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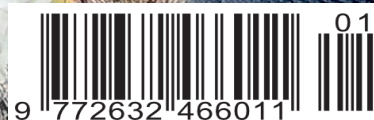
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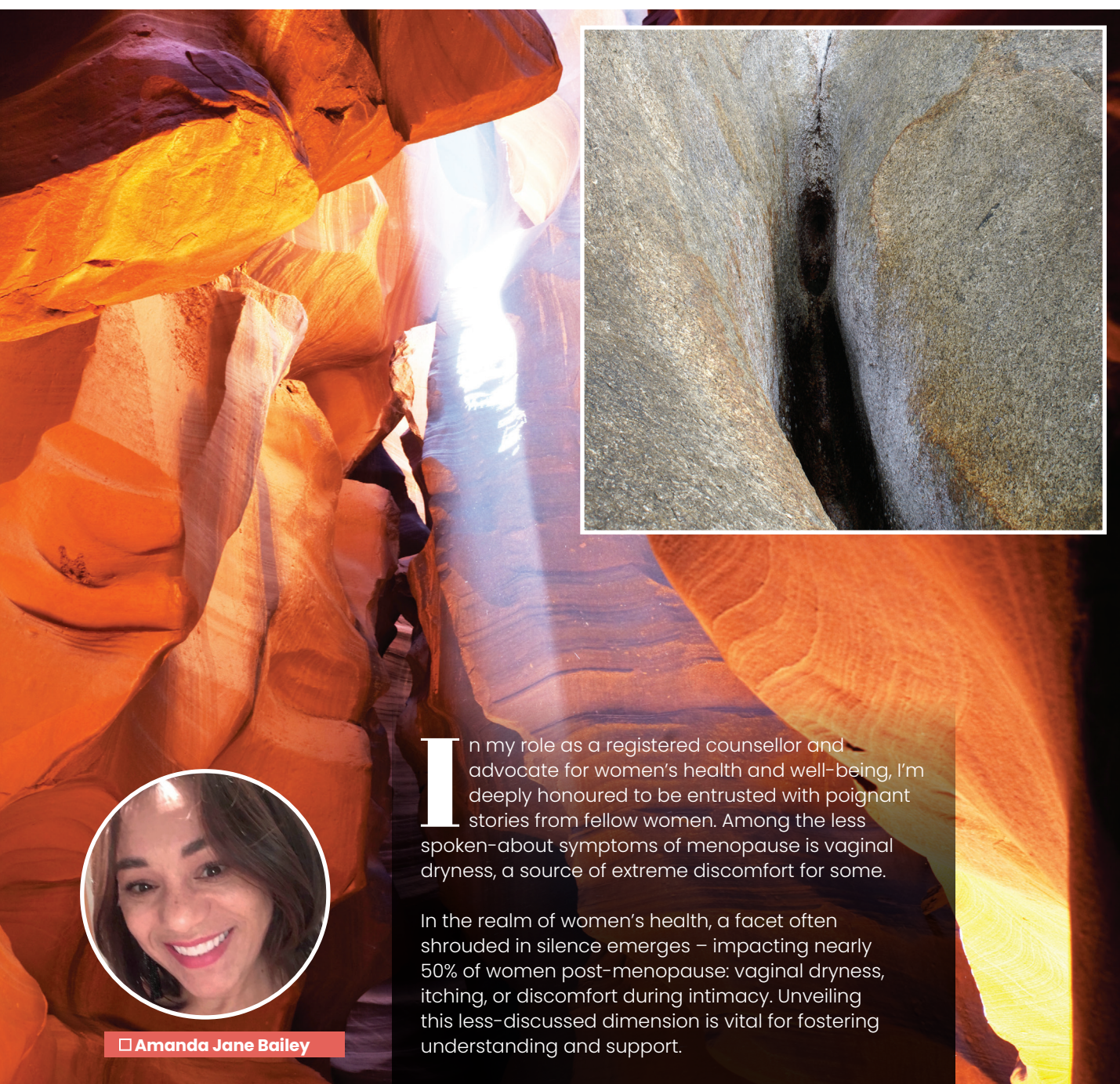
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Exploring the unseen

Amanda Jane Bailey navigates vaginal wonders and menopausal marvels.



□ Amanda Jane Bailey

In my role as a registered counsellor and advocate for women's health and well-being, I'm deeply honoured to be entrusted with poignant stories from fellow women. Among the less spoken-about symptoms of menopause is vaginal dryness, a source of extreme discomfort for some.

In the realm of women's health, a facet often shrouded in silence emerges – impacting nearly 50% of women post-menopause: vaginal dryness, itching, or discomfort during intimacy. Unveiling this less-discussed dimension is vital for fostering understanding and support.



Dry but not high

While certain menopausal symptoms like hot flashes or mood swings fade, the persistence of vaginal dryness is distinctive. Rooted in the decline of estrogen levels post-menopause, it's a seldom openly discussed phenomenon. The trajectory is gradual, potentially intensifying over time, with impacts ranging from mild irritation to profound discomfort. For some, it translates to constant irritation, making simple activities an unwelcome challenge, leaving some women finding it difficult to sleep, or the simple act of sitting comfortably becomes unbearable. The emotional toll challenges acceptance of body changes, leading to a loss of self-confidence and sexual assurance.

Vaginal dryness isn't just a physical inconvenience; it's a multifaceted challenge. It can manifest as a sore and itchy vagina, pain during sex, and an increased need to pee. The discomfort isn't confined to the physical realm; it infiltrates emotional well-being, influencing self-perception amidst the shifts that menopause brings. It's imperative to acknowledge these dimensions, understanding that addressing vaginal dryness transcends mere symptom relief.

Addressing this aspect with a healthcare professional or your GP may seem daunting, yet the benefits often outweigh the initial apprehension. They possess the expertise to provide valuable assistance on this challenging journey. To make these conversations more approachable, consider these tips:

- Make a list of what you want to discuss.
- Prioritize the most important or challenging questions.
- Take notes during the appointment.
- Seek clarification if anything is unclear.
- Take along some information about your symptoms to explain to the doctor. Some women may find this more comfortable without needing direct eye contact.

Initiating these discussions with your healthcare provider creates a pathway to effective support and tailored solutions and treatments for addressing vaginal dryness. It's a dialogue that can lead to improved comfort and a renewed sense of well-being.

As a passionate advocate for women's health and well-being, I am also privileged to create a safe space where stories of resilience and challenges find a voice. By delving into these shared experiences, we contribute to a broader conversation that dismantles taboos and nurtures understanding and support.

How life can change

As estrogen levels decline post-menopause, the roots of vaginal dryness can take hold, presenting a gradual spectrum of sensations that may intensify over time. For some women, it's more than an inconvenience; it's a constant challenge, disrupting the ease of everyday activities. This unwelcome guest not only interferes





with physical comfort but also echoes emotionally within. Changes to the body, like ripples in a pond, challenge acceptance and may cast doubt on self-confidence and sexual well-being. Acknowledging the emotional weight of these changes is vital; within that acknowledgment, we find strength. Menopause is no longer on mute!



Lifting a veil

Addressing vaginal dryness transcends physical comfort; it's about nurturing mental well-being. The emotional toll can make a woman feel different, questioning her identity amidst the shifts. This is where the journey becomes profound, requiring a warm embrace of self and understanding. Together, let's amplify these narratives, ensuring no woman feels alone on her journey through the intricacies of menopause.

Embarking on this exploration unveils the often-overlooked aspects of women's well-being. By shedding light on the nuances of menopausal challenges, we empower a collective voice that resonates with understanding and support. Let's continue the conversation dismantling stigmas and fostering a community where every woman feels heard and validated. **MM**

Checklist

Many women find it difficult to talk about vagina and bladder changes and are often embarrassed to bring up the subject with their doctor, nurse or health professional.

Try using this checklist and show it to your doctor, nurse or pharmacist to help you start a discussion.

- o Vaginal dryness before/during sex
- o Vaginal discomfort
- o Pain during sex
- o Vaginal itching and/or burning Itching or irritation on the outer lips
- o Frequent or re-occurring vaginal or urinary infections
- o Thrush-like symptoms
- o Lack of bladder control

"I'm Amanda Jane, a registered Counsellor and proud member of the British Association for Counselling and Psychotherapy.

My path? Well, it's all about weaving compassion, advocacy, and the well-being of women into my daily life.

Life has taken me on a rollercoaster ride of hormones, and in that journey, I discovered a deep commitment to championing women's mental health and well-being. I'm not just an advocate; I'm a fellow traveller who has faced her fair share of challenges, making my advocacy a truly personal affair. Each twist and turn in life has become a source of strength, and I've found a sense of purpose in nurturing mental health and well-being.

My mission is heartfelt — I'm here to create a safe haven for women. As a counsellor and advocate, I've blended my own experiences into a narrative painted with empathy, understanding, and unwavering support. Yes, hormones can be all over the place, but I'm here to stand by every woman's side, offering strength and a listening ear.

It's an absolute honour to contribute to stories of resilience, challenge, and triumph. I hope to amplify voices, break down those taboos, and build a community that thrives on understanding and support."

You can learn more about her and the services she offers at www.therapywithamandajane.co.uk

Feel free to reach out to her at hello@therapywithamandajane.co.uk

A menopausal host's guide

As Easter descends upon us, the excitement of hosting a special celebratory lunch can be both exhilarating and daunting. Throw menopause into the mix, with its unpredictable hot sweats and mood swings, and you have a unique recipe for holiday chaos. As I prepare to don the apron and serve up a dinner with a smile, I've learnt that juggling family expectations along with my hormonal fluctuations requires a generous helping of self-care – a crucial ingredient often overlooked during bustling times of year.

Picture this: An Easter kitchen bustling with activity, the savoury aroma of roasting lamb (or other) wafting through the air, and me, desperately trying to keep my cool – literally. Menopausal hot sweats can be uninvited guests at the dinner table, threatening to turn the Easter roast into a personal sauna experience. It's a delicate dance between serving up celebratory cheer and discreetly patting down the inevitable 'glisten.'

In the midst of this culinary circus, self-care becomes my secret weapon. While it might sound counterintuitive to prioritize oneself during such a family-centric occasion, past experience has taught me that a well-nurtured host is a far more gracious one. So, here's my Easter manifesto for the menopausal host – embrace self-care, and remember, it's not selfish; it's a holiday survival strategy.

The first slice of wisdom I've carved out of my culinary experiences is the importance of planning. Creating a realistic schedule that accommodates rest breaks and a moment to cool down.

This is a season (like Christmas) to delegate and not feel guilty about it. Let others help out, perhaps bring a dish, set the table, or manage the music playlist. A menopausal host is like a well-choreographed orchestra conductor – directing the festivities with finesse from a strategic vantage point.

Then comes the self-care toolkit, discreetly stashed in my apron pocket. Cooling facial mist, a discreet fan, and a mini mindfulness exercise – these are my secret ingredients to surviving hot sweats while remaining the picture-perfect host. It's like a backstage ritual to ensure the show goes on seamlessly, minus the visible signs of the hormonal rollercoaster.



Humour has become my trusty sidekick during the holiday hullabaloo.

Embracing the absurdity of fanning oneself while stirring the gravy or strategically placing ice packs in hidden pockets becomes a source of amusement. Laughter is not only good for the soul but also an excellent distraction from the temperature fluctuations and the pressure of playing the perfect host.

Finally, the post-event reflection has become an essential part of my self-care ritual. Taking a moment to acknowledge the challenges, celebrate the triumphs, and learn from the mishaps ensures that future holiday hosting endeavours are even more resilient and enjoyable for me and my family.

In essence, as a menopausal host, I've discovered that self-care is not a luxury; it's a necessity, especially during the festive frenzy. So, this Easter, as I navigate the dance of hosting and hormone management, I encourage my fellow menopausal hosts to embrace self-care with open arms. After all, a well-cared-for host serves up the true spirit of family celebrations – joy, warmth, and a touch of humour. Here's to an Easter and spring season filled with self-love and good cheer! **MM**

Amanda Jane is a qualified integrative counsellor an advocate for Women's Health and well-being, and is a registered member of the British Association For Counselling And Psychotherapy.

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