

The menopause left me suicidal



Diane had her husband Martin's support



When **Diane Danzebrink** experienced 'the change', the joy left her life. Now she's campaigning for every woman to get the support they deserve...

Fanning myself with my hand, I felt a fiery heat spread up my neck and into my face.

'I'm having a hot flush again,' I said to my husband, Martin, as I headed to the back door to get some fresh air.

It was 2012 and three weeks since I'd undergone major surgery to remove my womb, ovaries and cervix due to suspected ovarian cancer, and the op had revealed severe endometriosis, adenomyosis and a large fibroid.

While a full hysterectomy isn't an operation you undergo lightly, especially at 45, it had been made clear to me I didn't really have a choice.

It meant going into a medically-induced menopause too, but at the time I thought that menopause was just hot flushes and no more periods.

Sadly, this assumption was incredibly naïve – and not a single medical professional warned me that the menopause can have more than 30 symptoms – mental as well as physical.

I had heard all the scary stuff about hormone replacement therapy for years and nobody at the hospital mentioned it, so a few weeks after my surgery I saw a nutritionist who gave me seven pots of herbs and sent me on my way, assuring me they would help. But three months after my surgery, my life fell apart.

I started waking at 2am with my heart racing due to crippling anxiety and struggled to focus

'If there's one thing I've learned'
 'The menopause can be an opportunity, if you get the right support. It can be a pitstop to re-evaluate as you move into the next stage of your life.'

on my work as an equine physiotherapist.

As the weeks passed, I became agoraphobic and couldn't even face walking my dogs. I stopped answering the telephone and my thinking was so irrational that I wouldn't open my post – I was convinced it would be bad news. My mum came to stay because Martin was too worried to leave me alone in the house. I felt like a worthless, useless husk of a person, who was making life very difficult for my poor family.

'They would be better off without me,' I thought desperately. They tried to get me to see a doctor, but I was terrified that I would be committed

to a mental health unit.

Things came to a head when I was home on my own for a few hours and got into the car with my four dogs for the first time in months. My memories of that day are hazy, but I found myself on a main road near to where I lived and came incredibly close to intentionally putting my car in front of a lorry.

As I went to do it, one of my dogs, Henry, barked. The sound brought me back to reality.

I was absolutely horrified at what I had almost done and that my beloved dogs were in the car with me.

Tearfully and shaking, I drove the couple of miles home and as soon as I saw Martin, I told him what I'd almost done. He

got me in front of a GP that same night and thankfully she recognised what was wrong and took the time to explain what was happening to me and why.

I wasn't losing my mind. My deeply depressive and anxious feelings were a result of the rapid loss of oestrogen I'd suffered due to having both of my ovaries removed.

'You really need to have hormone replacement therapy,' she said and then explained why it was so important and the up-to-date safety information, which was such a relief.

'You should have been prescribed hormone replacement therapy straight away,' she said.

I started on HRT patches right away and within a week, a chink

of light appeared in the dark scary world I'd been living in. It wasn't an overnight change, given how low I'd been, and I eventually had to see a private specialist to tweak my medication.

As the weeks went on and slowly but surely I started to feel a little more like myself, my initial relief turned to anger as I thought about how close I had come to taking my own life.

I wondered if I'd been really unlucky or if there were others who were struggling...

When I began to research the issue online, I was horrified to find chatrooms filled with women saying: 'I don't know who I am any more', 'I feel lost' and 'I feel like I'm going mad'.

They weren't just people



Diane (second from left) has become an activist at 55



Being interviewed on BBC News, she's keen to spread the word

'I felt frustrated and angry at this needless suffering'

I revisited the counselling training I'd done years before and attended professional menopause nurse training too. I joined the British

Menopause Society and started counselling women experiencing menopause in early 2015.

When new NICE guidelines were published for medical health professionals at the end of 2015, I felt compelled to speak publicly about my ordeal to help raise awareness. But at the time, it was a very lonely place, menopause was still a taboo subject and there were no celebrities speaking out about how it had affected them.

Needing to reach more people, I set up my not-for-profit organisation Menopause Support and in October 2018, I launched #MakeMenopauseMatter.

The campaign has three aims – mandatory menopause training for GPs and medical students, better guidance and support in every workplace, and menopause in schools.

Four years on, our petition has 172,000 signatures and we've made great strides.

Menopause was added to the school curriculum in England in September 2020, which will not just empower future generations but help them to be more compassionate to the women in their life going through it.

Celebrities like Davina McCall and Mariella Frostrup

are speaking out and MPs like Carolyn Harris brought the topic to the top of the political agenda.

HRT will be available for one annual prescription charge of £18.70 from April next year, although that won't help if you can't get your GP to give it to you. I want better menopause care and support for everybody. That's why I continue to share my story.

There are currently 13 million of us in Britain who are either peri- or post-menopausal – mothers, grandmothers, partners, colleagues, friends. Their symptoms can be debilitating, costing them their physical and mental health, their relationships and their careers.

In the worst cases, it costs them their life too. Figures from the Samaritans show that suicide rates among women are highest between the ages of 45 and 54. This is no coincidence.

But it doesn't have to be this way – and I'm living proof.

What I went through was terrifying and I wouldn't wish it on anyone, but I believe it happened for a reason.

I never expected to be an activist at 55, but in 2015 I couldn't wait for somebody else to speak up about this injustice.

Now I dream of the day where my campaign is no longer needed and every woman gets the care and compassion they deserve.