Her Life
Aligned

THE MIDLIFE CONVERSATION EVERY WOMAN DESERVES

Starting at the beginning - understanding the biological transition of midlife.

Angela Sky

Dear Reader,

Welcome to The Midlife Conversation Every Woman Deserves.

I've written this conversation in the hope that it lands in your hands at a time when you need it most.

Maybe you've been wondering why you don't quite feel like yourself anymore. Maybe things have been changing in ways you can't explain. Or perhaps you simply know that something feels different.

Wherever you are, I hope these pages help you begin to understand a little more about what may be happening in your body and brain and why.

Because before we rush into trying to fix, change or manage everything, I believe we deserve the chance to understand what's happening first.

This is the conversation I would have loved someone to have with me before I arrived in midlife and found myself in the grip of perimenopause, confused by what I was experiencing and wondering what on earth had happened to me.

So please take your time.

Make yourself a cuppa, read slowly, and take from these pages whatever you need to right now.
For now, understanding a little more is enough.

Ang xx



"What is happening to me!?"

Are you in your 40s or even early 50s and found your way here because something just doesn't feel quite right?

Are you feeling drained or exhausted in a way that sleep doesn't seem to fix?

Have you been wondering **“Is there something wrong with me?”**

Maybe you’ve noticed your body is changing?

Has your weight been creeping up and harder to manage?

Do your joints ache, maybe your shoulders, your hip, or are you feeling odd little pains here and there?



Does your heart occasionally race for no apparent reason?

Have you been feeling suddenly anxious, irritable or overwhelmed by things that would never have bothered you before?

Are you forgetting words, like they’re on the tip of your tongue, but they just don’t come to you in the moment?

Or even walking into a room and wondering why on earth you went in there in the first place?

Have you been finding it hard to describe...

that you just don't seem to feel like yourself?



Is it stress?

Am I just getting older?

Why is my stomach so bloated?

Why can't I sleep properly?

Why am I so sensitive to EVERYTHING?

Why can't I cope like I used to?

Why does it all seem so much harder?

What the hell is happening to me?

If you've asked yourself any version of these questions, you're not alone...

Because I battled with all of these too!

With so much information available, and so much of it! It easily becomes confusing, conflicting or difficult to make sense of... is it any wonder when we search the internet looking for answers, that we walk away even more confused than when we started.

"What is wrong with me?"

It shouldn't be this confusing!

For me, I was around the **age of 47** when I began to notice the odd little things, and nothing I was doing seemed to be working for me anymore.
I was desperately tired, and yet I couldn't sleep...

My middle resembled a six-month pregnancy, and I seemed to have developed a magic gift, I could look at food and instantly gain 2 kg of body fat! I felt frumpy, I looked frumpy, and I felt as though I was losing my mind...

It felt like my world was changing and I couldn't figure out why...

Menopause had briefly crossed my mind, but I still had a fairly normal and regular periods. I wasn't really aware of any 'classic' menopause symptoms, so I thought to myself it couldn't be menopause... Not yet!

I didn't have a clue that I was in Perimenopause!

I always knew menopause would eventually happen. But if you had asked me what I thought that actually meant, I probably would have said something like:

Oh... one day my periods will stop. I'll get some hot flushes for a while and maybe some permanent PMS for a bit and then boom!

Done and dusted, thank you very much... ***If Only!***

I know that sounds a little naive of me, but I honestly had no idea there would be years of biological change leading up to that final period, and that there wasn't a simple finale!

I also had no idea that it would impact my life the way it did!
And when you think about it, it's not surprising that so many of us have misunderstood what menopause actually is.

Even the word menopause directs our attention towards our periods stopping...

The word menopause comes from Greek roots:

mēn / mēnos — meaning month
pausis — meaning a stopping or cessation

Put together, menopause essentially means “the cessation of the monthly cycle.”

And when you think about it, it's not surprising that generations of women — myself included — grew up thinking menopause was simply the point when our periods stopped.

For centuries, that final menstrual period was largely how menopause was defined and understood.

Here we are in the 21st century, and yet so many women still don’t really know what is going on and what might be happening.

Instead, we are Googling for answers and thinking something is wrong with us, feeling confused, overwhelmed and fearful.

So let’s start where I believe we need to begin — by connecting the dots...

Meet your ovaries.

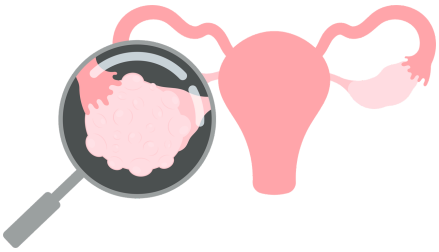
Before I talk about hormones, I want to shine a light on the remarkable organs that are responsible for producing many of our hormones:
our ovaries.

Throughout our reproductive years, our ovaries are incredibly busy.

Every month, they receive messages from our brain that help coordinate our menstrual cycle and prepare an egg for ovulation.

And that's not all they do. Our ovaries also produce hormones that have effects far beyond our reproductive system.

Let's zoom in and take a look inside...



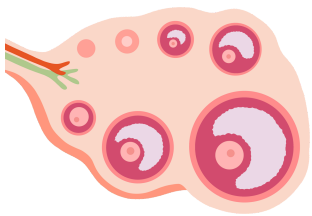
Meet your Follicles...

When we talk about the eggs stored inside our ovaries, the egg isn't actually sitting there all by itself.
Each immature egg — called an oocyte — is held inside a tiny structure called a **follicle.**

Think of the follicle as the egg's little support team.
It surrounds and nurtures the developing egg and, as a follicle matures during the menstrual cycle, its cells also produce hormones and send important signals.

So follicles aren't simply little containers holding our eggs until we might need one.

They're active participants in the hormonal conversation between our ovaries and our brain.



We are born with essentially all the eggs we'll ever have.

Long before we are born, while we're still developing inside our own mother's womb, our ovaries are already forming.

Around the middle of pregnancy, a female fetus has **approximately 6 to 7 million** immature eggs.

By the time we are born, that number has already naturally reduced to around
1 to 2 million.

And by puberty, around **300,000 to 500,000** eggs remain.

During our lifetime, only around 400 to 500 of those eggs will ever be ovulated.

I find all of this **fascinating!** I got a little sidetracked there...

Now, back to the story...

As I mentioned earlier our ovaries are very busy, and they don't work alone.

They are tightly connected to our brain.

Ovaries + Brain Connection

Have you ever heard the term HPO axis?



The **HPO axis** is what scientists call the **hypothalamic-pituitary-ovarian axis.**

This essentially means that our ovaries, hypothalamus and pituitary gland are in constant communication with one another.

(I promise I won't get all sciency here!

The conversation begins in our brain.

Our hypothalamus sends chemical signals to our pituitary gland.

Our pituitary replies, **“Yep, copy that!”** and releases two important hormones — follicle-stimulating hormone (FSH) and luteinising hormone (LH).

These hormones travel to our ovaries, helping follicles develop, supporting hormone production and coordinating ovulation.

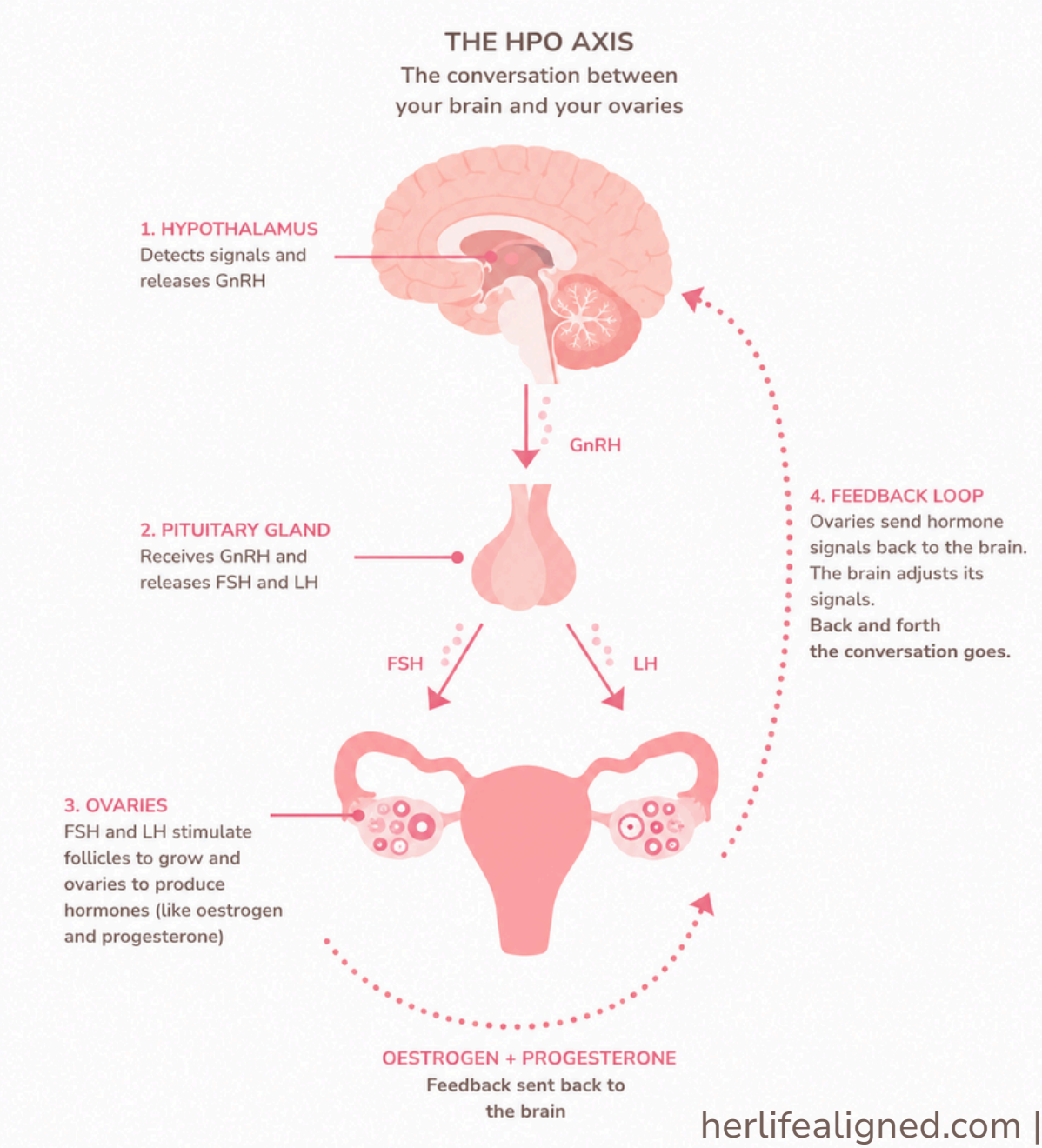


Our ovaries and developing follicles then produce hormones, including oestrogen, which provide feedback to the brain.

The brain receives that feedback and continually adjusts its signals.

Back and forth the conversation goes.

It's a beautifully cooridnated feedback system!



Meet your sex hormones...

If you're anything like I was, you probably already know *something* about hormones.

We blame them when we're moody.
We blame them for everything when we're pregnant.

And we blame them when we're crying over something ridiculous and wondering why on earth we're crying.

But that was pretty much where the understanding ended for me...

So, what actually is a hormone?

In the simplest terms, hormones are chemical messengers.

Different glands and tissues throughout our body produce hormones and release them into our bloodstream, allowing them to travel through the body and communicate with tissues that respond to them.

I like to imagine them as a very sophisticated internal messaging service.



"Message for the brain."

"Message for the bones."

"Muscles, this one's for you."

"Anyone seen the bladder?
I've got something for her too."

Of course, the real biology is far more complex than that, but you get the idea...

A hormone can only deliver its message where the body has the right receptors to receive it.

I think of a receptor like a little docking station.

The hormone arrives, connects with the appropriate receptor, and that interaction helps influence what happens inside that cell or tissue.

And those receptors aren't only found in our reproductive organs.

Many of these hormone receptors are found in tissues throughout our body.

And this was a little lightbulb moment for me...



Because now it started to make sense that changes in our hormones might be felt in places I had never associated with menopause before...

Let's look at some of the more commonly known female sex hormones, so you can see just how much they are involved throughout the whole body.

This is where we begin to see why changes in our hormones can be felt in so many different places throughout our bodies...

Oestrogen

It's usually described as one of our main female sex hormones, which is true...

but this seriously understates the job description.

Oestrogen receptors are found throughout the body, including in the **brain, bones, cardiovascular system, muscles, skin, digestive system, and reproductive and urinary tissues.**

Through these different tissues, oestrogen signalling is involved in many aspects of our physiology — including **reproductive function, bone health, blood-vessel function, brain function, body-temperature regulation, skin and connective-tissue biology, and aspects of metabolism and digestive function.**

Progesterone

Progesterone rises after ovulation occurs.

After a follicle releases its egg, the remaining follicle transforms into a temporary structure called the corpus luteum, which produces progesterone.

This is why ovulation and progesterone are so closely connected.

Progesterone's best-known reproductive job is helping prepare and maintain the lining of the uterus for a possible pregnancy.

But progesterone and its metabolites also interact with our brain and nervous system.

You may sometimes hear progesterone described as a **“calming hormone.”**
That's a useful shorthand, but it's not quite as simple as progesterone = calm.

One of progesterone's metabolites interacts with GABA-A receptors in the brain — part of a signalling system involved in **regulating brain excitability, stress responses and sleep.**

Testosterone

Women naturally produce testosterone too!

Our ovaries and adrenal glands both contribute to androgen production, and these hormones have roles in female physiology as well.

Testosterone is associated with sexual function and also contributes to the maintenance of muscle and bone.

Testosterone also interacts with brain systems involved in sexual desire, motivation and drive, and has been studied for its possible relationship with energy and wellbeing.

So testosterone isn't just a “male hormone” that women somehow accidentally ended up with.

It's one of ours too.

We just have it in different concentrations and biological contexts.

So why am I telling you all this?

My intention was not to bore you with ‘Sex Ed’...

My intention was to bring all of this into the conversation to help change the picture you may have had in your mind about what hormones actually do.

Because as I later realised, they aren't simply chemical messengers responsible for ovulation, menstruation, pregnancy and reproduction.

They are part of an enormous communication network that reaches throughout our bodies.

- **Our brain is listening.**
- **Our muscles are listening.**
- **Our blood vessels are listening.**
- **Our bones are listening..**
- **Our digestive system is listening.**
- **Our reproductive and urinary tissues are listening.**

And many other tissues are responding to hormonal signals too.

The reason I feel this is important is because when the familiar hormonal patterns of our reproductive years begin to change, it makes much more sense that we might notice those changes in seemingly unrelated parts of ourselves too.

Now the fun begins!!!

What begins to change — and why?

The answer to this actually takes us back to the beginning and those little follicles we met earlier.

It starts with our follicle supply.

Throughout our lives, that follicle supply has been gradually declining. Quietly and naturally... Mostly without us having the slightest idea it's happening. **AKA... Me!**

For many years, we still have enough responsive follicles for our ovaries and brain to keep our menstrual cycles working in a reasonably familiar rhythm.
But eventually, the number of available follicles becomes considerably smaller.

And this begins to change our hormonal communication.

As I briefly mentioned before, our developing follicles don't simply contain our eggs, they're also involved in producing hormones and signals that provide feedback to the brain.

Some of those signals essentially help tell the brain:

"We're here.
We've received the message.
We've got things under control."

But as the number of available follicles becomes smaller, some of the feedback from our ovaries begins to change...

Our brain notices...

Remember our pituitary gland?
She's been receiving feedback from our ovaries for all these years and adjusting the signals accordingly.
And when the feedback isn't quite what it used to be, she doesn't just say:

"Oh well. Never mind."

No, she tries harder!

One of the ways she does this is by sending out more of
FSH - follicle-stimulating hormone - to encourage the remaining follicles along.

It's almost like turning up the volume:

"Ovaries?" Not quite the usual response.

"OVARIES?" Still not quite what Pituitary expected.

"HELLOOOO... CAN YOU HEAR ME DOWN THERE?"

**And for quite some time, this can work...
Our ovaries can still respond and follicles can still develop.**

We can still ovulate, and we can still become pregnant.

And oestrogen can still be produced, sometimes in quite substantial amounts, and sometimes much less.

This is why perimenopause is not a linear decline, our hormones don't just gradually get lower and lower.

No, no, no, it is more like that roller coaster at your favourite theme park, the one that scared you with the ups and downs and the sudden twists and turns!

Things Start Becoming Less Predictable...



As our follicle supply continues to decline, that familiar reproductive rhythm can become harder to maintain."

One month, an available follicle may respond quite enthusiastically.
Another month, not so much.
Sometimes ovulation happens.
Sometimes it happens earlier or later.
And sometimes it doesn't happen at all.
And remember what we learned about progesterone?

Ovulation and progesterone are closely connected.
So when ovulation becomes less consistent, progesterone production becomes less consistent too.
And meanwhile, oestrogen can fluctuate quite considerably!

Sometimes changing enough that you might notice you feel quite differently from one week to the next, or even one day to another.

Cycles can become shorter or longer, heavier or lighter, closer together or further apart.
Occasionally they can disappear for a while... only to turn up again when you thought they had finally packed their bags and left for good.

Then... Surprise!

And This Is Perimenopause

These changes have actually been developing quietly in the background for some time.

And eventually, they become noticeable....

WHAT'S HAPPENING TO YOUR BRAIN?

My favourite n**euroscientist Dr Lisa Mosconi,** has spent years studying the female brain and menopause using brain-imaging techniques in her research.

Her research has helped show that menopause isn't simply a reproductive transition, it is a brain transition as well.

Changes are taking place in the brain as it responds and adapts to a changing hormonal environment.

And remember those hormone receptors we talked about earlier? **They're in our brain too.**

Oestrogen interacts with brain systems involved in things like memory, attention, mood, sleep, temperature regulation and how our brain uses energy.

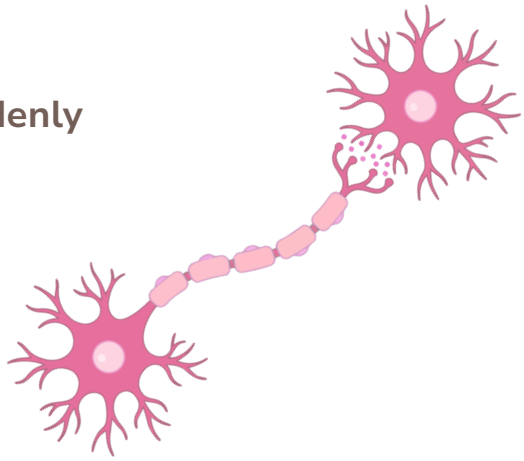
Research also shows that the menopausal transition involves changes across multiple oestrogen-sensitive brain systems.

"So THIS might be why I don't feel like myself?"

This is a brain transition too...

For many of us, neurological symptoms can show up in surprisingly familiar ways:

You might walk into a room and completely forget why you went there.



A word you've known your entire life suddenly disappears halfway through a sentence.

You might feel more anxious.

More irritable.

More emotionally sensitive.

Your sleep becomes a lucky dip.

You're feeling mentally exhausted before the day begins.

Our brain has its own chemical messaging systems: neurotransmitters, including serotonin, dopamine and GABA, to name just a few...

These systems help influence things such as...

Motivation.

Mood.

Sleep.

Emotional responses.

Brain cell communication.

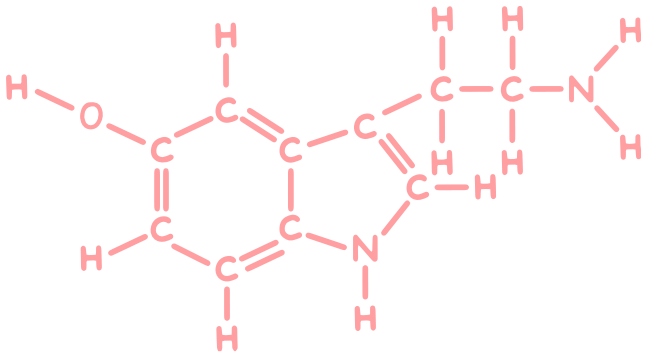


As oestrogen and progesterone fluctuate during perimenopause, the brain systems that interact with them are also responding to a changing environment.

Research suggests that changing reproductive hormones interact with serotonin, dopamine, GABA

and other signalling pathways in the brain.

This doesn't mean:
oestrogen = serotonin
or
progesterone = GABA.



Our brains are much more complicated than that.
But it does help us understand why changing reproductive hormones can sometimes be accompanied by changes in how we think, sleep, feel and respond.

And what about those hot flushes?
Oh... and the night sweats!



Those lovely and untimely hot flushes and night sweats — actually involve our brain.

Remember our hypothalamus from earlier?

As well as being involved in the conversation between our brain and ovaries, the hypothalamus also plays an important role in regulating body temperature.

Your Brain Is Adapting

The brain is remarkably adaptable.
Research suggests that during this transition it undergoes remodelling and adaptation as it responds to a changing hormonal environment.

Cognitive complaints are common during the menopausal transition, but importantly, research doesn't tell us a story of inevitable cognitive deterioration...

So, if you've been struggling with brain fog, forgetfulness, poor concentration, disrupted sleep, restlessness, irritability, low tolerance or feeling emotionally unlike yourself...

These are very real experiences reported by so many women during perimenopause and the menopause transition.

Once I began to understand more about what can happen in our brains during perimenopause and menopause, I felt far more reassured — and much less worried that I was losing my mind!

And this means menopause is a whole body and brain transition.

But there is one more very important part to this conversation...

You don't experience perimenopause separately from your life.

You experience it while you're living it...

The bigger picture...

For many of us, our 40s and early 50s can already be some of the busiest and most demanding years of our lives.



Then Perimenopause enters the picture

The Perfect Storm...

The work still needs doing.
The bills still need paying.
People still need us.
The mental load is still there.

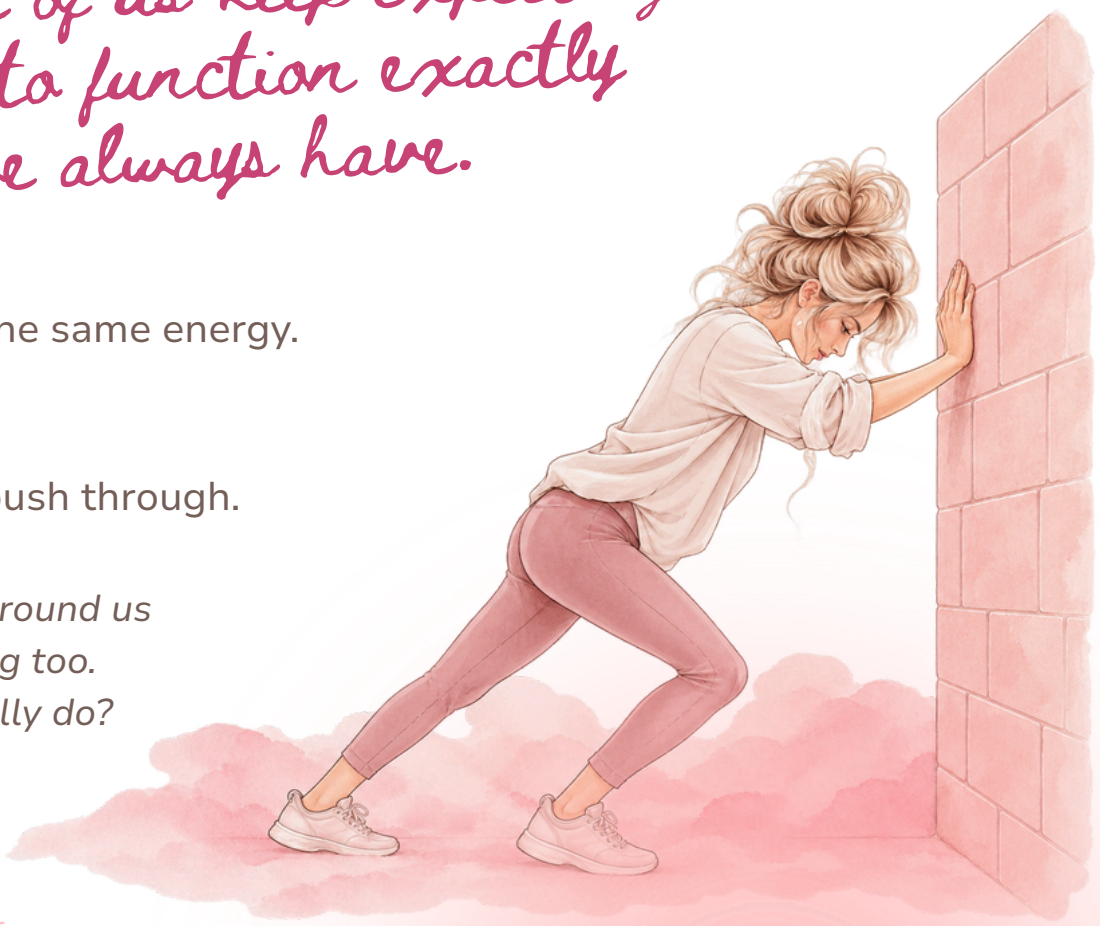
And all of the responsibilities we were carrying before perimenopause don't suddenly disappear because our biology has begun to change...

Everything can start interacting with everything else.

Yet so many of us keep expecting ourselves to function exactly as we always have.

We keep expecting the same energy.
The same capacity.
The same tolerance.
The same ability to push through.

And often, everyone around us expects the same thing too.
So what do we naturally do?



We push harder.

We become frustrated with ourselves.
We wonder why we're not coping.
We tell ourselves we should be doing better.

And eventually we wonder if We are the problem...

So what if, instead of asking what's wrong with me...
I start noticing what's changing for me?

- **What am I carrying?**
- **What seems to drain me?**
- **What has become harder than it used to be?**
- **What seems to restore me?**
- **What's changing for me?**
- **What patterns am I beginning to notice?**

And most importantly...



What is it that I might need now that I didn't need so much ten years ago?

Our biology is changing.
Our brains are adapting.
Our lives are still happening.

It's a lot, and it can be too much for one woman to be carrying all at once...

Because of all this and because of my own experience, I'm not going to finish this Conversation with another enormous list of things for you to start doing...

For me, what helped was stripping everything back. Simplifying. Allowing myself to just be for a moment, taking in what I was learning and giving myself time to make sense of it.

For you, I genuinely hope you can give yourself permission to do the same. Take in what you can. Allow this Conversation to filter through your mind and, in time, begin connecting some of it with your own experiences.

If you take only one thing away from this Conversation, I hope it is this:

give yourself some grace.♡

Give yourself some time to appreciate what your whole body and brain may be moving through, and begin noticing yourself with a little more understanding.

For now, understanding a little more is enough...

Take some time to sit with what you've learned, notice what resonates with your own experience, and perhaps begin paying a little more attention to what your body, brain and life might be asking of you now.

And whenever you're ready, you can choose what comes next...

Keep exploring

There's so much more to talk about.
In HER LIFE ALIGNED blogs, I share conversations, insights and explanations about the many things we can experience through midlife.
Visit the Blog → https://herlifealigned.com/blog/

Read More

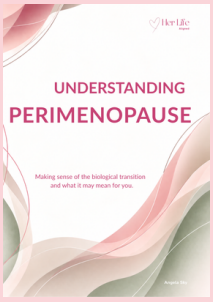
Take a look around

HER LIFE ALIGNED was created to help make midlife feel a little less confusing and a lot more understandable. Come and have a look around. There maybe more for you inside...
Visit Here → https://herlifealigned.com/

See More

Continue with the workbook

Still wondering why your body, brain and emotions feel so different?
Understanding Perimenopause workbook takes you deeper into the biology behind these changes, helping you connect more of the dots.
A special thank you for reading -
Yours for $19 instead of $29.



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Wherever you go from here, I hope you leave this Conversation understanding yourself just a little more.
Ang xx