED FROM MY SHOULDERS.’

Clare Jackson, 46, an alternative therapist and healer from Lancashire, was so inspired by a Menopause Café that she’s setting up her own.

In my late 30s I experienced menopausal symptoms but I didn’t realise that’s what they were. I was having ‘flooding’ (really heavy periods) but because of my age, it wasn’t picked up on as a menopausal symptom. I also began experiencing severe migraines and horrendous night sweats. I thought I was coming down with something – the menopause didn’t enter my mind!

But at 42, a doctor realised it was the menopause. Between running a business (connectivehealing.co.uk)

and having young kids, it just wasn’t something I felt ready for. I felt as if my body was letting me down.

### SUPPORT AT LAST

When I first heard about Menopause Café, on Facebook, I thought it sounded fantastic. There was one about half an hour from where I live, in Lancashire, and so I went along. I had an opportunity to share where I was with my symptoms, when I was having a particularly rough time. And it was so helpful to have people listen and say they completely understood.

I left there feeling as if a weight had been lifted off my shoulders. I’m now going to set up a Menopause Café with my friend nearer to home.

### GET INVOLVED

If you feel inspired to set up a Menopause Café, it’s simple. All you need is at least two people to run things, a venue with refreshments, and people who want to talk about menopause. Find out more at [menopausecafe.net](http://menopausecafe.net) or [facebook.com/menocafe17](https://www.facebook.com/menocafe17) where you’ll also see a list of all future events.

## You might also like...

**1** The Virtual Menopause Café. March 5, 6.30pm-7.30pm ([menopausecafe.net/events-calendar](http://menopausecafe.net/events-calendar)). The next virtual menopause café will be hosted by Zoom as a video conference, so you will need to download the Zoom software first.

**2** *Menopause The Musical* Touring the UK from Feb 5 to Jun 16 ([atgtickets.com](http://atgtickets.com))

Why not organise a group night out to this humorous and celebratory musical? It’s about four menopausal women who meet at a lingerie sale.

**3** #FlushFest Menopause Festival 2019 April 26 and 27, Perth Theatre, Perth ([menopausecafe.net](http://menopausecafe.net))

This brilliantly-named festival offers two days of themed seminars, films, discussions and workshops.