



Changing the narrative:

Opportunities for health and wellness brands to create empowering connections with women.



Thrive: Words that Change Lives reveal the top concerns women have about healthcare, featuring insights from over 1,000 women who took part in our survey or focus groups. This report offers valuable insights on how brands can leverage their content to fight stereotypes, create a lasting impact and close the gender health gap.

Consumer power



Women dominate the consumer economy. Often responsible for family purchases as well as their own, their rising health awareness means they are influential consumers of health and wellness brands.

But in the background is an enduring gender health gap. A 2020 report by Manual¹ highlighted that women face higher prevalence of disease, poorer health outcomes and less access to health services.

In addition, a call for evidence by the UK government in 2021² revealed that women live with health systems designed by men, for men. This evidence informed the recently published Women's Health Strategy for England³.

Quite simply, we don't know enough about female-specific health conditions, or about how conditions that occur in both sexes affect women differently. This means they experience worse outcomes and spend more of their lives in poor health.

As the women's health market emerges as a fast-growing sector, health brands have a rich opportunity to represent and serve the needs, challenges and health goals of women across age groups, geographies and ethnicities.

Every time they see an ad, read packaging, or buy a product, it's a window to offer gold-standard, trustworthy health information.

At **Thrive**, we work with our clients to empower women to make positive health choices. We create engaging content that builds trust, fosters change and leads to better health outcomes.

And to shine a light on brand opportunities, we asked:

Can women's health brands leverage their expanding reach to help bridge the gender health gap?

And if so, how?

Our survey in stats

Thrive surveyed 1,013 women in the UK, aged between 18 and 65. We also ran a series of focus groups with women in the same age bracket.

We asked questions about:

- 1 the healthcare they receive
- 2 the importance of language and communication when receiving healthcare
- 3 how health brands talk to them

Download the full Thrive White Paper including data and methodology www.thriveagency.uk/survey



Here's what they told us:

- 44% feel they are not always taken seriously by healthcare professionals (HCPs)
- 28% are embarrassed about discussing their sexual health with HCPs
- 39% would like to see more specialist healthcare services for women
- 51% would advise their younger selves to look after their mental health
- 77% want brands to provide more health information

Is anyone **listening** to me?

When it comes to healthcare and healthcare communications, the women we talked to were incredibly vocal about their experiences.

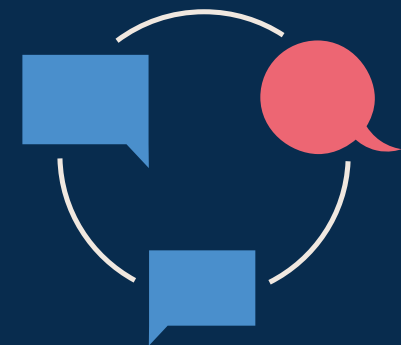
According to our survey, their top three concerns are:



1. Not being taken seriously.



2. Lack of understanding about female bodies.



3. Inadequate communication.



Issue 1: “I’m not taken seriously”

The women we surveyed trust HCPs more than any other source of health information, but they often don’t feel that HCPs are truly listening to them. As a result, they often seek support elsewhere.

In our survey, over a fifth of women aged 40+ cite ‘healthcare professionals not listening to me and my needs’ as a concern.

“ I’ve been backwards and forwards to my doctors about painful periods, I don’t know how many times, but I’ve still not got the advice and care I need.

“ I went to see my GP after I had signs of depression at 16. I was told that it was just teenage hormones, and I would grow out of it.



Brand action point

Our survey found that after HCPs, women turn to friends and family and health websites for information. Brands can seize the opportunity to provide expert-led, trustworthy health content, helping women to feel understood.



Thrive recommends...

Brands can advocate for women who do not feel heard and empower them in their interactions with HCPs. Highlight your expertise, help validate the concerns of your customers and enable women to start informed conversations with health professionals. By addressing issues **honestly**, you have an opportunity to craft language that really speaks to women.

Issue 2: “I don’t think the female body is understood”



From surging hormones and monthly periods to pregnancy, breastfeeding and the menopause, women have unique health experiences.

Women told us that sexual and mental health are the topics they’re most nervous talking about. They also worry about opening up about weight gain, eating disorders and incontinence.

Younger women told us they turn to social media for validation and information.

““ My friends always send TikTok videos to each other on group chats, asking ‘Is that normal for you?’, ‘Does your body do that?’.

““ I don’t remember learning about women’s bodies at school. I didn’t know why I was having a period; I had no idea what was happening to me.



Brand action point

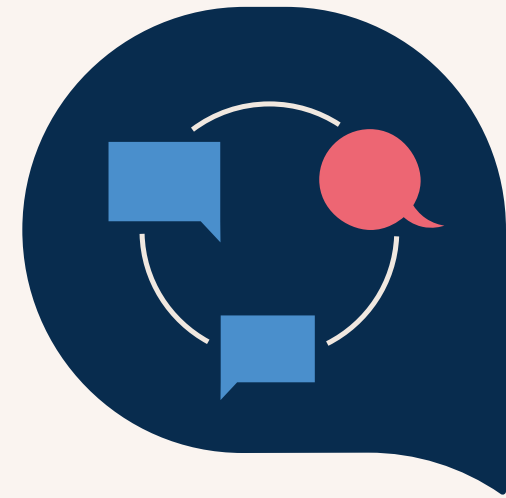
Feelings of embarrassment, self-doubt and even shame may prevent women from seeking help. By providing trustworthy health information that can be accessed anonymously through digital platforms, brands can bridge the gap.



Thrive recommends...

Knowledge is power. By providing meaningful information that women can access seamlessly, brands can engage them with content about sensitive topics and support their real-life healthcare interactions.

Issue 3: “I don’t have all the information I need”



Effective communication is essential in healthcare. Without it, women feel dissatisfied and can experience poor health outcomes.

Almost a third of our survey respondents say they need better information about their their menstrual cycle. Not understanding the potential side-effects of medication is also a particular concern, most notably for younger women.

By ‘better’ information, they mean health content that’s not only reliable and trustworthy, but acknowledges their diverse experiences. According to Royal College of Obstetricians and Gynaecologists (RCOG)⁴: “One way to inspire women to make positive health choices is to use authors from varied backgrounds and include a range of women’s voices and experiences”.

But women told us that health messaging doesn’t always make the grade.

Has poor language affected your health and wellbeing?
(Strongly agree/agree answers)



“ I feel I don’t get enough information from the NHS site, so I go to different sites and patient forums so I can read about people’s experiences.

“ There’s not enough in-depth information about the menopause. You get a long list of things that you could have, but how will it manifest itself? How long will it go on for? When I get better? There’s no detail and no light at the end of the tunnel.



Brand action point

Poor communication leads to self-doubt and worry. But brands can initiate honest conversations by providing women with engaging and accessible health information.

Thrive recommends...

Almost **80%** of women we surveyed want to see more health information from brands. But it needs to be direct, expert-led, empathetic and free from stereotypes.



Turning to TikTok

Women of all ages say HCPs are their trusted first port-of-call for health advice and information. But when they don't get the answers and the empathy they need, they turn elsewhere.

Some confide in family and friends, others turn online detective to try and figure out what is happening to them, what it means and what they can do about it.

Many explore online forums and social media for shared experiences and solutions. Use of social media is high across all the age groups we talked to, with Facebook and Instagram the most popular channels.

Younger women are more likely to follow brands on social media and they told us authentic or realistic messaging is an important factor in choosing which ones.



I often go to online magazines such as Cosmopolitan, Refinery29 or Stylist for information because I feel a woman has written it and that it's targeted to me. They're not strictly medical but they have advice I can trust.



There's a lot on TikTok. Obviously, it's not evidence-based, but if it's presented in a digestible way, with a community-based feel, I will watch it.



Sometimes, I get my info from social media. Mainly because adverts get your age and demographic right.

Creating conversations that change lives

“ I always feel more comfortable when information is coming from a female doctor or health expert. I feel they have a better understanding of women’s health conditions.”

Empowering, expert-led and packed full of real experiences. When it comes to talking about health, women are clear on what they do and don’t want. So, how can brands get it right?

The women we surveyed say these are the magic ingredients:

- 44% talk about the real experiences of women
- 23% openly discuss the realities of women’s bodies
- 20% avoid stereotypes
- 12% have a sympathetic tone
- 32% use expert-led information
- 26% understand the complexities and stresses of women’s lives



The power of language

Brand language that resonates is crucial. Almost two-thirds (64%) of the women we spoke to across all ages – but especially younger women – agree that their purchasing decisions are influenced by it.

There were interesting generational differences in the way women describe contemporary brand communications.

Younger women are more positive about how health and lifestyle brands talk to them. But older women are more likely to speak negatively, using words such as ‘stereotypical’, ‘patronising’, ‘unrealistic’ and ‘inconsistent’.

“*I think period product ads that show women doing things no woman wants to do during their period trivialises the experiences that women have.*”

Only 3% of women surveyed describe the language currently used by health lifestyle brand communications as ‘inclusive’.



How do you think brands talk to women?



There’s a disconnect between how brands think they are communicating and the views of their female customers, as demonstrated by further unpublished work from **Thrive**. When we asked brand managers to choose the words that best described how their organisation or product talked to women, it contrasted starkly with what women told us:

- ◆ **30%** of brands think their language is inclusive, but only **3%** of women agree.
- ◆ Just **4%** of brands think their campaigns use stereotypical language, compared with **16%** of our survey respondents.
- ◆ Women are **4X** more likely to describe brand communications as patronising than brand managers.

Building meaningful connections



Daphne Metland

Thrive's MD, behaviour change and women's health expert

“ Women are discerning consumers who make spending decisions based on a range of factors, including emotional engagement. But not being taken seriously, a lack of understanding about female bodies and inadequate communication are driving dissatisfaction.

Women are keen for brands to do more. There is an opportunity to form deeper connections, but brands must be mindful of language and tone.

Expert authorship boosts trust, but women also want to hear from other women. Blending a range of voices with empowering and supportive language makes information truly relatable.

Using your brand's platform to make a difference

- ◆ You are uniquely placed to support women: they unanimously told us they want brands to provide empowering health content.
- ◆ This is especially true when it comes to topics they're nervous talking about, such as sexual and mental health.
- ◆ To be impactful, content must be trustworthy, easy to access and expert-led. But it's also crucial that language and tone are carefully crafted to resonate with women.



We understand how to talk openly and empathetically with women about their health – and how to inspire positive health choices. And we can help you change the narrative to build stronger connections with female consumers. To find out more about our work or how we can support your brand, drop us a line.

Download the full Thrive White Paper including data and methodology
www.thriveagency.uk/survey

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Resources

- 1.** Manual (2020). The Men's Health Gap.
www.manual.co/mens-health-gap
- 2.** Department for Health and Social Care (2021). Results of the 'Women's health – Let's talk about it' survey.
www.gov.uk/government/consultations/womens-health-strategy-call-for-evidence/outcome/results-of-the-womens-health-lets-talk-about-it-survey
- 3.** UK government (2022). Women's Health Strategy for England.
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- 4.** Royal College of Obstetricians and Gynaecologists (2019). Better for Women.
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