



Menopause and Me: Amelia

Over the course of the past year, I have noticed some physical changes occurring in my body. I can't say that I am particularly fanatical about listening to every little change that goes on, so pretty much just get on with things and associate it with whatever external factors are going on.

2020 – 2021 were pretty hard years for everyone, my situation was exasperated by caring for my Mother after having a stroke and living with the impact of 18 years of metastatic melanoma. Her cancer situation worsened and she sadly died in September 2021 which was 5 short months after my Mother in Law who also died after a short cancer relapse. All in all it was a pretty tough time emotionally, physically and everything else in between so any changes I recognised I put down to this difficult time.

I was tired, emotional, lacked energy, lethargic at times. All of these symptoms I could pin down to bereavement and work stresses and emerging out of a long global pandemic, but now I also realise were the beginning signs of perimenopause. Almost a year on, with grief subsiding the one factor that I just seem incapable to controlling is my weight. I eat well (the majority of the time), exercise, try and get my sleep hours but just can't stop the pounds creeping up each month regardless of what I did. Early 2022, the penny dropped, and I wondered if the fact that my impending 50th Birthday and my age meant this was the infamous beginning of the "change" as my Mother's generation referred to it, was the actual cause of the weight gain and the other symptoms I was experiencing.

I am fortunate to have a very close group of girlfriends, however the prospect of discussing the "M" word was just too uncomfortable and I really don't know why. Maybe it is because the influences I had growing up were of a generation who literally didn't talk about menopause at all. It was just something women got on with and didn't even refer to it as menopause but simply "the change". I still find the word somewhat uncomfortable to say, even now!

Still none the wiser and really taking the denial route I was channel flicking in the late Spring on Channel 4 catch up and came across the 2nd documentary by Davina McCall, "Sex, Mind and the

Menopause". I was reluctant to watch, maybe it would validate the fact that I was too part of this gang. I was only a few minutes in and realised how much and how many women have suffered in silence. How many women, and these are women in the prime of their life, lost their jobs, lost their families and were basically written off as being crazy simply because of the biological changes going on in their own bodies. So many women themselves didn't recognise or link the brain fog or anxiety or depression with menopause. So many of these women thought their failing memory was early on set dementia. (I too had these thoughts when I forget words, or what I was going to do).

It blew me away that society is so dumbed down to a biological change that happens to every single woman across the globe, no not all will have severe symptoms, but all will experience some kind of change, but still it is a taboo subject hidden away. Would this happen if men went through menopause? It seems that erectile dysfunction issues are commonly aired, if you watch TV in the US every other TV ad is for some form of treatment to assist men with their aging process and changes to their bodies. Where are the adverts promoting HRT or treatment for women helping them to also associate and link changes they are experiencing with the menopause process.

Immediately after watching the documentary I knew I had to help to give this campaign another voice. I had to seek out ways to get more people talking about the menopause, bring it to the work place, get my friends talking about it and that is where my journey officially started.

It's actually quite cathartic once you start using a "forbidden" or uncomfortable word and say it over and over again. It's a bit like swearing, the more you swear the better you feel... or is that just me!? My goal is to try and get menopause into as many conversations as possible to talk about how other women have been impacted or affected by their own journeys. My husband literally rolls his eyes when I am with a group of friends and out comes the "m" word!

My new story to share with my friends is that in early August I started using oestrogen HRT patches. After months of procrastinating, all it took was a very short over the phone call with my GP, I explained my weight gain woes and sleeping issues I was instantly prescribed the patches. I was advised of risks of blood clots and being at higher risk of breast cancer which I took on board but kept asking her "Will it help me loose weight?" repeatedly. Her reply was not as positive as I wanted and was a muted "Hopefully"! Oh well, nothing ventured nothing gained.

The following day I picked up a rather unremarkable box which was filled with foil wrapped packages. Having opened the foil envelope, I removed a clear plastic square which reminded me of a flat Compeed blister plaster. I pulled off the plastic backing and was left with a sticky clear "plaster". So where do I stick it? I probably should have thought about this before removing the plastic backing but it was too late so stuck it on my backside. This was it, I was on my way back to the way my life was before (and thin again!).

I have to change my patch twice a week, so set calendar reminders for a Monday and a Thursday. Now I just wait! After a few days, I noticed that my patch had come off before I was due to change it. Realising that my bum wasn't the best place for my magic patch and have now repositioned to my stomach and it seems to be holding better.

Again, these are the things that no one talks about. Where is the best place to stick your HRT patch? As it transpires, you are not supposed to fix it anywhere near your breasts and anywhere below the waist is advised. Who knew.

Maybe if we all talked about our experiences, fears, asked questions it all might be less of a mine field. I am committed to talking about the menopause at any given opportunity and have just written a Menopause Guidance policy for OSIT. I am looking forward to doing a series of podcasts with my colleague Jamie Stuart who is as passionate about spreading the word as I am and happens to be a 20 something year old man! I am committed to doing all I can to help women to stop feeling like they are alone, scared or losing their mind! Who is with me?