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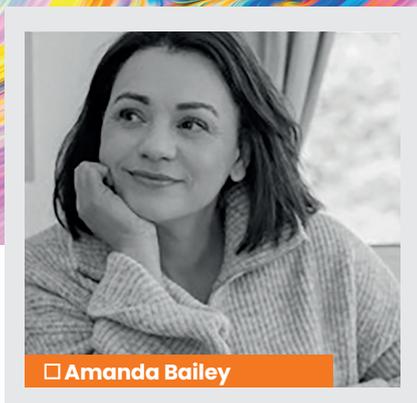
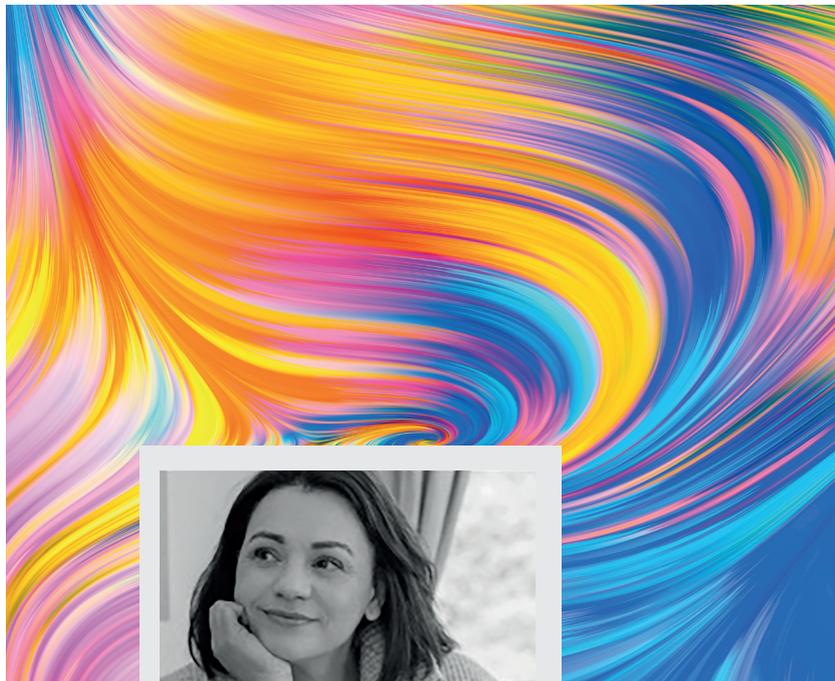
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Looking after ourselves in midlife



□ Amanda Bailey

Amanda Bailey looks at what happens when effort increases but motivation hasn't disappeared.

There is no shortage of conversation about how midlife women might care for themselves. Movement, sleep, self-care and nourishment are often part of this discussion, usually offered with good intentions.

And yet, many women are already doing a great deal. Walking is woven into daily life. Some swim, attend fitness classes, tend gardens, cook with care, or make thoughtful adjustments where possible. Attention to health is rarely absent.

What is often present, though, is a sense that everything takes more effort than it once did – not because motivation is lacking, but because life itself has become fuller. More layered. Less spacious.

Living close to the edge of capacity

As a registered counsellor – and as a woman in midlife myself – I notice that what is sometimes overlooked

is just how much many women are holding. It is not uncommon to be living close to the edge of capacity, carefully balancing work, care, relationships and responsibility, with little room left to rest or recover.

Midlife is sometimes spoken of as a time of freedom. For many women, it is also a time of ongoing commitment. Work remains demanding. Caring roles evolve. Parents age. Children move through their own changes. Our sense of who we are continues to shift.

Conversations about health and prevention can quietly become another responsibility. Even when offered kindly, they can feel like something else that needs to be kept up with.

The quiet tiredness many women carry

In the counselling space, I often meet women who are engaged, informed and thoughtful, yet carrying a quiet tiredness – not because they do not value their wellbeing, but because so much already asks for their attention.

When life feels full, even supportive intentions can begin to feel heavy. Stepping back is not a sign of not caring; it can be a way of protecting what little energy is left.

The emotional landscape of midlife and menopause

There is also an emotional side to midlife that tends to unfold quietly. This stage can involve subtle changes and losses: a body that feels less predictable, energy that comes and goes, familiar roles that begin to shift. Menopause can bring these experiences into sharper focus, with changes that are physical, emotional and deeply personal.

Before looking ahead, many women need space to acknowledge what has already changed — to notice what feels unfamiliar or uncertain. Without this pause, future-focused conversations can feel disconnected from real life and harder to take in.

In therapeutic work, change often comes more easily when there is permission to be where we are, rather than pressure to move on quickly.

Rethinking motivation and self-care

Much of the language around health looks towards the future. It asks us to make choices now for the sake of later life. While this can be helpful, it can also feel hard when the present is already full.

When energy is low and time is short, choosing rest, comfort or what feels familiar is often a reasonable response — not a lack of commitment.

Seen this way, motivation hasn't disappeared; it is shaped by the reality of our lives. When pressure eases, a sense of willingness often returns.

This understanding can soften the inner conversation. Instead of asking what more needs to be done, it may help to notice what feels possible, supportive and kind right now.

In my experience, lasting change rarely begins with direction. It more often begins with compassion.

Letting compassion lead

- **Compassion that allows us to slow down.**
- **To notice mixed feelings.**
- **To have periods where we hold things steady rather than try to improve them.**

When care for ourselves is allowed to sit alongside the rest of life — rather than compete with it — it tends to feel more natural and less like hard work. Change, when it happens, is more likely to last when it connects with what matters personally.

Midlife can offer an opportunity for this kind of reflection. As expectations shift, there may be space to consider what kind of later life feels right — not in ideal terms, but in ways that fit with how life actually is.

For some women, this may be about feeling strong and independent. For others, it may be about having enough energy for relationships, creativity or work that still matters. When choices grow out of these values, they often feel less like duties and more like small acts of care.

A gentler way forward

If conversations about wellbeing are to support midlife women, they need to reflect the reality of their lives. Less urgency. Less pressure to get it right. More understanding of limits.

The future matters — and so does the woman in the present moment, carrying her responsibilities, her experiences, and her hopes with her. **MM**

Amanda Jane is a registered counsellor, an advocate for women's health and wellbeing, and a registered member of the British Association for Counselling and Psychotherapy (BACP). She offers gentle, flexible online counselling for women navigating midlife and menopause.

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