

A Manifesto for Peri Menopause by Claire Hodgson

If you are wondering whether you are in this stage, you are in it. It is the period of time leading up to your very last period. Beyond that you are in menopause. I naively thought I would simply stop my periods one day and then have a few sweaty nights. I thought any other symptoms happened to other people. Quite why I thought this important life stage would skip me by I don't know. Arrogance and denial, I think. What are the signs? Well 34 signs officially (you can use technology to look this up) but in my experience it was a sense that all was not well. Skipped periods or surprising ones – lots of blood appearing at odd times, crushing anxiety, sense everything was changing – my own initial analysis was that I was dying. My more reasoned later analysis was that a part of me was dying. The part that had routinely put others first (often in a secretly angry begrudging way responding to every request). I am still working on this, but I have come a long way. I try to do the things that matter and make a difference. I am not always successful but there is a sense of standing on top of a hill. I can see the horizon clearly and my time is not infinite. I need to create the things that matter to me. Books, relationships, shows, the future I want my child to have.

1. Pay attention to what you want and side-line what you don't. There are choices to be made about what is needed and what can be ditched. Most women are conditioned to put the needs of others before their own. Listen very carefully to the voice that is telling you what to do with your life. I have buried a stone in a beautiful garden I know with my promise to myself for the next twenty years.
2. What gives you pleasure beyond alcohol, food and shopping? How can you relax? Most of us, me included would say we are not involved in late capitalism's worst excesses but everywhere we are taught to numb ourselves with things rather than deal with the void head on. For this stage you will need to know how to soothe yourself and what inspires you. For me this is reading, watching films and shows, being with my family, friends, partner and child, writing, walking, cycling, swimming and occasionally running. What inspires me is being in nature and creating shows with a gang. The menopause returns you to a useful state of childhood enthusiasms – writing a secret diary, cycling, running, going to the park -whatever your thing is make room for it. Like we did when we were kids.

3. Lose the trying to control but take full responsibility.
4. Don't get exhausted. Ask others for help. When others offer to help give them a very clear direct instruction about how they can help you.
5. You will become a fiercer sweaty version of yourself. I have. I burn with hormones, passion for what I believe in and a healthy lack of patience for the dicks who get in my way.
6. If someone is annoying no need to spend any time on wondering if it is, you or them. It is them.
7. Give yourself time. Stop expecting so much of yourself. Give up making lists of things you need to do ☑ achieve. Follow your nose. Write lists instead about what you have achieved in your life time. A taking stock.
8. Give yourself time to grieve every day and always for those you have lost. By middle age many of us have lost parents and friends. Make time for these relationships in your life. Continue your relationships with your dead people.
9. You are a phoenix being reborn. The changing hormonal state means you are being rewired to look out for the whole tribe with the wisdom you have gained (not just your small immediate tribe) and to listen to your deepest desires for yourself.
10. Give your friendships time and space. New ones are important in this life stage. See if you can reach out and connect with some people you like the look of.

Don't play small. Make the biggest impact you can with your work and life. Women have and continue to change the world for the better. It is not hopeless.

This manifesto was written as part of Diverse City's project and theatre production, Mid Life. Share your thoughts and Mid Life experiences on social media: #MidLife and @DiverseCity1 on Twitter and Facebook, @diverse_city1 on Instagram. Find out more at: <http://diversecity.org.uk/productions/mid-life>.

