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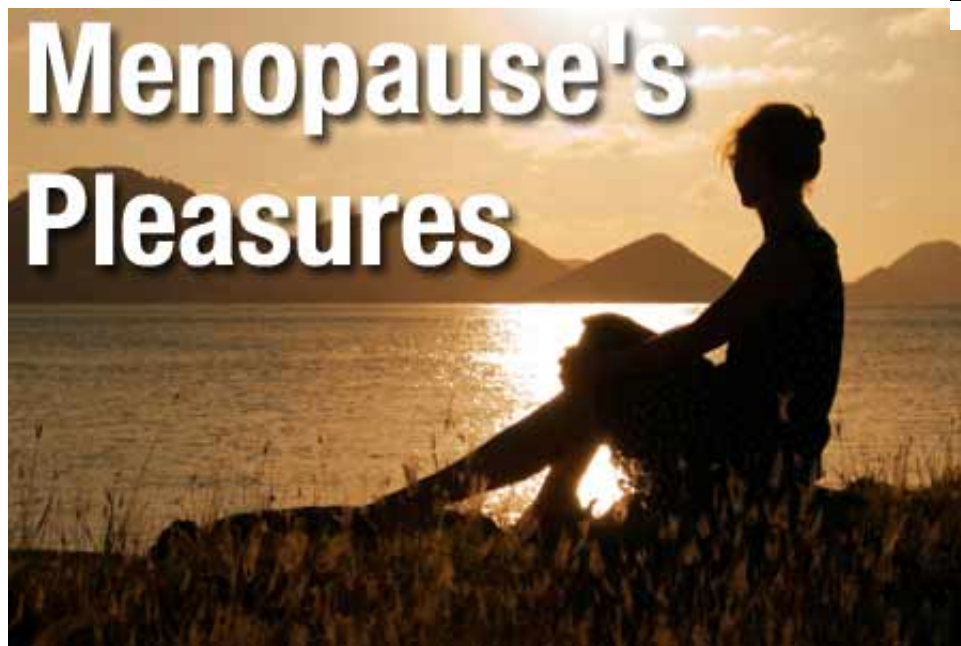
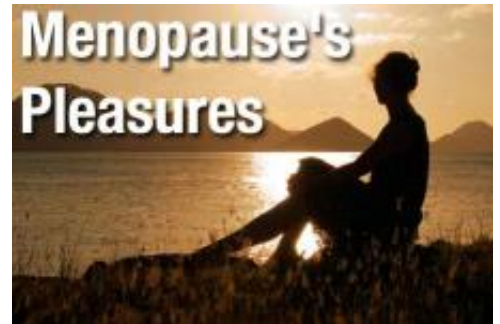
Menopause's Pleasures

By *Margaret Wade*
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menopause's pleasures

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Women past childbearing age are the ones leading the changes toward a better world all over the globe says [Jean Houston](#) [6]. She claims that 85% of the founders of change movements – planting trees, securing universal education, agitating for human rights – are women who don't need to fulfill others' expectations anymore. Some have birthed and raised children and some have not. All of them are birthing movements that are bettering the world for our children and grandchildren.

When I learned about them, I wondered how they had the energy and optimism it takes to do what they did. Some of them, of course, didn't realize that they were “changing the world.” They were just doing what they felt needed to be done. Others were just naturally optimistic and energetic regardless of their situations and predicaments.

Well, I may be eternally optimistic, but I am not typically energetic. Most of my life, I have

wished I had the level of energy I saw my mother call upon daily. I could look around any given day and see others who seemed to be inexhaustible. And of course, there were those inspirational stories of people who overcame all sorts of misfortune, ill health and repeated failures to eventually accomplish their desired results. I envied their ability to focus and stay on task for what seemed to be extraordinarily challenging circumstances. Of course, that was supposed to inspire me to buck up, persevere, stay the course, push on!

Unfortunately, no one ever tells us where we're supposed to get the energy for it. It was unspoken and unwritten that if you were healthy – or at least no doctor had diagnosed you as otherwise – and you couldn't buck up, you had a moral failing. You were just plain lazy. This is all too common a sentiment directed toward people who later find they have one of the diseases doctors have been slow to recognize, such as Lupus, chronic fatigue, thyroid conditions, celiac disease, or any of a host of others. And though I don't discount any of those as energy sappers, I don't believe they're always the answer either.

Our bodies are not designed with On/Off switches. Some of us are simply more energetic than others. That was hard enough for me when I was young. And then I started the process of menopause. Not only did I often lack the energy to get up and go about my day, sometimes the mere idea of getting out of bed was tiring. Some days, I was cranky as hell and some days I had blinding headaches that made me want to puke. I had not had migraines since my teens and 20s, and I thought I had finished with that little slice of hell. Well, there's nothing like extreme frequent pain to focus your efforts – when that pain has subsided for a moment.

One thing I've always been good at is learning, and I had motivation for delving into a new topic. So I started learning about migraines, which led to learning about hormones, which led to menopause and peri-menopause, and so on. What I learned amazed me. I began to deeply appreciate the process I was going through – and, it runs out, had been going through for years. The aches and pains, the ups and downs (emotional and physical), and the ins and outs of sex (and possible problems with it).

At the same time, I noticed that my [sexological bodywork](#) ^[7] clients included more and more women who were dealing with similar issues. Learning about menopause and the changes it creates in the bodies and minds of women, starting in their 30s, helped me appreciate its advantages and its disadvantages. My presentation will be biased – I will offer no fair and balanced assessment of the disadvantages. Really now, is that actually necessary?

First up is consistency. Once a woman's hormones level out through the month, the consistency in itself can be helpful. That constancy allows a woman to better understand her energy and moods, and how to work with them. There are fewer variables to consider when doing so. For instance, when I was still hormone cycling every month, my high-energy days were from about Day 3 through Day 12 to 15 of my cycle. (Day 1 is the first day of bleeding.) But my interests in how to use that energy were hard to harness, especially as I got closer to ovulating. Sometimes I would have a difficult time focusing on anything but sex. (Some people claim that men are always in this state. If true, it explains a lot!) Then, from about three days before my period until just after it started, I had so little energy and so little desire to get out of bed, that even going to the breakfast table was a challenge.

It made it very difficult to determine what helped and what hurt when it came to energizing myself. If I had the awareness then that I do now, I might have been able to deal with the monthly fluctuations and understood their effects. But the lack of information and the lack of consistency made it difficult for me to even figure out what was going on much less

understand what to do to change it in any way.

Another advantage to being “of a certain age” is, believe it or not, the invisibility of older women. For the first time in my life, I can walk into a restaurant and not have most of the grown men turn and stare directly at my breasts. This may not have been your experience, but enough women have told me that it was theirs, too, that I know it wasn't due to my particular anatomy. I can remember specific conversations during which the man I was speaking with never took his eyes off my chest.

Invisibility serves us when it comes to accomplishing work in the world, too. In some cases, being a young woman attracts useful attention, but it can just as easily distract from the effectiveness you want. Two women I know travel in an RV to offer first aid and other assistance at sites that have endured natural catastrophes. When other organizations go to such sites, they are required to do all sorts of paperwork and whatnot. But these women just drive right past all the people with paperwork and guns and rules and get to work. Since they look like grandmothers, no one questions their need to be there or their intentions.

For some women, the first time in their lives that they are taken seriously is once they get some gray hair. They're too cute to be listened to until they prove their worth with proof of age. And in many cultures, and to some extent our own, women are considered wise once they are old enough to be grandmothers.

For the next few weeks, I'll be presenting the information I learned in my research and with my clients about how to make hormonal changes work for you rather than against you. While I'm primarily addressing women going through the menopause process (which I'll also call perimenopause), much of this information is relevant to others whose hormones are changing. That includes women and men who have had sudden changes in their hormonal situation whether through surgery (including sex-reassignment surgery), chemical changes (including prescription drugs), medical procedures or other causes. However, I will be using feminine pronouns, so feel free to adjust them to suit you.

Each week, I will present an activity that has helped me and my clients. If you are feeling less healthy or happy than you'd like, try them. Even if a practice sounds silly, do it for a week before deciding that it won't help you.

This week's practice is to just get to know yourself as you are today. It is simple and it is quick.

Do: Twice a day, look yourself in the eye for five minutes. Look at yourself in the mirror, say hello, offer words of appreciation and love, tell yourself a joke, or just gaze.

Do NOT: Inspect your face for flaws or eyebrow hairs out of place, or run through a list of your faults or upcoming tasks.

Note: This might be difficult for you. Do it anyway.

See you next week.

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