

Members' Digest



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October Edition: Empowering Women's Health

Women's health is more than routine checkups — it's a vital part of community well-being. From hormonal shifts to hidden conditions that too often go undiagnosed, women face unique health challenges that deserve greater understanding and support. Because when women are healthy, families, workplaces, and communities are stronger too.

In this issue of Members' Digest, we're shining a light on the full spectrum of women's well-being — physical, emotional, and mental. Whether it's navigating life transitions, finding the spark again, or simply feeling seen, our goal is simple: to help every woman take charge of her health with confidence and care.

Member Story

Finding her Spark Again

There are times in life when you look in the mirror and barely recognise the person staring back

That was how Amara felt – tired, foggy, and distant from the energetic woman she used to be. Each day became an act of endurance. She pushed through work, family dinners, and daily routines, telling herself she was just ‘a little run down’. But deep down, she knew something wasn’t right. The hardest part wasn’t the fatigue; it was feeling unseen. Test after test came back ‘normal’, yet she felt that ‘something wasn’t right’.

When Amara connected with MembersHealth, everything changed. For the first time, a physician took the time to listen, really listen. Together, they mapped out a plan that focused on hormone balance, sustainable nutrition, and small, realistic lifestyle changes. It wasn’t about quick fixes or perfection; it was about giving her body a voice again.

Slowly, her mornings felt lighter, her thoughts clearer. One day, while getting ready for work, she caught her reflection and smiled, the first honest smile in a long time.

“It’s great to have my spark back!”



Empowered Action: Turning Awareness into Advocacy



- **Document Everything:** keep a health journal of symptoms, triggers and responses.
- **Ask Clear Questions:** write them down before appointments to make every minute count.
- **Use Clear, Firm Language:** instead of saying, ‘*I think this might be an issue,*’ consider saying ‘*I’d like to investigate this symptom further.*’
- **Know Your Health Data:** keep copies of lab results and reports.
- **Trust Your Gut:** if something feels off, keep pushing for answers.

How Advocacy Shapes Women's Health Care

Too often, women's symptoms are minimized or misunderstood – fatigue dismissed as stress, pain labelled emotional, or heart attack symptoms mistaken for anxiety. The consequences are real: delayed diagnoses, reduced quality of life, and lost trust in care systems.

Studies have found that:

- Women are more likely to have their pain attributed to emotional distress, seen as “exaggerating,” whereas men’s pain is seen as “real” and “physical.”
- Women experiencing chronic pain, such as endometriosis, fibromyalgia, or autoimmune conditions, often go years without a correct diagnosis.
- In emergency rooms, women wait longer for pain medication and are less likely to be prescribed adequate pain relief. In part, because female patients’ pain scores are 10% less likely to be recorded by nurses ([source](#)).
- Women are less likely to be prescribed life-saving cholesterol or blood pressure medications after a heart attack. They are also less likely to seek rehabilitation, leading to high rates of depression.
- Historically, medical research and clinical trials focused predominantly on male physiology, leaving gaps in understanding how diseases present in women.

Dismissed Symptoms: The Cost of Being Unheard

The gap in women’s healthcare isn’t only clinical — it’s cultural. Generations of women have been taught to push through pain, to care for others first, and to minimize their own needs. That quiet endurance has come at a cost. Change begins when silence breaks — when conversations about health are met with curiosity, not skepticism, and when every concern is treated as valid. Awareness opens the door, but advocacy is what walks us through it.

Change doesn’t start in policy rooms; it starts in conversations. When we listen, ask questions, and speak up — for ourselves and for those we love — we begin to turn awareness into action.

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Prioritize your health today

Learn how we make preventative care simple and accessible.

☎ 1-800 - 484 - 0152 ✉ info@membershealth.ca 🌐 www.membershealth.ca

This newsletter provides information only and is not a substitute for professional healthcare advice. We highly recommend individuals facing any health concerns, including symptoms related to mental well-being, to seek advice from their healthcare practitioner.

Redefining Menopause in the Workplace

As more women aged 45-55 stay in the workforce than ever before, there is tremendous experience and potential to be supported and retained. Yet so many find themselves facing the impossible decision to take a pay cut or even leave the workforce entirely — not because they are incapable, but because they've entered a new stage of life: menopause.

A recent Menopause Foundation of Canada study reveals a quiet crisis at work:

- 50% worry symptoms make them appear 'less capable at work'.
- 67% feel uncomfortable discussing symptoms with a supervisor.
- 70% are uncomfortable approaching Human Resources.
- 22% fear menopause affects their career progression.
- 1 in 10 have left jobs due to unmanaged symptoms or stigma.
- 87% say menopause deserves greater workplace understanding.

For many women, menopause isn't just a health transition; it's a career crossroads. Some are forced to choose between staying in jobs that fail to meet their needs or stepping away entirely. More than one in ten say they've left the workforce because the symptoms and the stigma became too heavy to bear, often right when they're headed into senior, higher-paying roles. That's not just a personal loss. It's a loss of talent, leadership, and experience for every organization.

The effects extend beyond physical distress. With so few women already in senior positions, menopause becomes yet another invisible barrier to advancement. While more research is needed on the true impact, a total of 62% of women surveyed say that the stigma around menopause contributes to the glass ceiling and their ability to progress at work. They believe that further acceptance could even reduce ageism at work. Making space for menopausal women isn't just about compassion, but about equity, leadership, and the future of work itself.

Creating Menopause-Inclusive Workplaces

- **Policy and HR Adjustments:** Offer flexible schedules and review physically demanding roles.
- **Health and Benefits:** Cover menopause-related therapies and medication.
- **Education and Communication:** Normalize open conversations with sensitivity training.
- **Work Environment:** Provide breathable uniforms, accessible rest areas and private spaces.

The Hidden Gender Gap in Autoimmune Diseases

Autoimmune diseases are among the most complex and least understood conditions in medicine, affecting women far more than men. About four out of five people diagnosed are women, a statistic that continues to puzzle researchers and frustrate patients.

These conditions, including rheumatoid arthritis, lupus, and scleroderma, can be debilitating. While the gender imbalance has long been recognized, recent studies suggest it stems from a mix of hormones, genetics, pregnancy-related changes, and environmental factors.



Key Biological and Environmental Factors

Hormonal Influences

Estrogen and prolactin heighten inflammation, while testosterone reduces it. Hormonal shifts can trigger autoimmune flare-ups.

Genetic and Chromosomal Factors

Women's two X chromosomes both influence immunity, and incomplete inactivation can heighten immune sensitivity, helping explain higher autoimmune rates.

Pregnancy and Microchimerism

During pregnancy, fetal cells may linger for decades, sometimes triggering autoimmunity, though pregnancy can also ease conditions like rheumatoid arthritis.

Environmental and Lifestyle Factors

Environmental factors like smoking, chemicals, and infections can trigger autoimmune reactions, especially in genetically prone women, by interacting with hormones and genes.



Together Through Autoimmunity

Support from partners, family, and friends is crucial for women managing autoimmune diseases. While medicine heals the body, understanding and flexibility from loved ones shape daily life.

- **Build awareness:** Learn about symptoms, triggers, and treatments to foster empathy and understanding.
- **Offer support:** Help with daily tasks, encourage rest, and listen without judgment.
- **Stand with compassion:** Be present through uncertainty. Shared empathy strengthens healing.



Spotlight Dr. Afiya Bernard

ON, Canada

With over 15 years of family medicine experience, Dr. Afiya Bernard blends science, empathy, and curiosity to help patients uncover the “why” behind how they feel.

Her focus on hormone and metabolic health empowers patients to balance energy, mood, and wellness through preventative, lifestyle-based care. At the heart of Dr. Bernard’s practice is connection. She believes that true healing begins when patients feel heard, not rushed, and that empathy is just as important as expertise. Across her diverse experiences in community clinics, hospitals, and virtual care, she’s learned that accessibility and understanding can transform outcomes. For Dr. Bernard, every “I finally feel like myself again” moment is the reward that drives her work.

Outside the clinic, she embodies joy in motion – strength training, spin classes, time outdoors, and kitchen dance parties – reminding patients that wellness is a way of living, not a checklist.

Dr. Bernard is proud to advocate for an open dialogue around women’s health, one rooted in understanding, confidence, and care without stigma. She continues to advance the MembersHealth mission to improve the health and well-being of members by offering flexible, inclusive, and tailored healthcare.

Mental Health Check-In

MembersHealth Leads with Mental Health First

At MembersHealth, we believe that mental health isn’t a separate conversation; it’s the foundation of every other kind of care. That’s why we’re proud to be the **first doctor-led EAP (Employee Assistance Program)** in Canada, designed not just for moments of crisis, but for every stage of living and working well.

Mental well-being touches everything, from how we show up at work, connect with loved ones, and care for our physical health. When people feel supported emotionally, they’re better equipped to handle life’s challenges, recover faster and thrive longer. That’s what true wellness looks like, and it’s why **MembersHealth’s Integrated Wellness Solutions** are now seen as a must-have in any modern benefits package.

Our doctor-led approach bridges clinical care and compassionate support. It gives members a safe space to be heard, whether they’re dealing with stress, burnout, grief, or simply trying to find balance again.

Because prevention starts with awareness, and care begins with connection.

Call 1-800-484-0152. anytime to speak with a certified specialist.

