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erimenopause is as natural as waking up in the morning – but eavesdrop on a conversation between forty-something women, and you'd think the end of the world was near.

Though talking about menstruation is beginning to lose its hushed whisper, the shame around menopause is still hot and sticky.

But the news from the wild shores of menstruality coaching is that perimenopause is something to get excited about, that it's the biggest self-help workshop you ever signed up for, and that you get it for free! The task of perimenopause is to clear up outdated ways of being, the roles that don't fit, and toxic relationships in your life. Post menopause, or in the Second Spring as it's known, you'll emerge revitalised and deeply engaged with your calling. It's an inside job, a rebirth. No wonder, then, that the old patriarchal systems don't like older women; the last thing they need is a tribe of liberated, powerful people who won't buy their rubbish and are hell-bent on having fun.

So, why do you need to prepare for perimenopause? The thing that makes perimenopause painful is the toxicity coming at us: the physical toxicity of our environment, the misogynistic toxicity of our culture, and our own beliefs. By starting to clear the toxicity in advance, you will be better equipped to navigate the perimenopausal waters.

MEDICAL DEFINITIONS

Perimenopause means 'around menopause'. Our hormones naturally change from around our late thirties, but you might start to notice your menstrual cycle shift from your mid-forties onwards.

Menopause refers to your last period. Your GP

will tell you that it's your last if you haven't had one for a year. Like your final breastfeed for your baby, you never quite know when that's going to be.

PSYCHO-SPIRITUAL DEFINITION

These are the internal phases of the menopause process, which happen in their own time, independently of physical menopause manifestations.

SEPARATION. You might find in your late forties that what you used to feel OK about and could tolerate is no longer OK. Seeing towels thoughtlessly left on the floor becomes unbearable – and we have the rage to express this. You might have a dramatic need for time alone, or fantasies about running away. There will be grief, too, about not having children, or about the many things you've not been able to achieve. In this separation, old wounds come up for healing, physical sensitivities emerge, and generally you might feel that the rug has been pulled from under your feet.

SURRENDER. Surrender describes the place where you are no longer pretending that everything is OK when it's not. This is where you look your issues squarely in the face and start to find ways of healing, caring tenderly for yourself and resting. So unpopular in our world, so seemingly unproductive, resting is a primary menopausal task.

Over time, with self-compassion, your best friends and carefully chosen professionals, the storms will ease and you will find your way through.

EMERGING. The third part of menopause is where the pieces of your Second Spring, your post-menopausal life, start to come together. You might meet people who inspire you, or find new pleasures, and very gently you'll find that you start to have the desire to emerge once again into the world. As a newly born Second Spring woman, you'll find yourself like a teenager, a bit wobbly as you experiment with your new way of being. In this time of great tenderness and playfulness, your new direction becomes clearer.

WHAT WE COULD
ONCE TOLERATE,
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WHETHER
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THIS IS TIRING FOR
A BODY

HOW CAN YOU PREPARE FOR THIS REBIRTH?

DETOX YOUR ENVIRONMENT. To have a healthy perimenopause, follow the same guidelines as those for a healthy menstrual cycle. Take an audit and see what you can eliminate or substitute. Think about plastic food and water containers with their xeno-oestrogens; about chemicals in your home, cleaning products and cosmetics. Find out if you're sensitive to electromagnetic radiation.

EAT WELL. Eat joyfully; little nourishment is digested when you eat in a state of tension. Keeping a food and drink diary is helpful to see what you're actually consuming and how it affects you before making any changes. There are a thousand different opinions about diet, but in general add in more dark green leafy stuff, reduce refined carbs and sugar, and eat in moderation what gives you joy.

REDUCE STRESS. This is major. Every single menopause manifestation is made worse by cortisol. Luckily, you already have all you need to know about reducing stress available to you in your menstrual cycle.

To understand perimenopause, pay attention to what happens in your premenstrual and bleed times, typically the most stressful of your cycle. Because the cycles in our lives tend to repeat and the same themes emerge, the way you feel in your premenstruum can be replicated in your perimenopause. If you're still bleeding, you get to practise every month – this is your perimenopause education.

Here are some cues to help you prepare for perimenopause:

- What soothes you in your premenstruum and bleed time?

- What gives you the greatest pleasure?
- What winds you up?
- What situations, people and negative beliefs get in the way of you nourishing yourself?

THE CRITIC. The premenstruum is the natural home of the inner critic. She comes with her sword of truth and sometimes has difficulty putting it down. If you can improve your relationship to your inner critic, it's easier for you to access the menopause gift of discernment, enabling you to see exactly what you need to let go of in your life. The first step is to notice her. The more you can befriend this voice, the better. You might try journaling, going to therapy, sharing in safe circles – whatever works for you. Your inner critic has a heap of opinions about you, and by gaining more understanding before perimenopause you will be able to spot these patterns later in your process.

Here are some cues to help you improve your relationship with your critic:

- Are you aware of the negative self-talk you give yourself?
- What are the situations when this happens?
- Can you dialogue with these negative voices?
- What can you do to change any negative self-talk to positive dialogue?

RADICAL REST. We all complain about being tired, but it's highly likely you will feel more tired in perimenopause. As the focus is to take you inward, the demands from work and family become more tiresome.

It's time for inner work, and though it's not visible from the outside, this takes a lot of energy too. You're transforming yourself, and there's going to be lots of change. This is hard, tiring work that is not supported by the outside world – for some

reason lying around on the sofa isn't seen as a valuable contribution to the community.

Perimenopause makes you super-sensitive, and this is also draining. We all do it differently, but as well as emotional and energetic sensitivities, I come across an astonishing range of new sensitivities in my menopausal community. What we could once tolerate, we now cannot, whether it's dairy or patriarchy. And this is tiring for a body.

Here are some cues to help you explore your attitude to resting:

- What are your beliefs about taking rest for yourself?
- Can you rest more in your bleed time?
- Do you get enough sleep?
- Can you get a nap every day?
- How would you feel about going more slowly?

In summary, here are three key things you can do to prepare for perimenopause:

1. Reduce your exposure to toxicity in your environment.
2. Practise menstrual cycle awareness – note your energy and how you feel every day through your cycle so that you can develop friendliness with your body and trust that it knows what it needs.
3. Rest more, and get familiar with what stops you from doing so.

Don't be scared of menopause. By using your inner satnav to embrace the possibilities for healing and growth, it might be the best thing that ever happens to you! ●

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