

HOW TO HAVE A *modern menopause*

Take back control of your hormones with these lifestyle tweaks to ease your symptoms, says Lynn Jackson

Not so long ago, menopause was often a shameful, taboo subject that was occasionally spoken of in hushed tones as 'The Change'. It was shameful because the end of fertility was seen as something undesirable and totally unsexy. Now, at last, it is coming out of the closet, and the enormous physical, emotional and psychological changes that women undergo at this potent time are being fully recognised and openly discussed.

Menopause is a natural, biological transition that usually occurs between the ages of 45 and 55 as oestrogen levels decline and periods cease, signalling the end of a woman's fertility. There is nothing new about this, and the challenges of menopause – hot flushes, mood swings, night sweats, low libido and depression, to name but a few – have never been easy for women. Now, new reports are indicating prolonged and increasingly severe symptoms are becoming more common. In addition, recent years have seen ever-younger age groups affected by the menopause.

There is, for instance, premature ovarian failure – which has identical symptoms to those of menopause – which is now beginning to appear in women as young as 30. Some fertility specialists link these developments with lifestyle issues, such as poor nutrition, tobacco and alcohol use, as well as escalating thyroid and autoimmune diseases and exposure to environmental pollution.

Such thinking is echoed by pioneering research headed up by Yale Medical School, which has revealed that menopause symptoms across the world are not the same. Hot flushes that are so prevalent in the Western menopause are virtually unknown in parts of Asia.

Furthermore, these studies reveal that women in Denmark, Sweden and Norway are more likely to report that the menopause has been easier than they expected, while those in the US, UK, France and Canada typically find it much worse than they had anticipated, leading researchers to conclude that menopause is about far

more than hormones. They point to an array of additional factors, such as:

■ **DIET:** Countries with the lowest reported symptoms typically consume a higher percentage of phytoestrogens, which are found in plant-based foods.

Soy has the most concentrated form of phytoestrogens, but it is now almost always genetically modified, and so many authorities recommend steering clear of soy, and instead point towards the following...

Vegetables – especially beans, sprouts, cabbage, spinach, alfalfa, garlic and onion

Legumes, pulses and seeds – lentils, flaxseeds, mung beans, chickpeas

Grains – barley and oats (not wheat)

Fruits – pomegranates, apples, plums, pears, grapes and berries

■ **STRESS:** also plays a significant role, and the rush-around Westernised lifestyle was linked to the most severe symptoms.

Traditional Eastern practices such as meditation, tai chi, yoga, shiatsu and qigong may well be the key to a different result.

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■ CULTURAL CONDITIONING:

Those cultures that traditionally celebrate age also have the lowest menopausal symptoms, indicating that societal attitudes to ageing subconsciously affect women's beliefs about entering this phase of life. In youth-oriented cultures like the UK and the USA, where women are more likely to equate menopause with becoming old, our commonly pessimistic attitude towards ageing may be predisposing us to far greater side-effects than our sisters on the other side of the world.

Let's be clear here, menopause is not 'in the mind', it is a very real biological event. But research from the US highlights a complex interplay of physical and psychological triggers, which is far wider, and deeper, than has previously been acknowledged.

When we recognise that factors such as diet, stress, environmental toxins and our psychology are all bound up within the fundamental biology of menopause, we will begin to grasp the enormity of the issue.

But this realisation also offers us a ray of hope, because this is a chemical cocktail that is within our power to manage. In short, we can each make the necessary lifestyle changes – some of which are outlined above – to navigate the modern menopause with minimal disruption.

Another very positive note is that this life transition bestows some very real benefits. Many post-menopausal women experience a powerful energy surge, which brings a sense of increased inner strength, insight and intuition. In times gone by, this transition was recognised and celebrated, plus post-menopausal women were honoured as wise and visionary elders.

Mid-life can be a rich time of awakening, and many women find themselves spontaneously doing the 'life laundry' – really taking stock and examining their life choices through the grittier, no-nonsense lens that this enhanced confidence, experience and wisdom bring. They often discover previously untapped inner resources which lead to more conscious and empowered decisions.

Many post-menopausal women will go on to live another 50+ years. By preparing the body and cultivating inner wellness via a dynamic combination of energy work, lifestyle practices and stress-busting techniques, we can effectively minimise the suffering of menopause, and revel in the freedom and liberation that our 'second life' offers us. Change begets change. Let's embrace it.

Lynn Jackson is an energy healer and retreats guru who specialises in menopausal issues via her 'Hotstuff' menopause initiative. Head to lynnjackson.co.uk or bespoke-retreats.co.uk