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# MY PERIMENOPAUSE STORY

By Lisa Salloway

I honestly wondered if I was going half mad! I had no idea what was going on and after several years of being completely in the dark and wondering what was wrong with me, I finally decided to do my own research and was shocked to realise I was probably suffering from perimenopause symptoms.

My initial thoughts were that I was far too young to be menopausal! It took me by surprise, but I discovered that this is a common misconception.

Looking back now, the symptoms had started years earlier in my early 40's, possibly even my late 30's. The last few years it became a lot worse, and I was really struggling to function properly at all. Anaemia due to very heavy periods is not uncommon in ladies so initially I thought the extreme tiredness was anaemia, but it didn't improve and just got worse. Severe fatigue, not sleeping well, night sweats, headaches which sometimes turned into migraines, nausea, loss of concentration, brain fog, forgetfulness, sometimes complete memory blanks, tearfulness, becoming very stressed over things that just never used to bother me at all. These were all becoming a big issue and affecting my day-to-day life, including work.

I'd had depression in the past caused by stressful life circumstances and had fully recovered but now it appeared that the horrible 'black fog' was back. I refused to accept that, even though I had long periods of time where I felt really down. I lost enjoyment in life and most things became a huge exhausting effort. Anxiety and panic attacks increased and started to creep into the daytime, not just at night when I woke up with frequent night sweats.

Numerous trips to my GP unfortunately didn't really help. I felt like my GP wasn't listening to me and all that I was offered were contraceptives, which I didn't want or need. It was like putting a tiny sticking plaster on a severely broken leg and expecting it to heal itself – it just didn't happen! I did try the tablets the GP offered me as I felt I had no other choice at the time. I suspected for a long time that they were causing issues, which I later discovered for me was true as I had an intolerance to synthetic progesterone tablets (another common issue for ladies). Unfortunately, I have also discovered that many GP's and health specialists have very little, if any, training in the many menopausal issues and symptoms.



I was totally exhausted and felt like I was failing. My work performance really suffered, and I started to have anxiety that I may lose my job. It affected my confidence and psychologically I was really struggling – it really felt like I'd 'lost' myself. When I finally realised it was perimenopausal symptoms, I spoke to my manager and arranged to reduce my working hours. Not ideal, but it took some pressure off me, which helped.

So, after many months of my own research, finding online help and communities, I finally managed to persuade my GP to allow me to try transdermal HRT patches (hormone replacement therapy). I arranged a double appointment with my GP to ask for HRT and took a book with me written by Dr Louise Newson, a GP specialising in perimenopause/menopause. It was still several months before I got the HRT patches, which was very frustrating.

Within a few weeks of using the patches I noticed I was sleeping better, had a lot less night sweats and over several months a lot of other symptoms improved. Things are far from perfect and can still be very unpredictable at times but being much more aware of the symptoms and managing them with self-care is key. So, my advice to anyone reading this is to do your own research – there are plenty of resources out there to support you and help you make informed choices.

Perimenopausal symptoms (pre-menopause) can last up to 10 years for some people, menopause is just one day, and then the post-menopausal years follow. The truth is that millions of women are suffering unnecessarily, psychologically as well as physically. It affects us all either directly or indirectly, not only women in their 40's and 50's, but sometimes younger women, also family members, colleagues, and friends. I hope that in the future menopausal issues will be discussed a lot more openly in society in general, particularly as it affects at least 50% of the population and workforce.

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