**Menopause Information sheet**

Women are most fertile (able to conceive children) in their late teens and early twenties. The risk of miscarriage and pregnancy complications rises with age. Between 45-55 years old age, fertility reduces and then comes to an end in a process called the menopause. It can take several years to complete.

The menopause involves:

* Gradual ending of menstruation (or stopping having periods) and a large reduction of fertile eggs in the ovaries.
* An increase in the production of hormones called gonadotropins that try to stimulate egg production, which can cause irritability, hot flushes and night sweats.
* A reduction in the sex hormones (oestrogen and progesterone) produced by a woman’s ovaries, resulting in some shrinkage of sexual organs and sometimes reduction in sexual interest (libido.)
* Associated problems such as osteoporosis, which can be caused by a reduction in the production of sex hormones.

For some women, the general hormone changes, especially reduction in oestrogen levels experienced during the perimenopause and menopause, can lead to mood changes, depression and anxiety. This can make a woman feel that she is on an emotional rollercoaster. Some women experience overwhelming sadness that they are no longer able to have children and this can affect their self-image of being a ‘desirable’ woman. Self-esteem and self-image can become low, which may impact on self-confidence and the quality of life during this transitional stage of the lifespan. Some women may try hormone replacement therapy (HRT) where oestrogen is prescribed in order to replace the decline and relieve the symptoms.