

GRUMPY OLD  
MENOPAUSE

CAROL E WYER



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The colophon of Saffkhet is a representation of the ancient Egyptian goddess of wisdom  
and knowledge, who is credited with inventing writing.  
Saffkhet Publishing is named after her because the founders met in Egypt.

## INTRODUCTION

Have you started to write post-it notes with your kids' names on them? Do you need to change your underwear after every sneeze? Guess it's time to read this book then. It'll help you get through "that" time in your life with a spring in your step and a smile on your face. (Yeah right!)

I hit puberty late in life. When I say late, I mean late. Every girl in my class had huge breasts, Bic disposable razors, and boyfriends, and giggled a lot about sex. I was behind the times and my body didn't transform until I was about seventeen.

Now, I am in my fifties and I am still a late developer. All my friends journeyed through the miserable menopause several years ago while I trailed behind.

At least I was able to amass a stack of information to help me transit this time with the minimum of woe and bad temper. I learned much from my friends and have discovered that you can get through the menopause without wanting to rip off people's heads or lying in bed with terrible cramps.

This guide will help you when your other half and your family don't seem to understand what is happening to you. It will ease your mind, when you are awake at night, wondering if you are the only woman in the universe to be swimming in a puddle of sweat with your heart palpitating. This little book will help you sail through a tricky part of a woman's life with ease and humour. It should prevent you from turning into Mrs Crabby or worse still, a demonic monster.

I would make sure you haven't got any sharp knives around the house though just in case I happen to be wrong.

Menopause is one of those life changes. How we handle it is up to us. Whether we choose to use hormone therapy replacement, whether we set up our own physical and mental regime through exercise, diet, or other means, or whether we decide to "go it alone" and just ride it out until it's hopefully over, we are entirely responsible for the daily attitude we carry throughout this time.

The menopause often occurs at a time in our lives when most, if not all, of our children are leaving or have left the nest. (For some, it unfortunately happens when their off-spring are going through puberty which can cause fireworks.) We may begin to feel needed less. Our purpose in life seems to have left, along with its dirty washing and noisy music. It is a time when we might begin to question what lies ahead.

Now that we have more time to ourselves we may begin to notice those indicators of age: facial wrinkles, the drooping turkey neck, and the triceps that are turning into the infamous “bingo wings”. It’s not a very appealing picture. However, we should not be concerned with the “old” woman who is staring at us in the mirror. We should concentrate on the “new” woman on the inside.

What can we do to get through this phase of our lives? Surprisingly there is much that we can do to stop blowing up at people and having a rough ride. We can take measures to look after ourselves and ensure we do not get too overwhelmed by what is happening to our bodies. However, the best medicine of all is laughter.

So, without further ado, sit back with a small glass of wine, a large box of chocolates and this book.

\*

question: what can a husband do when his  
wife is going through menopause?  
answer: keep busy. if he's handy with tools,  
he can finish the basement.  
then when he's finished, he'll have a place  
to live.

\*



things you should hide from a woman  
going through menopause: axes, arrows,  
anything sharp and pointed.

\*

**Anger, anxiety, aggression, annoyed** ... the letter A is shaping up to be a great start to our journey through grumpy old menopause.

Let's start with the big A for anger, otherwise known as being affronted, annoyed, antagonized, bitter, chafed, choleric, convulsed, cross, displeased, enraged, exacerbated, exasperated, ferocious, fierce, fiery, fuming, furious, galled, hateful, heated, hot, huffy, ill-tempered, impassioned, incensed, indignant, inflamed, infuriated, irascible, irate, ireful, irritable, irritated, maddened, nettled, offended, outraged, piqued, provoked, raging, resentful, riled, sore, splenetic, storming, sulky, sullen, tumultuous, turbulent, uptight, vexed, wrathful. There, feel better?

You don't? This is the time to buy one of those large punch bags that boxers use and hang it outside, preferably in the garage. Whenever you feel like smacking something hard, walk out to the garage and have six rounds with the bag.

Better still, paint a large face on it of someone you want to hit, give the bag a name and let loose. (Warning—be careful you don't rip your shoulder muscles. So far, it's taken me five months of physiotherapy to fix mine, and I yelp and swear every time the physio tries to work on it!)

If, like me, you have been banned from attacking people with heavy or sharp objects every time you fly off the handle, then you can always rely on your crafty female ways. After all, there are other ways to release your inner anger.

husband to wife: "when I get mad at you,  
you never fight back. how do you control  
your anger?"

wife: "I clean the toilet bowl."

husband: "how does that help?"

wife: "I use your toothbrush."

\*

After a gruelling morning during which our garden was decimated by builders who were looking for a fractured water pipe, and Mr Grumpy complained bitterly about his lot in life, I went out to grab a quiet few minutes in a local coffee house.

It was three in the afternoon, and as I opened the door, I noticed that only two tables were taken and they were occupied by elderly people drinking afternoon cocoa. I breathed a sigh of relief, ordered my green tea and skulked off to sit at a table in a corner, where I unfolded my newspaper and set about working out the Sudoku.

Almost immediately, the front door opened and four women, plus pushchairs, barrelled in. They ordered drinks and extracted babies from the pushchairs. They then set about chatting at volume, oblivious to everyone else. Babies gurgled and squealed. One young child, released from his harness, squirmed out of his chair faster than a heat-seeking missile and ran up and down the cafe screaming, "Eehh!"

You know how cats recognise that you are allergic to them, and come and sit on your knee making you sneeze? I think the same applies to irritating children who have an inner ability to realise that the miserable old boot in the corner does not want to be bothered. The child got visual, locked onto me and propelled himself with force into my chair leg.

The little darling then insisted on standing next to my chair staring at me while picking his nose.

"Go away," I growled. He decided at that point that I was even more interesting, grabbed the vacant chair next to me and climbed up.

"Clear off. Go back to your mother."

He sat kicking my chair with podgy legs and staring at me with a goofy smile plastered on his face.

Since I became a grumpy old woman I have decided that I don't like children. It's illogical, but that's part and parcel of the menopause. Well, it is for me. I don't mind children if they are kept quietly out of the way, or are behaving, but when they disrupt my day, or get into my personal space I turn into a hideous fiend.

My growls didn't work. I turned around to get the attention of the group of mothers who were yacking away.

"Excuse me. I have something here that belongs to you. I'd like to give it back."

A young woman dragged her attention away from her friends and with a mouth half-full of biscuit mumbled, "Come to Mummy Naafan."

"No!" screamed Nathan.

"I've got you a drink," she wheedled.

"No!" yelled Nathan, going red in the face, "No drink. No Mummy!"

"Please yourself, Naaf. I'll give it to Jessie."

The brat shouted, "No!" once more and continued to kick my chair with more ferocity. I snarled at him. He kicked more furiously. The woman went back to her conversation with little more than a shrug of her shoulders. She clearly thought he was safe with me and had decided to leave him to wander back when he felt like it. I had suddenly become an unpaid child-minder. A switch flipped in my head. I saw red.

Fortunately, some tiny voice managed to shout out before I lifted "Naafan" from the chair, hung him upside down by his foot, and hurled him into the toilet opposite my table.

I did what I needed to do, then stomped past the women, who were still talking, oblivious to everything, and left the coffee shop. No, I didn't harm him. I merely painted his face in lipstick and covered him in makeup from my bag so he resembled a small demon, and left him at my table stuffing his face with a large chocolate muffin. I also left a sign on the table which said, "Be grateful I didn't kidnap him. Pay more attention in future, there are some right weirdoes about!"

The menopause can make us do mad things but we can use it to our advantage too. Having spent several decades being generally chirpy and happy-go-lucky, losing "my rag" had led to some positive results in recent years. When I snarl, my hubby runs about and prepares dinner for me or pours me a glass of wine. (Very wise move on his

part.) Frighten your own unruly kids or husbands by standing in the kitchen holding a knife and staring into space like Jack Nicholson in *The Shining* and they'll soon ask if everything is okay and help with the cooking.

\*

SIGNS YOU MIGHT BE EXPERIENCING  
MENOPAUSE:

YOUR HUSBAND JOKES THAT INSTEAD OF BUYING  
A WOOD STOVE, HE IS USING YOU TO HEAT THE  
FAMILY ROOM THIS WINTER. RATHER THAN JUST  
SAYING YOU ARE NOT AMUSED, YOU SHOOT HIM.

Q: HOW MANY MENOPAUSAL WOMEN DOES IT  
TAKE TO CHANGE A LIGHT BULB?

A: ONE! ONLY ONE. AND DO YOU KNOW WHY?  
BECAUSE NO ONE ELSE IN THIS HOUSE KNOWS  
HOW TO CHANGE A LIGHT BULB! THEY DON'T EVEN  
KNOW THAT THE BULB IS BURNED OUT. THEY  
WOULD SIT IN THE DARK FOR *THREE WHOLE DAYS*  
BEFORE THEY FIGURED IT OUT. AND ONCE THEY  
FIGURED IT OUT, THEY WOULDN'T BE ABLE TO  
FIND THE LIGHT BULBS DESPITE THE FACT THAT  
THEY'VE BEEN IN THE SAME CUPBOARD FOR THE  
PAST SEVENTEEN YEARS!

BUT IF THEY DID, BY SOME MIRACLE OF GOD,  
ACTUALLY FIND THEM TWO DAYS LATER, THE  
CHAIR THEY DRAGGED TO STAND ON, TO CHANGE  
THE *STUPID* LIGHT BULB, WOULD STILL BE IN  
THE *SAME SPOT* AND UNDERNEATH IT WOULD  
BE THE WRAPPER THE *STUPID* LIGHT BULBS  
CAME IN BECAUSE NO ONE EVER CARRIES OUT  
THE RUBBISH! IT'S A WONDER WE HAVEN'T ALL  
SUFFOCATED FROM



the piles of rubbish that are a foot deep  
throughout the entire house! *It would take  
an army to clean this house!*  
I'm SORRY ... what was the question?

\*

Let's move away from anger and all those negative emotions that wash over you to some of the wonderful delights that you might experience as your body changes.

Remember when you were a teenager and all the boys in your class used Clearasil to get rid of their spots, but you didn't need to because you just bloomed and had peachy skin? It could be your turn to need Clearasil. While the rest of your body gets older, your skin decides to go through a late stage of puberty, and you may develop **acne**.

Fiery spots will appear for no good reason and of course, they will appear on days when you really don't want them to, like your child's wedding day, and for good measure, they will appear in the most prominent place possible—usually, near or on your nose. Even with extra strong foundation, layered on with a trowel, you will see the crimson spot shining. If you get a hot flush it will even glow. Sounds like Rudolph the Reindeer could have been female.

As you may know at the heart of acne lies the pimple. It's a plug of fat, skin debris, and keratin stuck in a hair duct. When it's open, it's called a blackhead. When it's closed over, it's referred to as a whitehead. Whiteheads often cause the walls of the duct to rupture. This in turn leads to redness, infection and acne.

It is best to wash gently twice a day than to scrub away at the spot vigorously, every morning. Please avoid squeezing it, as tempting as that may be. You could spread it. (Yes, I did!)

It will calm down. Acne isn't caused by poor hygiene. In this case it is most likely caused by your hormones. (They are to blame for so much.)

If you need to go out and don't want everyone to see your spot, then wear a ski mask or wrap a scarf tightly around your face. This method works well during cold weather but, of course, if it is summer, you'll look a total idiot. You could always invest in some leatherette trousers and a motor bike helmet, then you'll look like a

cool cougar, and no one will realise that you are hiding a prize zit. (Might look a bit daft if you get into your Yaris still wearing the helmet.)

\*

q: why did the police stop the greasy  
teenager?

a: It was just a spot check.

\*

To help cope with aforementioned symptoms, you could take up a demanding exercise class which will allow you to release your inner energy. That way, even if you get angry or annoyed, you will be too exhausted to do anything about it. Or you could seek out **alternative medicine** and **alternative therapies**.

I am not a doctor so you must take appropriate advice before deciding on whether you should follow the alternative path. I had rather hoped to stay on the pill until I was fifty, then hop onto HRT for the rest of my days, but my body didn't fancy that, so I took the natural route. I didn't bother with anything. Can't get more natural than that.

For those of you who would like to try alternative treatments, a health food shop has trained staff who will help you choose a product like Burt's Bees for your acne, along with other natural menopause treatments. They may direct you to Kava Kava, St. John's Wort, or Goat's Weed, also known as Hypericum Perforatum for anxiety. I'd just like to say here that even though St. John's Wort is a widely used supplement for menopause and in treating depression, there are specific things to avoid while taking it, such as alcohol, cheese, and any foods containing Tyramine. Additionally, if the woman is on any type of antidepressant, St. John's Wort should not be taken.

Quite honestly, anything that means I have to cut down on my daily glass of wine gets left well alone, so my own efforts consist of little more than drinking soya<sup>1</sup> milk, taking the occasional evening primrose oil tablet, and making sure I get plenty of exercise.

<sup>1</sup> Note: Japanese women have fewer menopausal symptoms than any other nationality. That is put down to their diet which is high in omega essential oils and soya.

There is a vast range of alternatives to HRT so acquaint yourself with the possibilities.

There are a range of activities I can suggest beginning with the letter A that might help you transit the menopause and take your mind off the annoying symptoms: **aerobics, archery, art, antique collecting**, and **arm-wrestling** to mention but a few.

Become wackier and breed **alpacas**. These hairy goat-like creatures are wonderful mothers. When they are happy they hum to their offspring and each other. Who wouldn't want a humming alpaca? I watched a documentary set in France (*Little England*, ITV3), in which a retired couple had started up an alpaca farm. It had transformed the pair of them and made them appreciate life so much more. (I highly suspect moving to France played a part too.)

Another way to help stay calm is to use some relaxing **aromatherapy** oils. Aromatherapy involves using plants and essential oils for relaxation, spiritual health and psychological health. Could be just what we stressed-out hormonal women need.

You can either inhale essential oils or apply them to the skin. You can even put small droplets into a bath. Never put essential oils onto the skin undiluted. I got a wonderful angry rash through dropping lavender oil onto my wrist. It itched for weeks. Be mindful too of the fact that anything you apply to the skin has a real chance of being absorbed into the blood stream, so only apply small amounts and read all instructions before you use them. (I wish I had!)

Breathe in ... and...breathe out! Hope you are beginning to feel appeased by my words. We'll leave the letter A and move along while we are beginning to feel slightly amused and more relaxed.

## B

things you should hide from a woman  
going through menopause: BOMBS,  
BAZOOKAS, BLOWGUNS, BLUNT INSTRUMENTS,  
and FIREARMS MADE BY BROWNING, BERETTA,  
BARRETT AND BERSA.

\*

**Brittle bones, breast pain, bloating, and body odour!** Looking at this list of menopausal symptoms, there doesn't seem to be much to look forward to. Don't despair. It isn't too bleak.

\*

SIGNS YOU MIGHT BE EXPERIENCING  
menopause:  
you take a sudden interest in  
"wrestlemania".

\*

Cheers! I was really pleased to discover that **beer** can alleviate some menopausal symptoms. It's true. Czech scientific research has unearthed some fascinating facts.

It has been suspected for some time that hops can have an effect on the hormonal system. Before the advent of machine pickers, women and girls picked the plants at harvest. This would often take about three weeks. It was observed that amongst the young girls picking hops that their menstrual periods would come on early. Later this was validated scientifically. It transpires that hops contain very high levels of phytoestrogens—between 30,000 IU (international unit) to 300,000 IU per 100 grams. The levels are at their highest when the plant is fresh.

Beer contains phytoestrogens found in hops. Phytoestrogens work by binding to oestrogen receptors and thus provide a mild oestrogenic effect on the body. Obviously, they are not as strong as

regular oestrogen, but as the oestrogen levels decline in menopausal women this boost can have a balancing effect on the body.

Herbalists use hops for their mild sedative effects. Not only are hops good for sleeping problems, they are beneficial to people with nervous gastrointestinal and stomach problems too.

Oh yes, I think I warned you to keep off too much alcohol in chapter one, didn't I? Don't worry, those clever Czech people have also brought out an alcohol-free version that has a similar effect. So next time you are out shopping, don't forget to buy yourself a six-pack. Na zdraví!

\*

SIGNS YOU MAY BE EXPERIENCING THE  
MENOPAUSE:  
*you need the jaws of life to help you out  
of your car after returning home from an  
italian restaurant.*

\*

If you have a problem with a bloated belly thanks to your irritating hormones, then avoid eating too many gassy foods at one meal. Foods like cabbage, broccoli, cauliflower, onions, beans, Brussels sprouts, corn, oats, potatoes, apples, pears, peaches, milk, soft cheese, and fluffy wheat are difficult to digest. Chew your food properly too because digestion begins in the mouth. I expect that you have read this all before and follow the necessary advice. If you still have a bloated belly then take up **belly dancing**.

What an amazing hobby for a woman. It accentuates all your curves, especially that rounded belly, and can help you discover your inner goddess. (I read that in a magazine once. My inner goddess is more of a Medusa at the moment.) I admit that I have had a go at this. I attended several classes, and to be fair, you do actually begin to feel much more feminine once you grasp the idea. (And stop guffawing.) You can convince yourself that you are enchanting and captivating by the end of a session or two. The women who attend are encouraging and there is a grace to the dance. By the end of my sessions, I was ready to be sensual and provocative and entertain my man.

Give a local centre a call and watch a performance. You'll be intrigued. Have a go yourself. I don't suggest you try and captivate your man while he is watching football though. Somehow, you wobbling your stomach at him while waving a dishcloth about and batting eyelids takes second place when Arsenal are playing Manchester United.

What about taking up something else that'll make you feel sexy, wanton and desirable? **Burlesque** is all about the slow tease. People love burlesque today because it incorporates all the old-school glamour, and satire, and highlights the female form—it's something that many women can actually see themselves doing.

Burlesque takes its name from the Italian word *burla*, meaning joke. so I was naturally drawn to it. So far I haven't managed to perform anywhere other than my bedroom in front of the mirror but I might venture out one of these days.

How much cardio can one get from shimmying your shoulders and wiggling your hips? Quite a bit, it seems. You'll soon be strutting, sashaying, and sweating with a gusto that would have made Cher proud.

Still not convinced? Sample a **Bollywood dance** class. All the way from Bombay to Britain there are classes springing up everywhere. They have become very popular for events, workshops and school parties. Even hen parties are booking classes. Buy a Bindi, a sari, and some bling, then let out that inner Bollywood star. There will be no time to worry about brittle bones once you get on the dance floor.

If that is all too tame for you and you want to blast that bloated belly away by taking up an extreme activity, you could have a go at **bungee jumping**. It's guaranteed to provide a lot of excitement and get your heart racing. I'm sure as you speed to the ground, your stomach will look flatter as it drags behind you.

It isn't looking so bleak, is it? As for alternatives to conventional medicine that begin with the letter B, I ought to mention **black cohosh** here. Black cohosh, a member of the buttercup family, is a perennial plant that is native to North America. Other common names for it include black snakeroot, bugbane, bugwort, rattleroot,

rattletop, rattleweed, and macrotys. Insects avoid it, which accounts for some of these common names. It is therefore peculiar that a plant with such a variety of horrible names can supposedly help women during menopause. Some believe that it can alleviate hot flushes and other menopausal symptoms, but studies<sup>2</sup> reveal conflicting data on that subject. In short, the jury is still out on it, and while some say it is beneficial there have been others who suggest that black cohosh carries risks of headaches, dizziness, gastrointestinal disturbances and possibly liver toxicity.

If you are considering taking black cohosh then get professional advice before doing so.

Let's move on to hobbies or activities that might help you through the menopause. I had to mention this next one because it's what has kept me sane for three years: **blogging**. It couldn't be easier to set up a blog. Google "Wordpress" or "Blogger" and get started. There are instructions on the internet. Millions, and I mean millions, of women of all ages, blog regularly. You will find oodles of blogs about the menopause alone. These can be sassy, witty or just informative. Set up your own or work with a friend and write one together.

Don't fancy writing a blog? Read some of those that are out there in cyber world instead and comment on posts. There are a huge number to discover including: menopause.theblog.com, menopausegoddessblog.com, menopausemaniac.com, theperimenopauseblog.com, flashfree.me, and menopausalmonster.blogspot.com among many others.

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a BLOG IS LIKE A THERAPIST. IT'S THE FIRST  
PLACE YOU GO WHEN YOU WANT TO MOAN  
ENDLESSLY ABOUT YOUR LIFE.

\*

Join Facebook and sign up for one of the menopausal groups where members share worries and experiences. I was surprised at how many groups there are. Hang out with others at Menopause

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2 <http://ods.od.nih.gov/factsheets/BlackCohosh-HealthProfessional/>

Sucks, Menopausechatter.com, Menopause Matters or Menopause Fitness. You need never be alone and suffer in silence again.

Should you enjoy reading, join or start a **book club**. Get together with a group of like-minded people and discuss the latest best-seller or something more appropriate like *How Not to Murder Your Grumpy* by Carol E Wyer.

Not adventurous enough for you? Then why not do the same as Lucy Valentine from the UK who decided that she needed to change her life and purchased a Harley Davidson. She spent the following five weeks riding through France and Spain, before embarking on a new life in Costa Rica as a teacher. She still rides her motor cycle. She now has a tattoo on her stomach of shells, seahorses and the words "Live Life". Oh yes, she's also found a new love interest too. Who'd have thought **bikes** could be so much fun?

For something different have a go at **bareback riding**. This can be challenging and exhilarating. Clearly, you would need proper instruction, but imagine the freedom of riding bareback over fields and dales, with the wind blowing in your hair. I can't vouch for it myself but I am given to believe that the very freedom of riding without a saddle challenges you as a rider but also allows you to be more in tune with your horse. Contrary to some beliefs, it does not require strength or bravery, just a good sense of balance. (And a large amount of padding for when you fall onto the ground.)

\*

a poorly-looking horse limps into a bar  
with a bandage round his head. he orders a  
glass of champagne, a vintage brandy and  
two pints of guinness.  
he downs the lot and says to the barman:  
"I shouldn't really be drinking this with  
what I've got."  
"why, what have you got?"  
"about 2 quid and a carrot."



You might prefer my next option which does not require balance, merely a quick mind. It is very good for helping with your memory—bridge. (The game involving cards, not going out with a team of mates and constructing a flyover for the A38.)

If you haven't ever tried this game, here's your chance to take it up. Team up with three other fun-loving women, add a jug of Margaritas, spice up the game by putting on a little bet and you'll have a super time. (I'm sure I just described an episode of Desperate Housewives.)

Bridge is one of those games that requires good attention and memory so you'll be doing yourself a big favour if you take this up. Just don't ask me to explain the rules because I still don't understand them. Mind you, I think it was more difficult to play the game using that pack of "Old Maid" cards.

\*

GIVING a man his physical, the doctor noticed several dark, ugly bruises on his shins, so he asked, "do you play hockey, football, or some physical sport?" "no," he answered. "I play bridge with my wife."

\*

I'll skip over any other suggestions such as **bowling** where you could release any aggression left over from losing at bridge by hurling a heavy bowling ball down an alley, and move swiftly on to the letter C.