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Our inner autumn



□ Amanda Bailey

Amanda Bailey looks at what menopause teaches us about letting go.

The leaves begin to change colour before gently falling from the trees. The mornings become cooler, the evenings draw in, and nature quietly prepares for a new season. There is no resistance, no urgency, no attempt to hold on to what has already served its purpose. Nature simply allows change to happen.

As I watch the seasons shift, I'm often reminded of the women I meet in my counselling room. Menopause, much like autumn, can feel like a season of profound change. It can bring uncertainty, unexpected challenges, loss, and moments of self-doubt. Yet alongside these experiences, it can also offer something we may not expect: an opportunity to reflect, reconnect and consider what we no longer need to carry.

Many women I work with describe feeling unlike themselves during menopause. They may notice changes in their mood, confidence, relationships, energy levels or the way they see themselves. Some tell me they feel overwhelmed by emotions they cannot explain. Others describe a feeling of being disconnected, as though they have lost sight of the person they once were.

Menopause can be a time when the things we have pushed aside for years begin asking to be acknowledged.

Perhaps it is not that we are becoming someone different.

Perhaps we are finally beginning to listen to ourselves.

And sometimes, before we can move forward, we need to ask ourselves:





What am I ready to let go of? The things we carry

Many women reach midlife having spent years caring for others.

They may have supported children, partners, ageing parents, friends or colleagues. They have often become the person everyone turns to—the organiser, the problem solver, the one who remembers everything and keeps everything moving.

These roles can bring great fulfilment, but they can also come with an invisible emotional load.

Over time, many women become so used to putting others first that they no longer recognise their own needs. They become experts at coping. They keep going when they are exhausted. They say yes when they want to say no. They minimise their own feelings because someone else always seems to need them more.

Then menopause arrives, and suddenly the strategies that helped us manage life for years may no longer feel sustainable.



• Trees don't cling to every leaf because they fear what comes next. The release what they no longer need and trust the process of change.

Many women tell me: "I don't know why I can't cope like I used to." But perhaps the question is not whether we are coping well enough. Perhaps it is whether we have been carrying too much for too long.

Letting go of perfection

One of the themes I often explore with women is perfectionism. Not necessarily the obvious kind, but the quiet expectation that women can have that they should always have everything under control.

For many women, these expectations have been present for years. They have learned to measure their worth by how much they achieve, how much they give and how well they care for others. Menopause can challenge this.

Changes such as brain fog, disrupted sleep, fatigue and fluctuations in mood can make us feel as though we are not functioning in the way we once did. This can be frustrating and, at times, frightening.

However, perhaps these changes are inviting us to reconsider the expectations we place upon ourselves. What if we didn't have to do everything perfectly? What if resting was not a sign of weakness? What if asking for help was a sign of self-awareness rather than failure? Letting go of perfection does not mean lowering our standards. It means offering ourselves the same kindness and understanding we would naturally offer to someone we love.

Quiet expectations

- We should be productive.
- We should look a certain way.
- We should keep everyone happy.
- We should cope without needing support.

The courage to say no

Many women I support struggle with boundaries. They are often caring, compassionate people who genuinely want to help others. But sometimes kindness becomes confused with constantly putting ourselves last. We take responsibility for other people's feelings. We avoid difficult conversations. We agree to things when our own energy is already depleted. Over time, this can leave us feeling invisible.

Interestingly, menopause can often become a turning point. Many women describe reaching a stage where they no longer have the same capacity to ignore their own needs. Things they once tolerated begin to feel uncomfortable. Relationships that feel one-sided

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become harder to accept. The desire to be honest with themselves becomes stronger. This is not selfishness. It is self-awareness.

Learning to set boundaries is not about shutting people out. It is about recognising that our own wellbeing matters too. Sometimes saying no to something or someone else is actually saying yes to ourselves.

The grief of change

When we talk about menopause, we often focus on physical symptoms, but the emotional changes can be just as significant.

One area that deserves more recognition is grief. Not only grief after bereavement, but the quieter forms of grief that can appear during midlife. Some women grieve the end of fertility. Some grieve the body they once recognised. Some grieve the passing of time or the loss of a previous version of themselves. Others are navigating children leaving home, changing careers, caring for ageing parents or adjusting to new chapters in relationships. These experiences may not always be visible to others, but they can still have a deep emotional impact.

There may not be a ceremony or a moment where society acknowledges what has changed. Yet our emotions know. Grief is not something to be rushed or dismissed. It is a natural response to change.

By acknowledging what we have lost, we create space to appreciate what remains and what may still be possible.

Rediscovering ourselves

One question I often ask women in counselling is: "What brings you joy?" It sounds like a simple question, but many women struggle to answer. Not because they have never experienced joy, but because they have spent so many years prioritising everyone else that their own interests have moved into the background.

Menopause can offer an opportunity to become curious again. You have freedom to think about what matters to me now? What do I enjoy? What parts of myself have I neglected? Who am I when I am not defined by my roles and responsibilities? Rediscovering ourselves does not have to involve dramatic changes.

It might be reconnecting with an old hobby or spending time outdoors. It could be trying something new or making time for friendships or, heaven forbid, resting without guilt. Small moments of self-connection can become powerful reminders that we are still here.

Becoming kinder to ourselves

One of the most important things we can learn during menopause is self-compassion.

Many women speak to themselves in ways they would never speak to another person. They criticise themselves for struggling. They judge themselves for needing rest. They compare themselves to who they were years ago. But menopause is not a failure to be corrected. It is a natural transition that deserves understanding.

Self-compassion does not mean ignoring challenges or pretending everything is easy. It means meeting ourselves with patience. It means recognising that we are navigating change. It means remembering that we are worthy of care too.

A new season of confidence

Something I find incredibly encouraging is that many women discover a renewed sense of confidence during and after menopause. Not necessarily the confidence of youth, but something deeper, a quieter confidence. The confidence that comes from knowing themselves better. They become more comfortable expressing their needs.



• Perhaps menopause invites us to do the same as the trees – and let go of what we don't need. So, as autumn arrives we can take a moment to ask ourselves some questions.



They stop seeking approval from everyone around them. They become clearer about what matters. They begin living with greater authenticity. This confidence rarely appears overnight, it grows through small choices. It might be from setting one boundary, having one honest conversation or one moment of choosing themselves. Like the changing seasons, it happens gradually.

Embracing the autumn within

Autumn reminds us that letting go is not the end of growth. Trees do not cling to every leaf because they fear what comes next. They release what they no longer need and trust the process of change. Perhaps menopause invites us to do the same. To release unrealistic expectations. To let go of guilt. To stop measuring our worth by what we achieve or how much we do for others. To accept that change is not something to fear.

Every woman's menopause journey is unique. For some, it can be physically and emotionally challenging. For others, it may bring unexpected clarity and freedom. There is no right way to experience this stage of life.

But support matters.

Talking matters.

Being heard matters.

In essence, menopause matters. So, as autumn arrives, perhaps take a moment to ask yourself:

What am I ready to let go of?

The pressure to be perfect?

The belief that you always have to be strong?

The idea that your value comes from what you provide for others?

Whatever your answers, remember this. Sometimes growth does not come from adding more to our lives. Sometimes it comes from gently releasing what we were never meant to carry. **MM**

Amanda is a registered counsellor, an advocate for women's health and wellbeing, and a registered member of the British Association for Counselling and Psychotherapy. She offers gentle, flexible online counselling for women navigating midlife and menopause, creating a supportive space where women can feel heard, understood, and less alone. If this article has resonated with you, you're very welcome to get in touch to find out more.

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