

Alice in weight-loss wonderland



THE NEW FRONTIER OF WOMEN'S HEALTH

Our weight-loss columnist Alice Dogruyol, who has type 1 diabetes, shares her recent experience of having a midlife MOT with WomenWise, and what it revealed.

I'd been so busy with work, family, travel and trying to lose weight that I almost forgot my 46th birthday this summer! Perhaps I'd been subconsciously trying to forget it. Whilst I do feel and see changes in my body, skin, energy, and mood – and not for the better – I tend to attribute them to diabetes rather than perimenopause. And while all my girlfriends seem to be constantly talking about their menopausal symptoms, I have completely ignored mine, and I think I know why...

Not only do I go to the hospital and my GP regularly for diabetes-related check-ups, and never once have the words perimenopause or menopause come up, but also, I have been in denial that I must be perimenopausal because I still have a regular menstrual cycle and I still want to have a baby. Controversial, I know.

I have had multiple miscarriages,

completed six rounds of IVF, and had five embryos frozen about four years ago; I've been waiting for the right time to attempt a frozen embryo transfer. I am acutely aware the clock is ticking but I have never felt the time was right, health-wise, to put one in. I have been dreaming that a surrogate will pop up out of nowhere and offer to carry my embryos, or that I will win the lottery and be able to afford to pay for one.

Given that I don't play the lottery and a miracle is unlikely, I am continuing to gather as much information as I can on my own body, and get as healthy as I can, in the hope that one day I carry those embryos. I am a big believer in arming myself with as much knowledge as possible and advocating for my own health. After all, I saved my own life by diagnosing myself with type 1 diabetes when doctors kept telling me it was type 2.

SIMPLE AT-HOME TESTS

So, when a friend recommended WomenWise, which supports women through perimenopause and menopause with extensive testing, analysis and tailored plans, I jumped at the chance to see what it would reveal. My friend showed me the bespoke reports she'd received, and I was transfixed – I had never seen anything like it; it is the next frontier of women's health.

The company was founded by Sarah Williamson, a nutritional therapist and researcher. She graduated from the Institute of Optimum Nutrition with distinction in 2003 and has run a successful private practice since. With first-hand experience of the limitations of current menopause support, and after getting increasingly frustrated and worried about friends' difficult menopause experiences, she was determined to do something





about it. Her WomenWise co-founder, Victoria Keith-Roach, has a degree in economics from Cambridge University and a background in marketing and advertising. She spent 30 years helping build some of the world's biggest brands before becoming frustrated by the lack of relevant, quality information about menopause, so is now passionate about improving women's midlife health and wellbeing.

But before I signed up, I wanted to make sure I wasn't too much of a complicated case. Sarah took me under her wing and gave me reassurance. As luck would have it, she has a particular interest in type 1 diabetes and the role emotions play in eating. She was very well-researched on blood sugar balance and the impact of insulin on the body. I was in the right place.

I opted for the Expert package and spent a considerable amount of time completing the digital health questionnaire, which was a list of all the questions you wish your GP

would ask but never does because they simply don't have time.

I was then sent a package of at-home tests with detailed instructions. The blood test was a finger prick with a lancet to test thyroid function, blood glucose status, vitamin D, iron, and to check for any inflammation. The urine tests, which were precisely timed at different points over a 24-hour period, were to measure cortisol and the functioning of my adrenal glands. The most fascinating of all was the DNA test, which was just a cheek swab, to help understand my genetic predisposition to clear and process oestrogen, caffeine, and alcohol, plus to understand in more detail the working of my thyroid, brain chemistry and mood.

I also received a portable blood pressure monitor to assess cardiac health, and a tape measure for my waist, hip and height measurements. I just had to provide a set of scales for my weight.

'My results all pointed to the stark reality that I am most certainly in perimenopause'

Victoria Keith Roach (left) and Sarah Williamson, co-founders of WomenWise

WHAT THE TESTS SAY

A few weeks passed and my results came back. A Zoom appointment was booked with Sarah. It was a long session (there were around 70 pages!), and my mind was blown.

Interestingly, WomenWise don't test sex hormones – progesterone, oestrogen, testosterone – because these fluctuate so much throughout the month that a random snapshot can't provide meaningful results, they say.

Instead, they look at symptoms on your digital health questionnaire. Mine all pointed to the stark reality that despite my regular cycle, I am most certainly in perimenopause.

I was also stunned to learn my genetic ability to process caffeine is



“medium”, which would explain why a coffee in the evening keeps me awake until 3am. Conversely, my ability to process alcohol is “fast” – it’s a shame I don’t drink anymore! Interestingly, I have a fast “COMT gene”, which is great for reducing harmful oestrogen metabolites, but it can lower dopamine, the feel-good hormone. Sarah asked whether I have a love of excitement, chasing thrills or have addictive tendencies; I didn’t need time to think as the answer was yes to the last one. Due to my genetics, dopamine doesn’t stay in my system for long, so I am constantly looking for a top-up. Thankfully, there are lots of healthy ways I can increase and maintain dopamine through diet and fitness

but also by taking an L-tyrosine supplement, and she recommended one called Brainzyme Focus, which I added to my purchase list.

The oestrogen report was fascinating and explained how important it is for this hormone to be metabolised and cleared from your body safely, and the role that a series of enzymes play in that clearance. To help get an understanding of my genetic predisposition to clear oestrogen, they analysed some of the key genes that code for each of the

enzymes. Overall, my ability to clear oestrogen is “average”, with room for improvement. I was relieved. If these enzymes work at a sub-optimal rate, oestrogen metabolites can build up and become toxic, increasing your risk of hormone-sensitive cancers such as breast, ovarian and endometrial. I was advised to avoid specific foods, increase the intake of others, and consider supplementing with resveratrol, glutathione and manganese, which help your body clear toxins.

MY NEW PERSONALISED WELLNESS MANUAL

One size can never fit all when it comes to menopause, health and wellbeing, which is why these tests are so important. My 28-page action plan, which is now my own wellness bible, went deep into my requirements as a type 1 diabetic and gave personalised information and recommendations on every aspect of my health, diet, weight loss, exercise, sleep management, vaginal health, HRT, and lifestyle. I left the Zoom consultation feeling empowered and hopeful.

What I love about WomenWise is they help you become your own menopause expert. Every woman in perimenopause should have these tests, as they can be instrumental to contributing to a better menopause experience. I feel sad that my mum’s generation didn’t have this kind of information and support. Mum just pushed through the symptoms with little or no options. She didn’t want to start HRT as she was worried about it triggering cancer. I think she would be in a very different state of health and fitness now, at age 75, if she had known about her own genetic predispositions and all the many things, natural and medical, that can help women transition through menopause and come out the other side stronger than ever.

WomenWise offers three services: Foundation (£399), Advanced (£599) and Expert (£699) all including proprietary testing, bespoke reports and 12 months of support*. Visit [womenwise.health](https://www.womenwise.health).