

# **Michael van Straten's Bodytalk Celebrity Menopause**

Being a celebrity is no protection against the passage of time and every woman, regardless of their station in life, will go through the menopause – the only difference is they have to do it in public.

Some women sail through the menopause without batting an eyelid. For others it represents months and sometimes years of discomfort and misery. It's my experience that women who regard the menopause as an illness are those who suffer worst. It is not a disease, it is not the end of all life; it is in fact, for many women, the beginning of their golden years free from the monthly discomfort of difficult periods and of contraception. They feel liberated and sparkle with a new lease of life and vitality.

To be sure, there are medical consequences to the menopause, but it is with these problems that natural remedies come into their own. Most important are hormone-like plant chemicals called phytoestrogens and they can relieve hot flushes, control mood swings, strengthen bones, protect against heart disease and keep your skin glowing and healthy.

When your periods stop, no matter at what age or for what reason, menopause begins. Anorexia, over exercising - especially in young, elite athletes like gymnasts and runners - and simply just being too thin can all affect your hormone production and cause an artificial menopause. In just the same way, having a total hysterectomy (removal of ovaries and womb) produces the same result.

Here's how two famous women have used natural methods to cope with their symptoms.

Ingrid Tarrant at 50 is the mother of two boys aged 13 and 24 and two girls 16 and 20 and the wife of TV celebrity Chris Tarrant. She's been very healthy throughout her life.

"My father was a typical stiff upper lip gentleman who always denied the existence of any illness. I soon learnt not to bother about being ill as I never got sympathy and no-one took any notice. This attitude has stood me in good stead throughout my life as I never missed a day of school and I've never taken to my sick bed. My periods were so regular you could set your watch by them. They started every fourth Saturday at 11.00 in the morning.

"I was a guest at a 'This is Your Life' programme when everything changed. I suddenly felt very ill, dashed home and my period started. It had only been a few days since the last one finished. I was referred to a gynaecologist and a scan showed that I had an ovarian cyst which was removed two years ago. After the op I had two normal periods then nothing. I haven't had any other symptoms except some pain but the doctor couldn't find anything wrong. Even the blood test he described as 'surprisingly normal'.

"Then it all seemed to happen overnight. Terrible hot flushes, feeling very tired, always struggling to get things done – I knew I was in the menopause. I've never been much of a drinker but now I can't even tolerate a glass of wine. I'm a bit worried about my hair which was very fine to start with but so far it's no worse and my nails are fine. I don't take pills unless it's absolutely vital. I didn't even like the contraceptive pill and there's no way I was going to take HRT. Fortunately I've got a brilliant local pharmacist and he suggested an all-natural menopause supplement called Isovon. So far I've taken it for nine months and I feel fine."

MICHAEL SAYS:

There are many women like Ingrid who are very anxious about the risks of taking HRT and so they should be. I've campaigned against the drug company's efforts to turn the menopause into a disease when in fact it's a

normal, natural process which for nearly all women can be successfully managed with diet and natural supplements. The Isovon that Ingrid is taking is an all-natural supplement extracted from non genetically-modified soya. Just like the beans themselves the pill contains plant hormones which help control the symptoms and protect against heart disease and osteoporosis.

At 57i and 9st3lbs, Ingrid's BMI is a perfect 20.5 though for the sake of her bones she shouldn't lose any weight. Considering she hates cooking, Ingrid is very good about her diet as she's never bought ready meals, junk food, McDonalds or fizzy drinks. She has porridge, fruit or eggs on toast for breakfast; a healthy salad sandwich at lunchtime; and cooks a family 'meat and two veg' meal every evening. Ingrid takes an extra vitamin C, a B complex and cod liver oil every day and though she hates going to the gym and never does specific exercises, she's always been physically very active.

I'm sure she'll sail through the menopause, but for a bit of extra insurance she needs to eat some oily fish – canned salmon, pilchards or sardines are perfect – make sure she puts some cheese in her lunchtime sandwich and eat a small pot of live yoghurt every day.

It's a one-a-day capsule taken with the evening meal

Angela Rippon has been in the public eye for years as newsreader, presenter of Come Dancing, most famously for showing her legs on the Morecambe and Wise Show, and most recently for her great presentation of Strictly Ballroom. For Angela the menopause presented very particular problems.

"I've always been extremely healthy and physically active" says Angela. "I originally trained as a dancer and have ridden horses for most of my life. Unfortunately I was plagued with digestive problems until I finally discovered that I was allergic to all wheat and dairy products. I've avoided them completely for many years now and didn't really give it a thought till my periods started to get irregular in my early 50s. My GP confirmed that the menopause was beginning and he was very keen for me to take HRT as he

thought my bones were at greater than normal risk of osteoporosis because I didn't eat dairy products.

"I'm now 60 but on my wedding day when I was 24 I weighed 7st6lb and I'm 5f6i tall. I know that being that much underweight in your 20s is bad enough risk for osteoporosis without possibly missing out on calcium for so many years. Even though I didn't have any other menopausal symptoms the GP scared me enough to start taking HRT and that was even more frightening, so I stopped and went on to a natural red clover supplement called Novogen.

"Although I've done yoga and swum a lot for years, I knew I needed more weight bearing exercise so three years ago I took up tennis and now play for at least 3 or 4 hours every week. I'm not much good but I'm very enthusiastic and run about a lot. I'm really careful with my diet and at weekends have to get up at 4.30 and I don't finish reading the news till 11, so I always eat a good breakfast. Just to make sure I do take a daily calcium supplement as well and eat lots of soya foods.

"I really think women are leading the way to a more natural approach to the menopause by asking their doctors about alternatives like Novogen Red Clover."

MICHAEL SAYS:

I've known Angela for many years and because of her lactose intolerance she takes great care to see that she eats regularly and properly. She's right to worry about not having dairy products and being so thin when she was young but she's now been 9st6lb for years giving her an excellent BMI of 21. She makes a fresh juice of apple, carrot and beetroot every day and has that with her breakfast of buckwheat porridge. She doesn't drink regular tea or coffee and has fennel or mint tea instead, and for lunch she has chicken or oily fish with salad. Every few weeks she makes a huge saucepan of meat and root vegetable stew and then puts 20 separate portions in the freezer. Thanks to the microwave she can come home at any time and have an instant healthy

meal which is also organic as she buys all her meat and veg from Planet Organic.

Angela eats masses of vegetables with bananas, satsumas, figs and dates every day. She has a wonderful local baker where she can get bread made from other grains rather than wheat.

Red Clover has been a traditional source of plant hormones for many years but scientific studies have shown how these isoflavones can help women in the menopause and after it by relieving hot flushes, reducing bone loss and protecting the heart, without the increased risk of breast cancer associated with HRT.

## MORE ABOUT MENOPAUSE

The first thing you'll notice is that periods become lighter and less frequent. They may stop for several months. This time is called the perimenopause which usually lasts from 2-4 years, though in some cases as long as 15. Most women suffer worse symptoms during the perimenopause than after the menopause but their problems are frequently ignored during these key years from 35-45. All the menopausal symptoms can occur and it's never too early to start using complementary treatments.

**WARNING** – Don't get pregnant, unless you want to. Scanty and irregular periods don't mean infertility so don't abandon contraception until you've been 12 consecutive months without a period.

Far too many women put up with these symptoms without being certain that it is the perimenopause. Many other medical conditions may be responsible for any of these symptoms but doctors are often reluctant to do hormone tests for this group of young women. Don't worry – you can do it yourself. There is now a great home test kit producing 98% accurate results in three minutes so you'll know whether or not your menopause is starting. The Vielle Kit

measures hormone levels in urine, an accurate predictor of your menopausal status.

## COMMON SYMPTOMS

**Hot Flushes:** Low levels of oestrogen are the trigger but stress, being very thin or fat, unsuitable clothes, room temperature and the weather can all make things worse. Vitamin E helps and you get it from cold pressed vegetable oils like wheatgerm, safflower and olive oil, and all nuts and seeds.

One of the best nutritional supplements is Confiance from Wassen. It's a combination of vitamins E and B, and minerals which reduced hot flushes, mood swings, headaches and irritability in the majority of women in a large trial.

**Headaches:** Often related to the hot flushes, and also to the stress and tension that arises at this time. Beetroot is excellent here, but don't forget the leaves and red stems. Use both root and leaf, raw in salads, dressed with sunflower seed oil, lemon juice and sprinkled with sesame seeds. Beetroot improves the oxygen carrying ability of the blood, contains iron and is a good source of folic acid. For severe pain try the herbal remedy Feverfew.

**Brittle Bones:** It's never too late to improve your bones, but it's easier sooner rather than later. More calcium, magnesium, zinc and vitamin D are essential. Eat oily fish, milk, cheese and yoghurt and lots of dark green, red and yellow fruit and veg. Canned sardines are special as you get calcium and vitamin D but you also need weight bearing exercise and sunlight. Take a good supplement like Wassen Osteomarine.

**Skin Problems:** Caused by falling hormone levels, ageing skin, wrinkles and poor skin tone are common. Eating more soy based foods like tofu, soya beans and soya milk provides natural plant hormones that will help skin but

also protect bones and your heart during and after the menopause. Eat avocados for vitamin E and all the dark coloured fruits and vegetables for betacarotene. Essential fatty acids from fish and flax seed oils are important.

Depression: Another common problem which needs calcium, magnesium, and the amino acid Tryptophan, will you'll get from dairy products, spinach, chickpeas, sesame seeds, soya beans, cashew nuts, almonds, wholemeal flour, brown rice, bananas, dried fruits and seafood. B vitamins are vital, so eat liver, oily fish, wholegrain cereals, eggs, spinach and yeast extracts. Exercise produces feelgood hormones as well as strengthening your bones.

Sexual Difficulties: Low oestrogen affects the vagina, but an active sex life delays these changes. For widows and single women masturbation is as effective as intercourse as it's regular orgasms which count. Eat all the vitamin A and E rich foods, take one of the plant hormone supplements and buy a vibrator.

Heart Disease: The menopause means women are as likely to suffer heart disease as men so nutrition is even more vital. Vitamin C reduces the risk of blood clots; garlic and onions and all the wholegrain cereals lower cholesterol, and a little red wine, a handful of prunes and a brisk walk every day are enjoyable heart protectors.

## **HRT:**

I've been anti since the beginning as I've never been convinced that the benefit justifies the risk of taking these hormones. There are safe natural alternatives that may not be as effective but are without any risk. Any woman with a family history of breast cancer or who has had it herself is at much increased risk if she takes HRT. However I've seen women whose menopause symptoms are so horrendous that their lives become miserable and hopeless. In this situation may are prepared to take the risk and for them I believe it is justified as it gives them back their lives.

## NATURAL ALTERNATIVES TO HRT AND USEFUL SUPPLEMENTS

These are all based on natural hormone-like substances extracted from plants, usually soya beans or red clover. For many women they reduce, control or even prevent the worst symptoms and they certainly help protect bones from osteoporosis. There's even some evidence which shows their heart protective properties too. Among the best are:

Novogen Red Clover, £18.99 [www.novogenredclover.com](http://www.novogenredclover.com) . For a free menopause action pack call 0845 603 1021

Isovon, £14.95, 0800 389 6663 , [www.isovonforwomen.co.uk](http://www.isovonforwomen.co.uk)

Menoflavon, £14.95

Estroven, £14.99

Vitabiotics Menopace, £14.75

For mild to moderate depression and mood swings:

Kira St. John's Wort, £14.95

MedicHerb Black Cohosh and Valerian, £12.99

MedicHerb Sage and Ginkgo, £9.99

Fish oils and flax seed are both a great help in relieving the symptoms of the menopause MorEPA is a highly purified, concentrated fish oil capsule super-rich in essential fatty acids.

Barleans Organic FortiFlax is ground flax seeds high in lignans which are rich in phytoestrogens which help restore hormone balance and protect against osteoporosis see [www.healthyandessential.com](http://www.healthyandessential.com)

All from chemists, health stores, and Nutri Centre, [www.nutricentre.com](http://www.nutricentre.com)

Breast Cancer Care Helpline [www.breastcancercare.org.uk](http://www.breastcancercare.org.uk) tel: 0808 800 6000

British Menopause Society [www.the-bms.org](http://www.the-bms.org) 01628 890199

National Osteoporosis Society [www.nos.org.uk](http://www.nos.org.uk) 0845 450 0230

The Vielle Menopause test kit costs £14.95 for two tests and is available from Superdrug, Tesco, Morrisons, Lloyds, Moss and Local Pharmacies. For further information visit [www.viellemenopausetest.com](http://www.viellemenopausetest.com)

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