

YES

You can talk about
MENOPAUSE

An Imperfect Guide

THIS IS FOR YOU IF



You've been wondering...

- Why didn't anyone tell me anything about menopause?
- How am I supposed to function like normal when things are so fucked?
- Is this the new normal?
- Is _____ part of it?
- Is this my fault?
- Where would I even find the time to figure this shit out?
- Why isn't there more support for me or all of us as we go through menopause?
- Will I ever feel like myself again?

Or feeling like...

- I wish I were handling this better.
- I'm not supposed to be here yet.
- I don't know where to begin.

MENOPAUSE IS BONKERS

Of course, you want to talk about it.

The good news is that many other people do, too. I've been researching and writing about menopause for the past six years, and some of the concerns and complaints I hear most are:

**Why didn't
anyone tell
me???**

**Is it just
me?**

**NO ONE
TALKS
ABOUT
IT!?!**

**How would I
know what to
ask when I
don't know
anything?**

I UNDERSTAND HOW FRUSTRATING IT IS, AND...

If we want people to talk about menopause, we need to start talking about menopause. We can totally do it; we just need some support and encouragement. I've assembled some tools in this booklet to help you get started.

PREPARATIONS

A few questions to help you understand the kind of menopause conversations you want to have.

PARTY TRICKS

Tips to make your conversations and gatherings manageable.

PROMPTS

Questions and exercises to help you get and keep the conversation going.

PREP STEP ONE:

WHY do you want to talk about menopause?

Check all that apply

- | | |
|---|--|
| <input type="checkbox"/> feel less alone | <input type="checkbox"/> commiserate |
| <input type="checkbox"/> share information | <input type="checkbox"/> blow off steam |
| <input type="checkbox"/> learn more | <input type="checkbox"/> get emotional support |
| <input type="checkbox"/> get comfortable | <input type="checkbox"/> build community |
| <input type="checkbox"/> troubleshoot symptoms | <input type="checkbox"/> know what to expect |
| <input type="checkbox"/> sort through my feelings | <input type="checkbox"/> feel understood |

These are all great reasons to talk about menopause, as are any others you noted that were not listed here. Knowing your reasons can help you discern who you want to talk with and how (what setting and what kind of conversation).

Want to blow off steam? Inviting a big group of people in the midst of midlife to a happy hour makes sense.

Troubleshooting symptoms? Go with a more targeted group and a space with some privacy.

PREP STEPS TWO & THREE:

WHO do you want to talk about menopause with?

Is it your closest friends, acquaintances, total strangers, or anybody who will listen? Who you approach for a chat or invite to a gathering depends a lot on what you want to get from the conversation and how you want to feel.

Take a moment and think about whom you'll feel most comfortable with. Who will be able to provide the information or listening that you need?

WHERE would you like to talk about menopause?

Behind closed doors? At a drop-in house party? In a committed, ongoing small group? In day-to-day conversation? The setting makes a difference. Some spaces are private, and others are inspiring or grounding.

Selecting a location isn't about perfection. The goal is to set yourself up for success by considering upfront how best to care for yourself and the other participants.

PREP STEP FOUR

WHAT situation meets your needs?

Look at the reasons **WHY** you want to talk about menopause, **WHOM** you want to talk to, and **WHERE** you think you'd like to do that and ask yourself **WHAT** kind of situation might best meet those needs. Here are a few examples.

If you want: to share information and troubleshoot symptoms with anyone else in the midst of menopause in an environment where people will feel comfortable speaking freely.

Consider: co-hosting a potluck gathering at someone's home with a few of your friends.

If you want: to know what to expect and sort through your feelings from the comfort of your own couch.

Consider: finding an online group that explores midlife or menopause questions together.

If you want: to connect with others, learn more, and don't want anyone to have to host.

Consider: gathering some friends for a menopause or midlife-focused book club at a brewery, cafe, or public library.

PARTY TRICKS

If you decide to gather a group, the suggestions below will help you stay true to the intention you started with while allowing the group to evolve.

CREATE A SET OF AGREEMENTS

People need to feel safe when they wade into new conversational territory. Setting some boundaries together and reading them at the beginning of each gathering keeps the values and intentions of the group alive and intact.

ROTATE THE ROLE OF HOST

No one likes to feel like the hall monitor all the time. Having everyone take turns running the conversations—tracking time and reminding folks about rules or agreements—is an easy way to share responsibility and reinforce everyone’s accountability to the group.

HONOR PEOPLE’S TIME

Make every effort to stick to the agreed-upon schedule (whether it’s strict or flexible—great, keep it that way!). If folks want to socialize, they can always gather early or hang around afterward to chit-chat.

SHARE WITH CARE

Tending a conversation in a way that ensures participants feel listened to requires that you endure the awkwardness of doing a familiar thing in a new way.

When people share feelings or experiences that make us uncomfortable, we rush to tell them we know how they feel, how to fix their problem, or to assure them that it's not a big deal. Unfortunately, these tendencies can be more harmful than helpful to the other person—especially if they weren't asking for solutions or encouragement. It's challenging to refrain from speaking because we don't trust that offering our presence (instead of our words) is enough, but sometimes people simply need and want us to listen to them.

Here are a few ways to foster greater listening in your conversations:

Don't interrupt. Count slowly to five before speaking. Thank the person for sharing. Comment on something specific that particularly resonated with you, or ask them an open question.

Do not give advice. If you don't agree with or can't relate to their experience, you can honor their reality by saying something like, "I understand how you feel that way."

DON'T SKIP CLOSING REFLECTIONS

Big feelings and questions can arise in these conversations. One way to create a sense of safety for that vulnerability is to maintain a solid container for the gathering. In other words, provide and maintain some sense of structure so people can relax, knowing what to expect.

Thoughtful closings are a means of honoring the space you've created together, giving people a chance to feel complete before they depart the conversation and slip back into the flow of their daily lives. Ending with reflections and questions also offers a time for you to learn how the gatherings may need to change along with participants' needs.

PROMPTS

Each prompt offered here is a starting point. Whether you are having a casual conversation, coordinating a group discussion, or doing some self-reflection, these ideas can help you connect with your physical body, emotional experience, and thoughts about menopause and your transition to it.

NOTE: All of the prompts but one direct you to write or draw in response to a question before you talk about it. You don't have to do this, but I've found that people are more talkative if they have a few moments to gather their thoughts before speaking.

Each prompt will follow this format.

PROMPT NAME

INSTRUCTIONS



DISCUSSION / REFLECTION

Additional questions for self-reflection in a journal, a group discussion, or self-reflection followed by group discussion.

HEY, WANNA TALK MENOPAUSE?

A starting point for anyone who wants to talk about menopause but doesn't know where to start.

Hot Tip: Not used to talking about bodies and menopause with others or at all? Practice asking and answering these questions aloud in front of the mirror.

INSTRUCTIONS



30 mins
to an hour

Find a partner or a group of people, lob one of these questions out there, and practice your listening skills.

Anticipatory Questions

- What do you know about menopause?
- What concerns or questions do you have?
- Has anyone ever talked to you about menopause before? If so, what did they say? How did you feel?
- I'm reading this book <insert menopause book title>. Do you want to read it with me and talk about it?

Experiential Questions

- What has menopause been like for you?
- What, if anything, has made you feel supported?
- What resources have you found helpful?
- What do you wish someone had told you?

SPIRAL ON IN

This is a helpful exercise to do on your own or at the beginning of a gathering to help everyone arrive and get present.

INSTRUCTIONS



3-5 mins

Make a dot on the page and slowly draw a spiral around it. Keep the lines as close together as you can. As you spiral, conduct a scan of your body.

Focus your attention on the very top of your head. Let it drift down over your hair and face to your neck and shoulders. Run it along your arms out to your hands and fingers. Now bring it into your chest, along your ribs, through your abdomen, and into your hips and pelvis. And finally, out through your legs and into your feet and toes.

DISCUSSION / REFLECTION



3-5 mins

Did you notice anything about your body that you weren't aware of before?

Anything else that came into your awareness as you drew?

WEATHER REPORT

An exercise to help you observe and connect with yourself.

INSTRUCTIONS



5 mins

Take the next five minutes to draw or write about your weather today. It might align with the weather outside, but it could be wholly unique to you and what you experienced today. Use words or images that make sense to you, whether familiar—cloudy, stormy, foggy, windy, sunny, rainy, breezy—or of your own making.

DISCUSSION / REFLECTION



5 mins each

Did you notice anything that surprised you?

How did you know what your weather was?


What part of yourself did you connect with to know?

How does knowing your weather make you think differently about how to proceed with your day, tend to yourself, or meet your needs?

WRINKLES

One of the hallmarks of the transition to menopause is change. This exercise helps you consider how you contend with the unexpected.

INSTRUCTIONS

 12-15 mins

Take a piece of paper and crumple it in your fist. Uncrumple the paper, and for the next five minutes, trace its lines with your pen or pencil while contemplating the question: Can a wrinkle be beautiful?

Note: you can interpret the word wrinkle in whatever way you want here.

Now, spend the next 7-10 minutes identifying and exploring a wrinkle in your life- you can write, draw, or do a combination of both.

DISCUSSION / REFLECTION 5 mins each

What did you learn about where you encounter or how you respond to wrinkles?

Any observations about the kinds of things wrinkles yield- what comes from them?

Does anyone want to share what they wrote or drew?

HANDS (& OTHER PARTS)

A gentle opportunity to focus on and connect with a specific part of your body.

INSTRUCTIONS



3-5mins

Slowly trace your hand while thinking about what hands mean to you, how you use them, when and what you think about them, anything you might want to say to them, etc. When you've finished tracing, jot down any thoughts that stood out.

If hands don't resonate today, feel free to draw and consider a different part of your body.

DISCUSSION / REFLECTION



3 mins each

Did anything come up that surprised you?

Which other parts of your body do you feel inspired to explore?

MY DEAR BODY,

You are never not in your body. When was the last time you two talked?

INSTRUCTIONS



10-15 mins

Write a letter to your body to express how you feel about your relationship. Feel free to explore your past, present, and future. The letter might include appreciations, resentments, apologies, and no small number of surprises.

DISCUSSION / REFLECTION



3 mins each

How did it feel to address your body directly like this?

What did you learn about yourself, your body, or your relationship?

How did this interaction with your body feel different from the way you relate day-to-day?

DISTANCE

“Young women hold power by distancing themselves from older women.” -Ashton Applewhite, author and anti-ageist

“...if women themselves are not interested in mature women, if even mature women are not interested in mature women, we are faced with a vast and insidious problem.”

-Germaine Greer, *The Change*

INSTRUCTIONS



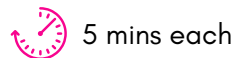
Write or draw in response to the following questions:

Consider how you are and aren't interested in older women.

Do you distance yourself from older women? If yes, how?

How might your thoughts about and behavior toward older women affect or influence what you can imagine for yourself as you age?

DISCUSSION / REFLECTION



What, if anything, did you learn about yourself that surprised you?

What insights did you have about your relationship to aging?

PEACE

“Understanding is not a prerequisite for honor, love, or respect.” In *The Body Is Not An Apology*, author Sonya Renee Taylor encourages us to release ourselves from the tyranny of understanding for the sake of peace.

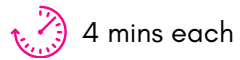
INSTRUCTIONS



Respond to the question:

What are you willing to stop struggling to understand about your body, or what your body is doing in its transition to menopause, for the sake of peace?

DISCUSSION / REFLECTION



How does it feel to consider letting go of trying to understand this part of your body or its process?

DOORWAY

The transition to menopause is sometimes described poetically as a doorway or threshold between life phases. In her book *What Fresh Hell Is This*, author Heather Corrina points out that how someone feels about a transition is informed by what they believe they are transitioning to. This exercise is an opportunity to explore your ideas about where this transition will take you.

INSTRUCTIONS



5-7 mins

Write or draw in response to the question, if menopause is a doorway, what do you believe is waiting for you on the other side of that door?

Explore both your hopes and fears.

DISCUSSION / REFLECTION



5 mins each

What did you learn from this one?

Where did your understanding of what's on the other side of the door come from?

How certain are you that your ideas about what's on the other side of the door are true?

PERIMENOPAUSAL PUPPET TROUPE

In an interview in *Vulture*, actress Parker Posey described the experience of perimenopause (the transition time leading up to menopause) like this, “Every little girl and grown woman you ever were, they all come out to play. I call it the perimenopausal puppet troupe.”

INSTRUCTIONS



8-10 mins

Draw or describe the cast of your perimenopausal puppet troupe.

And, if you have time, capture what it is they're here to say or draw your attention to.

DISCUSSION / REFLECTION



4 mins each

What, if any, information did you glean from your various selves?

What are they experiencing?

What demands are they making?

What do they agree or disagree about?

PLAQUES HONORING MOMENTS OF PRIVATE COURAGE

This exercise is inspired by a passage in David Whyte's book, *The Three Marriages: Reimagining Work, Self and Relationship*.

INSTRUCTIONS



10 mins

Consider a moment in your life where you made a courageous decision to stay, or to leave, to make your demands, or to deny the demands of others.

Draw or describe a plaque that would honor that moment.

What would your plaque say?

Where would it be mounted?

DISCUSSION / REFLECTION



5 mins each

What kind of plaques did you create?

What kind of courage do they honor?

With whom would you want to share them?

Can you imagine a plaque that would be helpful-inspiring, comforting, affirming—to see as you transition to menopause? What can you tell us about it?

ABOUT IMPERFECT GUIDES

Imperfect Guides evolved from my belief that a small amount of sound information and encouragement goes a long way toward improving everyday affairs.

I'm **Sasha Davies**, author of imperfect titles like **The Menopause Companion: A Beginner's Guide To Owning Your Transition From Peri To Post**, **The Guide to West Coast Cheese**, and **Caring Confrontations**. I also write a Substack, **I Text Myself**, about what might be possible if we let go of the fantasy of being different than we are.



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