

Surviving mid-life

The word menopause doesn't have the same positive ring as that other "m" word, marriage, but sometimes we forget that many positives come with this natural phase of life.

Certainly it can be a difficult time dealing with mood swings, hot flushes and all the rest when you might also be battling with that other major stress of mid-life – teenage children.

But all of this is just a natural progression of life. Once we come to terms with the concept of ageing and look at the positive side of it, we can grab the chance to start to feel good about what we are, not what our outward packaging might be.

Many women approaching 50 decide that now is "me time" and take the chance to do things they always wanted to do, or to change jobs and pursue something more meaningful for them. There is often a new confidence about women of this age who have accepted the changes within them, let go of their hang-ups about ageing and menopause and decide to treat them as natural phases of life, and confront them head-on.

It's not only women who find life changing for them in the middle years. Men are often also struggling with changes in their identities. Statistics suggest that about 70 percent of men aged over 55 will have some form of sexual function change, from minor to significant.

And in the workforce, these relative "old bulls" suddenly find themselves challenged by very assertive younger bulls, and this can feel very threatening for the baby boomer generation of males.

Organisational re-structures are a real problem, because men who lose out may find it difficult to re-enter the workforce because of their age.

Some men decide to attempt to hang on to eternal youth by taking a partner 20 years younger than themselves, which may work for a while, but it is hardly a reliable elixir of youth.

Men too need to accept their ages and stage of life and not try to modify their identities to what they think they should be.

Partners of these men need to be sympathetic and supportive, because many men bottle things up, and might suddenly feel the need to leave the relationship just to escape what is happening to them.

Expressing feelings to a sympathetic partner early is the way to avoid mid-life going pear-shaped, and to survive the challenge of this phase. If you care about your intimate relationship, the concept of growing older together harmoniously is a good one.

Survival tips

- **Treat menopause as a natural life phase and focus on the positives**
- **Reassess life and choose some new goals that are important to you**
- **Be sensitive to the changes that male partners may be going through. Mid-life challenges affect both sexes.**