



## Midlife as a Gateway to Authenticity

By Kalpana (Rose) M. Kumar, M.D.

Are you a midlife woman who doesn't understand what is happening to your body and mind?

Have you told your doctor how you're feeling and were you dismissed with medications or hormone replacement therapy?

Do you feel overwhelmed by the volume of information available about managing midlife and peri-menopause?

I am not only a practicing internist, but a midlife woman. I have been helping midlife women for over two decades with their menopausal symptoms and have gained significant personal insight about how little support is currently available for us.

During my forties I noticed my body and energy level change. I began to feel tired and heavy. I also felt restless and had trouble sleeping through the night. I looked for answers to these symptoms in my medical books and journal articles. I even went to my gynecologist to understand why I was feeling this way. All she had for me were prescription drugs and hormone replacement therapy. She told me I entered the category in life known as peri-menopause. "It's downhill from here" she said. My visit was a huge disappointment. As a scientist and a problem solver, I was determined to understand why I was having these symptoms and what I could do to restore my sense of health and well-being.

I found a lot written on this subject. What I read was theoretical, not practical and it did not address the deeper aspects of what I was looking for. Why did my soul feel restless? Why did I feel emotional 'heaviness'? Why was my body changing in this way and why were issues resurfacing that I thought were solved? I was forty-two when I began to feel this way. I was an intelligent and dynamic woman who had lived a very healthy lifestyle. I had also created a successful medical practice and on the surface, appeared to be at the top of my game. Deep inside, I felt empty and disconnected. My marriage felt deeply unsupportive and I found myself less able to tolerate the disrespectful ways I was being treated. It was as if I could no longer compromise myself to adapt. My tolerance for the superficial was receding. I found myself being more reactive and angry.

What I discovered was that hormonal shifts in my body, normal during this stage of life, brought with them emotional and soul shifts that were offering me an opportunity to take a look at my life from a deeper perspective.

This time in a woman's life holds immense transformational power. When a woman arrives at this gateway her hormones shift and she recalibrates her identity. She is meant to question who she has pretended to be and move deep into her authentic self. Our society deems this a 'midlife crisis'. I like to think of it as an alchemical process of becoming real. Women need to learn how to take care of themselves through this gateway and beyond. They need to learn how to use the framework of

transformation to connect with their intrinsic power and truth. At this juncture, women are in need of balance at all levels. Most of us live unbalanced lives up to this point, taking care of others, but neglecting to take care of ourselves. As our bodies change we are called to heal our self-neglect.

I would like to offer some simple solutions to support your midlife transformation:

1. Work with a physician who can help you balance your hormones, not replace them. Bio-identical hormones are much safer alternatives to synthetic ones. They can quickly restore your feeling of well-being when used correctly in small doses.
2. Acupuncture can make a significant difference in your well-being particularly if you are having a difficult time with menopausal symptoms such as hot flashes and night sweats.
3. Have your thyroid levels checked. Make sure your physician orders a thyroid panel to provide a better understanding of the status of your thyroid as it can become sluggish during midlife.
4. Clean up your diet. Change your diet to one that is mostly organic and plant based. A plant based diet has been shown to significantly lower the risk of heart disease, diabetes and cancer, three of the most common diseases in midlife and beyond.
5. Begin taking omega-3 supplements and vitamin D. They will decrease inflammation and strengthen your immune system, reducing the risk of disease.
6. Make aerobic exercise a priority. At least 20 minutes of exercise, 6 days a week is needed for stress reduction and cardiac health.
7. Incorporate massage therapy, yoga and meditation in your life. It helps heal stress and bring you into contact with your authentic self.
8. Work with a psychotherapist to gain a better understanding of your needs and desires and to dismantle the parts of you that no longer serve your life.
9. Make a commitment to be true to yourself and seek a deeper sense of meaning every day.

I invite you to reframe midlife from a time of crisis to transformation. The best years of your life are ahead of you. Grace them with understanding and compassion so you can experience the power and sacredness of your authentic self.

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