

# The bloom of youth

Bespoke hormones, trips to a Thai medi-spa and a judicious jolt of radio-frequency tightening are making the millionaire menopause a surprisingly seductive prospect

By Helen KIRWAN-TAYLOR

What other condition gets *all* the stars of a 'certain age' talking? Oprah Winfrey, Gillian Anderson and Emma Thompson have all gone there; Julie Walters described her hot flushes as 'a chimney that came from the base of my spine'. And now, welcome to the world of the 'menopreneur'. These include, inevitably, Goop goddess Gwyneth Paltrow, who wants to 'rebrand' menopause and has already created her own Madame Ovary supplements. She's joined by Noel Gallagher's ex-wife, Meg Mathews, with her MegsMenopause website, which sells, among other delights, lubricants packaged in pink called Motion Lotion. Beauty tycoon Liz Earle offers *The Good Menopause Guide* to help us navigate the A to Z of this confusing time.

All these women have realised that the menopause is big business. The industry is estimated to be worth \$14.7 billion globally, with a 5.7 per cent annual growth rate. No wonder a host of satellite industries are popping up to cater for wealthy women going through 'the change', including fashion, travel, beauty, even show business (anyone for *Menopause the Musical? And Just Like That*, series two?). Menopause is a hot topic. 'We're in a moment where women's health is being discussed,' says Daisy Robinton, aka the Ovarian Queen, a Harvard research scientist who works on molecular, cellular and developmental biology as well as gene editing. 'Female physiology has historically been overlooked, partly due to the perceived complexity of female hormones.'

Robinton's particular interest is the role of anti-Müllerian hormone, or AMH, which declines with age. Along with other researchers, she has developed a recombinant form of AMH, which is now in preclinical development as a drug to delay the natural menopause. We could be looking at the delay (even end) of menopause by the end of the decade.

The possibilities of Robinton's work will not only affect the menopausal landscape: it will potentially redefine what it means to age. Inevitably, as with stem cell therapy, those with deep pockets will benefit first, after which it could be rolled out to all. Robinton's goal isn't to extend life, but to age better. 'Currently we're constrained by a fertility cliff,' she says.

Menopause is defined as the point 12 months after the cessation of periods. The ovaries stop producing the hormones oestrogen and progesterone, and this marks the conclusion of a woman's reproductive cycle. In Britain the average age of menopause is 51. But perimenopause – when oestrogen and progesterone production begin to go haywire – can begin in a woman's mid-40s and last for up to a decade. This is the discombobulating spell when a plethora of distressing symptoms emerge. These can include (deep breath): hot flushes, vaginal dryness, depression, exhaustion, difficulty sleeping, anxiety, weight gain, painful sex, loss of libido, and brain fog. For many it's the wrinkles and sagging skin that push them over the edge. A menopaiser myself, I am intrigued by all the fashionable kit, including anti-perspiration clothes, but I had an easy ride of it because the moment I started having hot flushes and feeling grumpy, I asked for HRT. I can tell it does the trick because it gave me an instant breast lift.

I was lucky. In extreme cases, the menopause can lead to what feels like an out-of-body experience. One of my friends had such bad hallucinations that she was briefly checked into a hospital for medical supervision. When oestrogen production stops, we basically go into biological free fall. Reverse that and we could all live happily ever after with our ageing frozen somewhere around our mid-40s. No wonder this is a hot topic.

Increasingly, doctors consider menopause to be as

*A Vase of Flowers* by Jan Davidsz de Heem, c 1660

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