

Menopause retreat: a holiday for those darned hormones

2 July 2012 by Katie Libran

In a leafy Surrey location, Katie Libran spends five days learning to manage the menopause naturally, with wholefoods, supplements, yoga, massage and relaxation

 [MenopauseRetreat_Yoga](#)

Adopt the position: relaxation techniques are part of Stewart's holistic approach

If I said 'menopause retreat' to you, what would you imagine? Something involving California, teepees and chanting, probably. But no, I am at Grayshott Spa in Surrey, convening for a five-day break.

Although this solid country mansion has something of the air of a sanatorium about it, it is surrounded by 47 acres of lovely green stuff, mature trees and bunnies. Alfred Lord Tennyson shackled up here (and that was before they had an open-air pool).

Now, the rooms are traditional-lite, their mini-bars stocked with nothing but water (but you can sneak out to the farm shop just across the road). And if the food is a bit Good Housekeeping, the atmosphere is quite 'Om' enough for the experience ahead.

It is to avoid a different experience from one that previous generations have had to suffer that we're undergoing this. The number of women in the world who have passed their 50th birthday is expected to rise dramatically from 467 million in 1990 to an estimated 1,200 million by 2030. This figure – caused both by population increase and prolonged life expectancy – means that many of the women will spend more than a third of their lives beyond The Big M. In other words, post-menopause.

What happens to the body

During menopause, oestrogen production declines, leading to a reduction in bone density and an overwhelming list of possible symptoms. These include hot flushes, night sweats, interrupted sleep, headaches, bad breath, bloating, mood swings, loss of confidence, depression, heart disease, dementia and loss of libido.

It is no surprise that, for many, the menopause blights lives. And women are often not sure where to find support.

At Grayshott Spa, the [Menopause Retreat](#) addresses the problems of this major life change. The course leader is women's health pioneer and nutritionist Maryon Stewart. She is a formidable lady who started the Angelus Foundation, which educates people about the risks of 'legal highs'.

She is a mother of four, author of 26 books, a prolific broadcaster, a counsellor, the founder of a women's health advisory service and proponent of alternative healthcare. Additionally, she's a pocket Venus who can do the splits (but only after she's warmed up).

Seeds and beans

Maryon has devised The Natural Menopause Kit, a scientifically based approach. Before the retreat, you are asked to complete extensive paperwork about your diet, symptoms and medical history.

Once you're at Grayshott, the retreat kicks off with dietary advice. You need the right nutrients for optimal hormonal performance, otherwise you're conducting the orchestra with one hand. Some plants (soybeans, red clover, linseed and, in much lower quantities, green tea, peas, pinto beans and lentils) contain naturally occurring compounds called isoflavones. These closely resemble the molecular structure of oestrogen and act as phytoestrogens (i.e. like oestrogen in the body).

The idea is that if you take the right amount and right combination of isoflavones, the body will be fooled into thinking that the ovaries are still working. If you get enough of it into your receptor sites, you'll replicate your pre-menopausal state, thereby averting/reducing/killing your symptoms and potentially protecting the long-term health of your heart and bones.

Almost immediately, we ladies on the retreat get to sample the delights of naturally occurring oestrogen: pumpkin, sesame and flax seeds and enough soya to feed an army. It might be with a slight tightness in our voice that some of us say, "Pass the spiced poached pear with tofu," as we'll have already been given a Body Composition Analysis in which we stand on a metal plate and a nasty machine gives us a printout revealing whether we're too fat.

Maryon teaches us about the foods that aggravate menopausal symptoms. These include spicy foods, alcohol, caffeine and hot drinks. Instead, we should go for those oft-recommended treats, mackerel and green leafy vegetables.

Your nutrient levels

She might suggest having your levels of nutrients, vitamins, mineral and biochemical levels measured at Biolab in London – the only laboratory in the country doing tests of this kind – to determine any deficiencies that need to be addressed nutritionally or by other non-drug means.

Once the results are revealed, she can tinker and add to the supplements she has already recommended; Red Clover or Sea Buckthorn Oil, for example. She doesn't use anything unless it has been given the thumbs-up by the men in white coats.

But life according to Maryon is not just a question of pill-popping and glugging soya. She offers a smattering of DIY spiritual tips (of the 'make gratitude lists' and 'capture the joy in the moment' ilk) and there is something in the way she lives her life that make these extra attractive.

Importantly, she also suggests various changes in lifestyle. Exercise is a crucial component of the programme, so you'll be expected to spring out of bed before breakfast to do aqua aerobics and take walks, sweetened only by the latter being across the beautiful National Trust acres that adjoin Grayshott.

She is also keen on ladies *d'un certain age* having at least 20 minutes of relaxation a day. It is proven to reduce night sweats and hot flushes. The latter, incidentally, are caused by the body trying to kick-start the ovaries, rather like an engine being revved when the gear box is broken.

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Now this is where you get to the *ahhhh* bit of the retreat: the relaxing massages (often from talented menopausal therapists), yoga classes and use of the Pzizz machine, which plays hypnotic, relaxing, sleep-inducing soundzzzzz.

Not on the scrap heap

One of Maryon's aims is to help women come off – or avoid going on to – HRT, with its possibility of breast tenderness, bloating and headaches, and potential health risks including breast cancer.

Her programme has been proven in two studies (conducted over five months, with 50 and 100 women respectively) to help more than 90 per cent of women wean off HRT and overcome their symptoms naturally.

Her overriding message is that women can be more in control of their health prospects, rather than feeling on the scrap heap, as some do once they reach 'The Change'.

You may not like the soya worship. And eating isoflavones to combat nature's joke is not a new approach. But, ladies, the menopause isn't a problem for Japanese women, whose diet is high in such foods, especially soya. So it's worth a try.

Either way, you'll finish the retreat with a greater understanding of how to look after your ageing body, mind and soul. You may not feel as good as Cherie Lunghi, who reported feeling "500 per cent better" a few months after doing it. But you'll leave with hope, supplements and the promise of a renewed libido. A good enough alternative to going downhill?

[Grayshott Spa's Menopause Retreat](#) is a five-night retreat for women pre-, during menopause or post-menopause. From £1,490 per person. Dates for 2012: 9-14 July, 30 Sept-5 Oct, 18-23 Nov.

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Further reading

[Beat Menopause Naturally](#) by Maryon Stewart

[World Menopause Day: bring it on!](#)

[Jill Shaw Ruddock: your new five a day](#)



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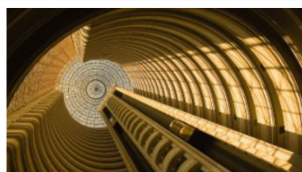


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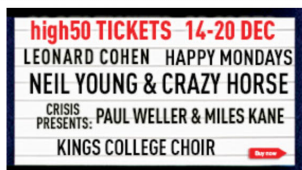


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