Menopause in the Media

by AFRA WILLMORE

Dealing With Menopause in the Media

I received an email this week from a German friend who had heard I was having some medical issues related to my menopause. She wrote with sympathy for my symptoms but added: "I love my menopause. She is my best friend."

What a refreshing view of this time of life, which is generally spoken of in doom-laden tones. Mostly in the media menopausal women are portrayed as psychotic, depressed, frumpy and almost asexual, and my friend's cheery words made me feel that those of us going through it should do more to change the view that menopause is something negative to be endured.

I was worried about turning 40, dreading it even, but another friend who had already reached that milestone told me she relished the birthday – had decided to finally be happy, and comfortable in her own skin. I took that on board, followed her lead and sure enough with the right attitude I turned my mood around and embraced the new, more secure me.

Being Comfortable in My Skin

It's all about positive thinking. It's understandable to not feel sexy when the media and popular culture is telling you that you are over the hill, barren, a hag. But all you have to do is reappraise what sexy is in this period of your life. Take the first signs of perimenopause or menopause as a prompt to re-evaluate how you look, what you believe, and how you feel. Take your cue from your heart and your gut feeling, not the TV.

Maybe it's time for a make-over, in your wardrobe, make-up bag or even your whole life. Just as when you were in your teens you abandoned outfits and behaviours from your childhood and looked forward to adult life, your menopause years are a time to think again about what you really want from the rest of your days here on Earth.

Part of the problem is that menopause in the Western world is largely treated like an illness or a disease, something to medicate. And while it's OK to seek out or accept help from your healthcare provider if you want to, it's equally OK to handle your symptoms homoeopathically, alternatively or just accept them as your new way of being.

When I was pregnant my husband always used to coax me along (and sometimes tease me) with the phrase: "It's not an illness you know." And he was right. So why do we use the menopause as an excuse to avoid sex, excuse our appearance and our lack of energy or drive? Because we are conditioned to, that's why.

Many women suffer alone, too embarrassed to share what they are experiencing with even close friends or family. It's like admitting that we are "suffering" equates to failure. The menopause can make us feel powerless, uneasy, too aware of the passing years.

A Lack of Strong Women in Television

There are so few depictions of strong, powerful menopausal women on TV and in films – mostly they are shown as deranged lunatics ready to stab their other halves on a hormonal whim. And it's easy on the days when you do feel like you are losing the plot to identify with these hackneyed portrayals, making you feel even more desperate and alone.

Mostly, the menopause is linked to being old. And while, yes, centuries or even decades ago you probably were getting closer to shuffling off this mortal coil by the time you were done you're your child-bearing years, nowadays 40, 50 or even 60 is not considered old!

When I was a child I remember my Grandma talking (well, more whispering) about "The Change," which in my head translated into some scary B-movie where attractive young women are sucked into a menopausal vortex and ejected years later dead-eyed, dried up and stripped of all signs of vitality.

I also remember as a teenager already wishing I was done with the messy and inconvenient business of menstruating, yet decades later I seem to have downplayed that silver lining in my cloud of menopause misery. We should pop champagne corks and party streamers in celebration of that fact alone.

Let's face it – the commercials on TV, online and in newspapers and magazines are full of how free you can be to sail, ride and cycle wearing the right sort of sanitary protection, but there are no adverts boasting that after menopause you can wear white trousers with impunity and save a fortune as you sail past the sanitary products aisle in the supermarket and have sex all month round with no risk of ruining your bedclothes!

These are the bright spots of The Change we should be telling our younger sisters about – telling them that it's not all encompassing, unless we let it be.

What can we do? Well, sites like this are invaluable for women to speak out about their experiences, share and support. We need to accept menopause as another of life's inevitable transitions and not a condition to be treated and cured. We need to love our menopause and embrace her as our best friend.