

Why it's important to understand menopause

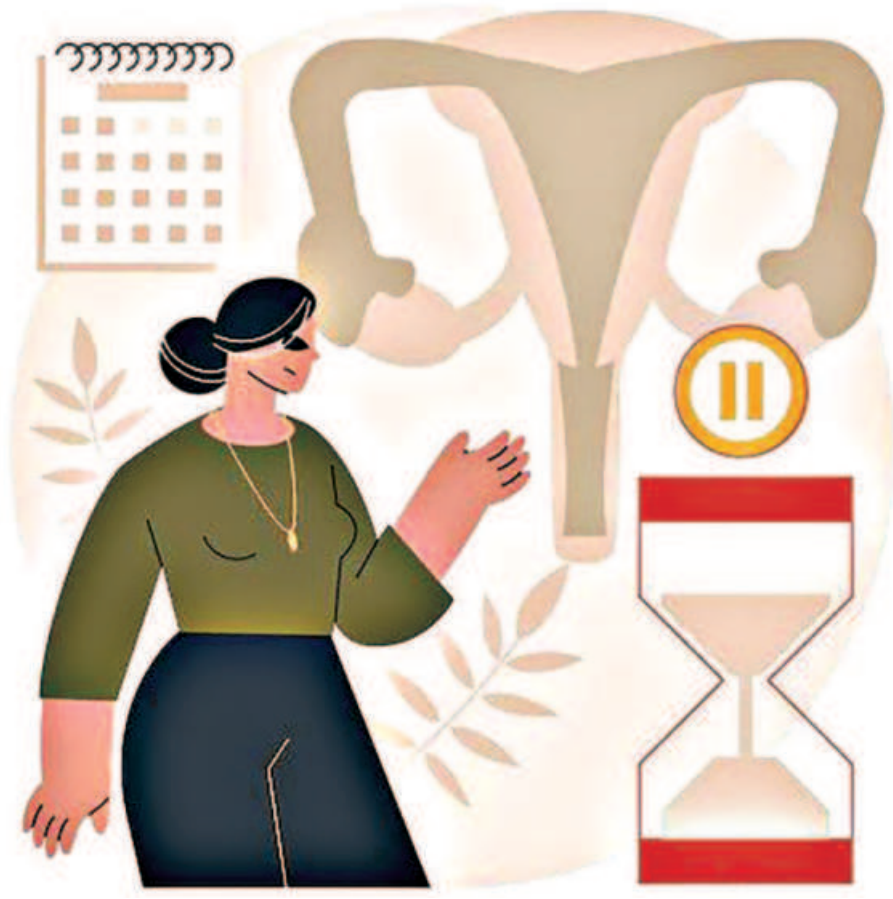
NADEEMAHAFROSE MONDOL

When I experienced the struggles and pain of my first period, I thought that the women who don't have to go through it anymore are the luckiest ones. No bleeding, no tension of leakage, no cramps, no mood swings – what a peaceful life they get to live!

My assumption proved to be terribly wrong when I was enlightened about menopause. I didn't have a single clue about the unbearable struggles of its early stages, until I saw my mother go through it.

Menopause, a point in time when a woman stops having periods and cannot get pregnant naturally, is a rarely discussed subject. In our country, talking about menopause is considered a stigma, which makes the topic harder to deal with. There can be many symptoms and indications for the early stages of menopause and these could vary from person to person. For me, however, the disappointing part is that most of the people don't even address these as problems and show zero empathy for the women who go through it.

On my way home from school, I could see aunties, in their 40s or 50s, sweating as if they were experiencing a hot flash. I got a clearer idea about hot flashes from my mother. When she reached her menopause, she used to have several hot flashes, even during sleep. As she is a working mom, it was painful to see her going to the office or



cooking at that time. With inefficient ventilation in our kitchens, cooking or working in the kitchen is very exhausting for the mothers and the housemaids undergoing menopause. However, these

nuisances are generally neglected by family members because they are unaware about menopause.

Another common symptom of menopause are mood swings, for which

our mothers get bullied and criticised constantly. The fluctuation and disruption of hormones are responsible for these several emotional changes. They can sometimes have outbursts, which we don't understand at all, calling our mothers "cranky", "mad" and a lot more. The thing that enrages me is that when these women try to give opinions, people, especially men, think of it as an act of "flare-up". Men use this misogynous tactic to make women feel bad when they feel like they are getting defeated.

After getting to know about different stories of women experiencing menopause, one thing that made me extremely sad is that there are countless women who feel insecure talking about their menopausal phase, even with their husbands. They consider menopause as a sign of getting old and many even lie about getting their periods due to insecurity. They think that if their husbands found out about their menopause, they would think less of them and won't love them anymore.

All this makes me wonder how a sexist mentality can turn a very natural process into a social taboo, whereas it is our duty to show empathy to all the women who go through this transition of life.

Nadeemah always wraps her head around the thought of what she's going to eat next and thinks that the glass at her bedside table is half-full. Say hi at: nadeemahafrose13@gmail.com

An alter ego might just be what you need

CHOUDHURY MASTURA MAHBUB ADRITA

The process of sculpting a personality is tricky and convoluted since we are taught to permanently instil in ourselves traits such as sociability, charisma and panache that are deemed universally likeable and useful when it comes to standing out from all the seeming lookalikes in life's cortège.

We are all essentially hyper realistic cake versions of ourselves, with layers of self-consciousness, insecurities, doubts and diffidence concealed.

An alter ego is a powerful tool when wielded properly, and can work wonders during anxiety inducing scenarios. It is a deliberately created artificial personality which enables one to be detached from one's original self. The harshness of reality might snub our zeal to do something out of the ordinary, but with a finely groomed alter ego, rebuffs and failures can be faced without feeling too dejected.

When the fear of being judged and the gripping hands of apprehension no longer exist, it becomes easier for us to perform well and muster the courage to step outside our bailiwicks. Peter Parker's powers would have been wasted had he not utilised them through

the guise of Spiderman. Where would Bruce Wayne be without his Batman persona?

Apart from these fictional instances, David Bowie must definitely be cited for his repertoire of alter egos: Ziggy Stardust, the androgynous alien rockstar or the swaddled Blind Prophet – these personas immortalised Bowie as one of the most influential artists of all time. Sasha Fierce is the self-confident side that Beyoncé limns on the stage. Shod in stilettos and with an altered posture and speaking style, Sasha possesses Beyoncé whenever she's nervous, making her performances unforgettable.

Rebecca writer Daphne du Maurier's male façade Eric Avon facilitated her to undertake ventures which were prohibited to her owing to her gender. Camille is the album in which Prince introduced us to his female alter ego, Camille. And how can anyone not love Sacha Baron Cohen's sensational Ali G?

A question now lingers mid-air: does this elaborate role playing work? The existence of an alter ego provides a perform with the opportunity to practice an extreme form of self-distancing. When sequestered from ourselves, it becomes easier for us to step back

and look at circumstances in a more neutral and rational light. We remain unaffected amid uncalled for situations.

The prolonged pretension demanded by an alter ego ultimately affects the person using it. The pseudo ego infuses its traits into the original self and transmutes it. However, it is necessary to remain wary so as not to get too carried away like Bowie with his Thin White Duke, the theatrical Pierrot entity who uttered fascist remarks and abused substances.

So, the next time you feel skittish when life throws curveballs at you, summon your alter ego and face them with your best foot forward.

Reference
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Mastura wallows in despair because she can never be friends with River Phoenix. Console her at choudhurmasturamahbub@gmail.com



DESIGN: MRITTIKA ANAN RAHMAN

The responsibility of taking care of ageing parents

RASHA JAMEEL

My mother's idea of life coming full circle revolves around "parenthood". She likens herself to a real-life counterpart of Benjamin Button, stating that the older she grows as my parent, the more of a child she becomes.

"All parents grow old enough to be parented by their children at some point," my mother says. I thought her words were ridiculous at the time, but came to see the truth in them eventually, soon after my father's poor health left him bedridden.

When a person comes to realise that the responsibility of their parents' care rests with them, it can be quite distressing, regardless of the said person's age and maturity. A general "how to" handbook doesn't suffice as a preparatory measure, because not every household is the same. There are ailing parents to comfort, medical bills to be paid, and responsibilities to be divided among family members.

"I had a difficult time coming to terms with my mother's deteriorating health. Your relationship with your parents tends to change once you assume the role of your parents' caregiver. It was quite upsetting to see my mother unable to conduct daily activities like she once used to with ease," shares Zyma Thaseen, marketing manager of an electronics brand.

Your parents are asking for you at their hour of need, how do you respond?

For adults in this day and age, being able to devote all your time and resources to caring for your parents is no longer a question of selflessness, but seemingly a product of luxury. Every other person has a hustle or two to deal with, which further complicates the logistics of constantly tending to a parent. The commitment an individual is required to make has to be binding, demanding most, if not all, of their undivided attention towards elderly care.

"I'm currently preparing for my admission tests, as I want to get into a public university, but it's really competitive," says 17-year old Ahmed Faiza*, a former student of Rajuk College. "Most of my friends will also be applying to universities outside Dhaka. I can't do the same because studying far from home

isn't an option. There would be no one to take care of my mom then, and she is in no condition to accompany me. Besides, if I live away from her, it would only add to her stress."

The moral implications of coming to terms with such a dilemma involve weighing responsibilities against ambitions, and societal expectations against personal choices. Young adults have plans for their future and lives of their own. Some plan on taking up their parent's role as breadwinner, while some work hard to further their career in a field they're deeply passionate about. Do we then attempt to determine the fairness in the parents' demands of their children, or in the children's decisions regarding their parents' care?

As previously stated in the article, parents only ask their children for assistance when their old age diseases confine them to the likes of beds, walking sticks, and wheelchairs. The expectation of the elderly is to grow old under their own roofs, in the comfort of their own beds, in the presence of family and loved ones. This is what brings them a psychological comfort of sorts, providing them with the willpower to endure whatever ailments their age has brought about. An elderly care facility can mimic just that, providing its residents with a sense of comfort alongside essential healthcare facilities such as various types of nursing care and nutrition assistance.

The senior care and housing industry in Bangladesh are still undergoing various stages of development in terms of facilities and workforce training. While the option of placing your elderly parents in a care facility is rather frowned upon in our country, it's important to acknowledge the feasibility that such establishments offer as a long-term solution.

The stigma surrounding care facilities largely stems from what might be misconstrued as an act of abandonment on the part of the children of the senior members in our community. Zyma spoke about dealing with the moral dilemma of seeking out caregiving services. She says, "When it comes to taking care of your parents, it's important to overcome the sense of guilt instilled in you by members

of our community. You must acknowledge that it's completely fine to ask for help. I didn't arrive at this conclusion overnight. I'd constantly think if I'm somehow being a bad daughter for handing over some of my responsibilities to an outsider. I eventually realised that this decision helps in improving one's relationship with their ageing parents, where the individual in question is no longer forced to make sacrifices in their personal life."

As an alternative to care facilities, one can always opt to hire personal caregivers at home should their elderly parents find it entirely too difficult to adjust to living conditions at care facilities. However, as the elders in our community age, they might find it difficult to either bond with, or rely on people outside of their immediate family members. Hiring a professional from a caregiving agency can possibly result in elderly parents experiencing a sense of distress in their state of vulnerability, given that they have to place their faith in a stranger. Professional caregiving services available in our country are thus not considered popular options.

I have to acknowledge that at this point in life, I'm somewhat responsible for my parents' safety and wellbeing, but surely not at a steep personal cost? Contrary to what our community believes, living out the days of your life next to your ageing parents can have a detrimental effect on a parent-child relationship. Both parties are, in a manner of speaking, confined to each other's company and while life passes by.

In our effort to prove ourselves being utterly devoted in the eyes of our critics, we forget that it isn't just about "caring", but rather "caring well". For an ageing parent, quality caregiving comes in more than one form, plenty of which involve healthy parent-child relationships through the involvement of a third-party caregiver.

Recognising the need for a healthy caregiving dynamic between parents and their children always comes first. At their hour of need, your parents will always ask for you – trusting you to decide "well" for them, along with yourself. Do not let them down.



PHOTOS: ORCHID CHAKMA