



WILL YOUR RELATIONSHIP SURVIVE MENOPAUSE?

A GUIDE FOR
PERIMENOPAUSAL WOMEN

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IS MENOPAUSE A SECOND PUBERTY?

Menopause comes along right when you and your partner are stepping into midlife, dealing with career, teenagers and ageing parents.



To understand menopause just cast your mind back to your teenage years. Remember when you had crippling shyness because your body was malfunctioning and could no longer be trusted. Your body regularly embarrassed you. Pimples were erupting, hair was sprouting, bodies were suddenly expanding and lengthening, and body odour became a real issue. Just pause a moment and remember how disconcerting and confusing this time was.

WHAT CAN WE DO?

- Consider how your partner is feeling.
- Consider how your partner makes you feel.
- Are your partner's needs being met?
- Are your needs being met?
- What needs to change for your relationship to be more mutually beneficial?

One minute you might be laughing and happy, the next you might feel rage coursing through you. You might have punched a wall or sobbed into your pillow. Some mornings you just woke up sad for absolutely no reason. Most of the time you had no idea what was going on and why you were behaving as you were. You had little control over your body and mind, buffeted by hormones that affected your moods and sense of self.

THE STAGES OF A WOMAN'S LIFE

Are you a Gen Xer – born between 1965–1980? This puts you in the menopause zone. The North American Menopause Society calculates there will be 1.1 billion post-menopausal women by 2025. I'm a Gen Xer and I knew precious little coming into menopause. My older sister alerted me to its impending arrival and told me about the herbal supplement she was on to alleviate symptoms. And that is all I had to go on. I started paying more attention to articles that covered menopause, and when it hit me in 2020, I started researching this new phase more deeply.

There are many stages in a woman's life governed by her body – menarche, menstruation, pregnancy and menopause. These are necessary natural stages in a woman's life. If we fight and push and pretend, these stages become more chaotic and challenging. When symptoms start women often write them off as just feeling wonky.



Perimenopausal symptoms can show up when something happens in the environment around you or due to hormone changes. Hormones are messengers and play complex roles in the body.

Menopause has three phases. The first phase, perimenopause, is the time leading up to menopause when a woman's periods become irregular. Perimenopause is the time, usually when a woman is in her forties, when she starts experiencing hormonal changes leading up to menopause. Perimenopause can begin up to ten years before a woman's periods stop.

Yes, you read that right. Perimenopause can last ten years.



Essentially menopause is one day. It is the anniversary of the twelve-month anniversary without a period. The average age of women at menopause in Australia is 51; perimenopause lasts on average anywhere from four to ten years. The rest of a woman's life is spent in the final phase, post-menopause. Post-menopausal years begin with her wise woman years, followed by her crone years when we are in our mid-sixties. The average Australian woman lives for thirty-two years after menopause.

The symptoms that span these phases are different for each woman and can affect many aspects of her life. The most infamous perimenopausal symptoms include hot flushes and night sweats (affecting 75% of Australian women in some form); insomnia and irritability (60%); body aches and soreness (58%), vaginal and genito-urinary problems (50%); heavy, irregular, or unusual periods (up to 90% depending on age) and low libido (approximately 12% at mid-life).

Perimenopause can cause countless other symptoms, including everything from itchy skin to vision changes and something called "burning mouth", tingling extremities, foggy brain, misphonia and tinnitus, urinary tract infections, dizziness, allergies and food sensitivities, digestive problems, heart palpitations and panic attacks, restless legs, bleeding gums, bad breath, loss of tissue in feet, itchy nipples, sore breasts, breasts growing bigger, taste sensitivities, stress incontinence and hair loss. Some seem unrelated like the padding in the soles of feet and hands disappearing overnight, causing painful plantar fasciitis due to oestrogen reduction, which produces collagen.

Sexy huh?

WHY DO YOU AND YOUR PARTNER NEED TO KNOW ABOUT MENOPAUSE?

The threat to marriages is real: divorce rates skyrocket for perimenopausal women.

Women initiate 60% of divorces in their 40s, 50s, and 60s. Menopause can exacerbate issues in a relationship with disastrous consequences. In USA 60% divorces are initiated by women between 40-60. According to the Office for National Statistics, in the United Kingdom divorce rates peak for couples aged 45-49 years old, with the average age for divorce being 43.9 for women and 46.4 for men. Inquiries often cite familiar issues caused or heightened by the menopausal years as key reasons for the marital breakdown.

According to a survey in the UK by Family Law Menopause Project and Newson Health Research and Education, eight out of ten women experiencing marriage difficulties said the symptoms of perimenopause or menopause put a strain on their family life. The survey of 1,000 women found that 70% blamed menopause for their divorce or marriage problems, with some saying it increased arguments or domestic abuse. Only a third of the women surveyed said they had been offered treatment or hormonal replacement therapy (HRT) to relieve their symptoms. Most survey participants reported that receiving support or treatment could have saved their marriage.

In a survey conducted by Stowe Family Law last year 77% of women felt menopausal symptoms affected their mental health, with 65% saying the menopausal years had negatively affected their relationship. The survey revealed a loss of physical intimacy was the area of relationships most impacted by the menopause. And 50% of those polled worried that a lack of sex could lead to their relationship ending. The survey also revealed that other key areas triggering relationship issues during menopause were a partner not understanding what they are going through, an increase in arguments, lack of communication, and growing apart.

Another survey found 60% of divorces in UK were initiated by women aged 40–60 years and 77% of women surveyed blamed perimenopause for mental health issues and 65% blamed perimenopause for relationship breakdown. I'm not suggesting menopause is the only reason in the spike in divorce rates for women 40–60 years but it's certainly not helping. Divorce solicitors often found that women were citing symptoms of menopause as the reason for the breakdown of their marriage.

Menopause can cause an increase in arguments, a lack of understanding, reduced physical intimacy, poor communication and eventually the breakdown of a relationship. Divorce is not a decision taken lightly. For many the breakdown of their relationship is gradual and has a multitude of reasons and contributing factors.

So, what do you do? You can sit in the mess and suffer. You can let your lava of rage erupt all over you. Or you can do something about it. Let's face it, menopause isn't going anywhere. It can take as long as ten years for menopause to be over. You might as well turn towards menopause and be curious. What is this new urgency for change bubbling within you? What is the source of the rage, sadness, emptiness and all the other emotions rising to the surface to be looked at?

Is this how you feel too? Has perimenopause hit you like a sledgehammer and made you doubt your relationship with your partner... and your relationship with yourself? Do you feel compelled to feed your needs?



ENOUGH IS ENOUGH

The onset of perimenopause can begin with an overwhelming desire to rip our perfect life apart. We may feel an overwhelming urge to walk away from the life we've created. For some, this moment is so powerful, it can almost feel irreconcilable. Our marriage, relationship with their children, friends or family might suffer irreparable damage.

In 'Second Spring: the self-care guide to menopause' Kate Codrington notes "Girls born into the middle of the twentieth century were trained to put other people first, most especially cis men, and to subsume their own needs – you only have to look at the ongoing pay gap to see it. After a lifetime of giving our energy away to other people and not leaving enough for ourselves, can we change the pattern? Can we not only relearn how to receive but how to contain and hold on to our energy, rather than give it away?"

Before menopause we might have felt like our wings had been clipped and we've been held back for far too long. We've been sitting in a gilded cage, pleasing everyone but ourselves. In menopause, we realise the only one stopping us from taking off is ourselves. The cage door is open but we've been too afraid to take to the wide-open sky. Now we are ready to stretch our wings and fly. Menopause super-charges the call to do the inner work and our work in the world.

Kate Codrington notes "As oestrogen departs, the veil of caring, smoothing over, looking presentable, holding it together, not telling the truth, and putting others first has finally lifted. Menopause is the station where we can finally get off the train. We can stop judging ourselves by how others see us and prioritise our own pleasure."

The drop in the hormone oestrogen during perimenopause can make women to feel less attached or concerned for her nearest and dearest. We often feel more detached from our partner and children. Our hormone oxytocin, the love hormone, is topped up by a good physical relationship with our partner. This keeps us feelings of love, comfort and joy going. The problem is that there's a link between oestrogen and oxytocin drop so, as our oestrogen falls, the levels of the love hormone decrease as well.

We may externalise our dissatisfaction. At the beginning of perimenopause, something within us cracks open and the wave of discontent breaks through, sweeping all in its path. If you have been having angry outbursts, you're not alone. Menopause tends to do that. Oestrogen helps regulate the feel-good hormone serotonin, as well as other neurotransmitters like dopamine and norepinephrine, which can all affect our mood. Rage can erupt and be gone just as quickly, lasting for a few minutes or even hours before it spontaneously resolves, similar to pre-menstrual syndrome (PMS).

Along with the rage, other potential perimenopausal symptoms we that could be impacting our relationship include:

- Irritability
- Hostility
- Anxiety
- Disturbed sleep
- Decreased interest in sex
- Decreased self-esteem





Or we may internalise our dissatisfaction, experiencing anxiety, depression or suicidal thoughts for the first time in our lives. If we don't understand this is part of the sacred work of the menopause journey, it can derail our entire life.

This phase can be brutal. We are confronted with all the ways we've sold out. The ignored, denied or rejected parts of ourselves can loom large, craving our attention.

WHAT CAN WE DO?

- Is your partner willing for you to be more independent and make your own choices?
- Is your partner willing to stop using your energy to make themselves feel better?
- Is your partner willing to free up their time to take more of the physical and emotional heavy lifting?

Caitlin Moran compares perimenopause to coming off Ecstasy. While you once buzzed with love and energy, hugging everyone in a bubble of bliss, now the trip is over and you are coming back down to earth with a thump.

LET'S TALK ABOUT SEX



Fear of intimacy can set up a negative pain cycle where we avoid sex, get frustrated and tense, making sex hurt more. Seething anger or depression are not exactly the recipe for hot sex either! Depending on our individual experience it could be what's causing the extra conflict with our partner. It's not that menopausal women go off sex, it's that we refuse to have sex when we don't feel like it.

With the decline in oestrogen our skin becomes dryer, more fragile and there's less collagen to plump up our vulva and vagina. Lower oestrogen levels thin the labia and inside of the vagina. But rather than spelling the end of sex altogether it heralds a time to start experimenting and exploring once more. You and your partner need to find the ways your changing body feels pleasure.

A few years after menopause women often experience vaginal dryness, bladder issues, changes in sexual desire, urinary tract infections and even an increased heart disease and stroke. Then there's the new wrinkles, thinning hair, dry skin and loss of breast fullness. It's also common to gain weight and slowed metabolism, often concentrated around the belly. This just doesn't feel sexy.

It's not that menopausal women go off sex, it is that they refuse to have sex when they don't feel like it. If the relationship has gone stale and sex has become unsatisfying, women will no longer be able to pretend. Her body will not comply.

Just a word of warning: just because we are in perimenopause does not mean we can no longer conceive. Incredibly, women can still conceive and need to use contraception for at least two years after our last period if we are under 50 years. If we are over 50 the time is reduced to one year and if we are over 55 years it's safe without contraceptives after our last period.

Having a really good physical relationship very often keeps the oxytocin topped up, which means your feelings of love, comfort, and joy are alive within us. So, as our oestrogen falls, the levels of the love and cuddle hormone decrease as well.

WHAT CAN WE DO?

- Research has found that couples who share activities have more sex. Jump at every opportunity to take the trash out and sweep the garage. and do the housework together.
- Passion begins long before foreplay. Foreplay begins at the start of the day in the things you do for your partner without prompting.
- Explore what feels good and learn what your new needs are. Explore your partner's body.
- Find time to play together.



HELP YOUR RELATIONSHIP THRIVE

When we go through menopause our partners are catalysed to change too, whether they like it or not. Our partner needs to be aware and conscious of their own needs, taking responsibility for who they are and not demanding your support. You are not responsible for anyone else's inner growth. Inner work is an inside job we can't take on for other people. Having a supportive partner will help us navigate menopause.



Remember it can take up to ten years, so you and your partner will have plenty of time to improve your communication skills. If you can help your partner understand why you are feeling this way will go a long way toward helping your relationship. If you have children, involve them in the conversation. Share how confusing this all is and how you are both doing your best to navigate through these difficult times.

Anyone who cannot own their own inner growth will feel intolerable and we will most likely struggle to be in a relationship with them. As we enter perimenopause, we need to know our partner is willing to actively change and grow with us. We need our partner to join us, to explore new ways of being alongside us.



ARE YOU HEARING THE CALL?

Menopause gives you and your partner a non-negotiable kick up the butt to get real with themselves and with you. We need to shed all that no longer serves us in preparation for our wise woman years so we live without regrets, unfinished business and less to shed as a soul as we enter the new phase of our lives post-menopause. We need to become more natural, genuine and authentic. We need to express the truth of who we are.

The clock is ticking. Time is running out. This sense of urgency tells us we need to do something NOW. We need to stop settling for less. We need to stop making excuses. We need to start accepting MORE.

Knowing what to expect, we are halfway to thriving through this natural change of life. Just know we will never go “back to normal” or the way we used to be. Why go through such an incredible journey and be the same as when you began?

Ok, perimenopause is not all rainbows and unicorns! But there are upsides to shedding our inhibitions, losing her filter and speaking our mind.



Menopause is the wake-up call. You and your partner are being asked to let every old preconceived notion, every old self-limiting belief or pattern go. We are being asked to surrender all that we believed of ourselves, to remember the truth of who we are. It's about remembering that we are a divine being, playing in our life right now.

The appalling lack of information and support out there for perimenopausal women and their partners means that most couples feel like they're going it alone, struggling through as best they can with little or no understanding of what this stage in a woman's life is all about, how to prepare and navigate the choppy unpredictable waters of menopause.

Menopause is way too challenging to navigate alone. Perimenopausal women need their partner there for support. We can traverse this new path together. We can be accompanied by our partner on this journey of self-discovery. We can do the inner work and step into the next phase of our own life older and wiser than ever. That way, our partner can not only support us but evolve alongside us, changing and growing with us.



We are wise.
Trust your body.
Trust your mind.
Trust your emotions.
Trust your spirit.
Trust you are moving
Towards a new way of being.

Plus, we need resources and helpful advice from other women walking alongside us on this journey.

I help perimenopausal women struggling to navigate menopause by themselves. I help perimenopausal women to take back their power, passion and purpose. I help perimenopausal women to remember their needs and desires, what gives them joy and makes their heart sing. I help perimenopausal woman to step into their wise woman years with ease and grace.

I help relationships to not only survive perimenopause but thrive! I help perimenopausal women create a new level of openness and honesty in their relationships. I help perimenopausal women create a new level of love and connection in their relationship.

I help perimenopausal women to explore their own body, thoughts, emotions and spirit. I help women to connect with their own inner wisdom. I help perimenopausal women to become more natural, genuine and authentic in their lives.



I help perimenopausal women to expand their capacity to give and receive more love.

It is up to us to learn how to navigate this menopause journey, to make space for our body, mind, emotions and soul to catch up. Because if we don't what will life look like for us? This is not a passing phase. Menopause can take up to ten years to be completed! Imagine that!

What will that look like for our partner or our children? How miserable will we be? Rage full, spewing anger and frustration on their heads, unable to restrain ourselves from withdrawing our care and support, even our love?

ABOUT DEBRA

FOUNDER OF THE SOULFULL SISTER REVOLUTION

Married since 2001, Debra lives with her husband on the heart-shaped island of Tasmania with our three sons (14, 18 and 20 years old), two border collie dogs and two cats.

Debra has trained as a Feminine Embodiment Coach and professional intuitive. Debra has also been trained in Clinical Pastoral Care and as a Hospice Volunteer.

Debra has developed programs to help perimenopausal women who are ready to take back their power, passion and purpose.



Click **[here](#)** and book in a **[Clarity Call](#)**... I know this call can be transformational.

Best Wishes,
Debra Reeves

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