Menopause and the Holidays

by AFRA WILLMORE

Enjoying the Holidays Despite Menopause

If you are panicking about suffering symptoms of menopause during the holiday season, good news! I have managed to come up with some top tips for getting through it.

You think it might be nice to have a few friends over to your home – organize some festive food and maybe a few drinks. Lovely.

What to Wear?

Forget synthetic/manmade fabrics and go for natural fibers, and dress in layers which can come on and off depending on the severity of your hot flashes.

I found when I was trialling HRT transdermal patches (recommended for me as a diabetic as the medicine bypasses the liver) I had to be careful about about clothes. My favourite skinny jeans or any outfit which involved tights seemed to cause the patches to curl at the edges when I shimmied out of them during my frequent bathroom breaks, and I ended up having to carry spares for when the combination of fluff-coated edges and sweat made them drop off!

My go-to outfit for the worst part of my menopause ended up being comfy but smart jersey cotton dresses, which stretched over my stomach depending on the severity of my bloating, teamed with leggings on cooler days, and cardigans or jackets.

Hair and Makeup

Time to sort your hair. I favor smart and cool up-dos. I opted for as simple as possible, since any complicated hair drying or styling seemed to set off yet more hot flashes. Makeup? A swipe of tinted moisturiser for me (full-on foundation sits in my ever-increasing lines) and a good quality waterproof mascara, since anything else immediately slides down my face. Is this a menopause thing? I have not yet found the answer to that one! Not too much blush - my face does that on its own!

Dealing with the Hot Flashes

Thanks to the hormonal skirmish raging in your body, despite all your best efforts you greet your guests sweaty and red-faced. Your carefully coiffed party hair is stuck to the back of your neck and your forehead making both itch, and your makeup is rapidly dissolving in a pool of oil or perspiration.

This is a good thing. Your friends will immediately assume you have been slaving for hours in a hot kitchen making a range of tasty treats for their delectation when in fact you have spent ten minutes opening packets, microwaving snacks and tipping chips into bowls because you are so exhausted from so many restless nights you

could not even face slapping mincemeat from a shop-bought jar onto ready-made pastry.

You let them in, exchange pleasantries and then excuse yourself and hurry back to the kitchen to... prepare more canapés? No – to get as much of your body as possible into the freezer. This I have actually done on many occasions during flashes. Easy for me with a huge freezer, but more agility is required if you have a fridge with a small freezer drawer.

My top tip here is to keep your freezer stocked with those cooling gel cushions designed for children. When the hot flash strikes you can grab it for your forehead or neck. It's more hygienic to use one of those than the frozen peas!

Next page: coping with irritation and getting a good night's sleep.

Coping with Irritation

Temporarily cooled, you head back to your guests. Oh no! Someone invited that annoying neighbour/friend's partner/work colleague/family member you can't stand!

Even the sound of their voice winds you up. You are very aware that due to Mother Nature's twisted sense of humour you have not only a variety of unpleasant physical symptoms, but also a much shorter fuse. Mood swings and disorders are common during menopause and even if you have coped well up to now, the stress of the festive season can tip you over the edge.

You wonder to yourself how long it will be before you lose your temper and tell them exactly what you think of them. Should you A) spend the whole party trying to avoid them or B) just go with the flow, let your hormones do the talking and finally snap at them to stop talking about model railways/their genius child/internal parasites?

If you choose option B at least you won't have to worry about them boring or annoying you at future events! You will however, be remembered for the next decade as the sweaty-faced harpy who lost the plot at Christmas.

Take a deep breath, count to five, and do your best to calmly respond to your infuriating guest. And if it all gets to much, make an excuse to leave the room for a moment.

Getting a Good Night's Sleep

Did you know alcohol (along with tight clothes, spicy food and stress) can exacerbate menopause symptoms? Booze certainly won't help if you are worried about weight gain either and can disrupt your sleep, so think about keeping your drinking to a minimum.

And now, the party is over. You look at the wreck that is your house and decide to tackle it in the morning. You head to bed only to wake an hour later feeling like the thermostat has hit 100. You are so tired you could cry. My top tip – keep a spray bottle with water next to your bed - a facial spritz goes a long way to cooling fevered foreheads. For desperate cases, always keep an ice pack or two frozen and ready to hug when those nighttime flashes strike.

Be Kind to Yourself

I joke about menopause, but know from experience that tiring and stressful things like parties, gift shopping, overexcited children and family dinners can magnify any issues you are having with your body. So be kind to yourself – give yourself the gift of understanding your symptoms, learning what triggers them and remembering that occasionally it is OK to say no. Accept that you need to look after yourself through this tumultuous time. Make sure you get enough sleep, eat a healthy diet, and take time to do at least some gentle exercise.

And if all else fails, you can always help yourself to a chocolate treat from the Christmas tree!