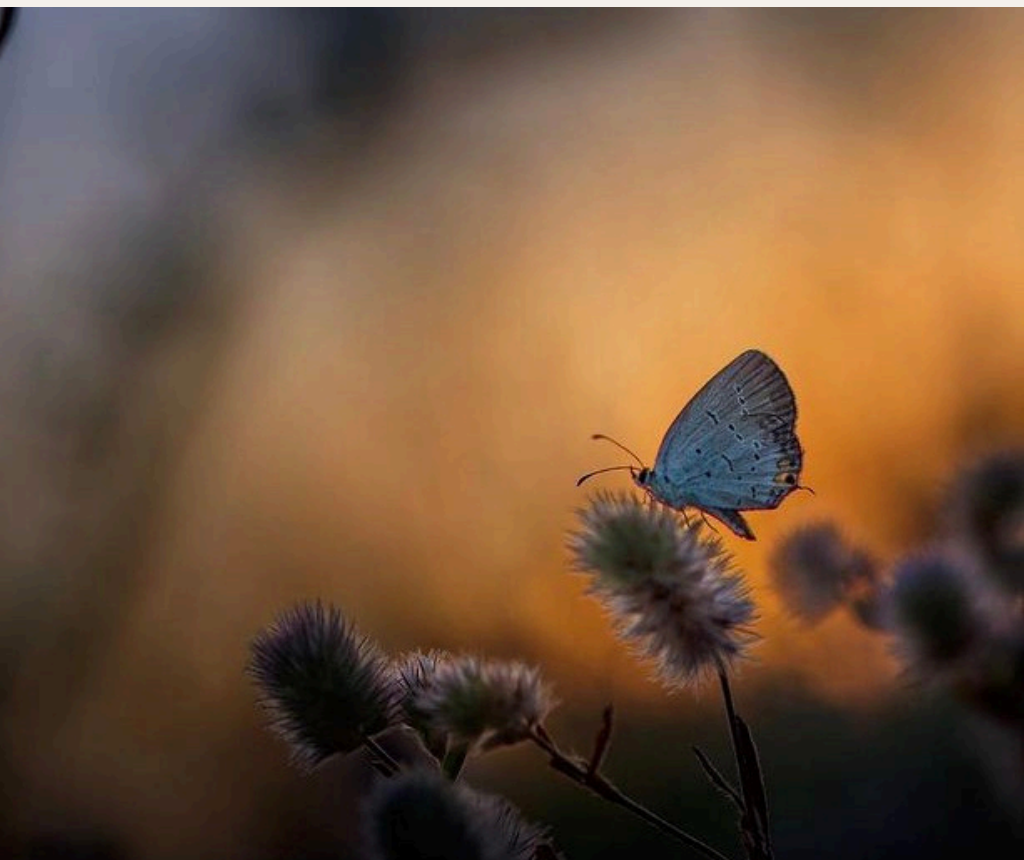


AN INTRODUCTION TO

# The Menopause Map



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## INTRODUCTION

# About this book

Hello and welcome! You may have come to this ebook because you are working with me, either in one-to-one sessions, or in a group programme. Or you may be reading and working through this book independently. Either way you are likely to be in or approaching menopause and be looking for answers; to how to support your physical, psychological, emotional or mental health, or for a way of understanding and making sense of what you are going through and what might be ahead.

My intention here is to keep things as simple as possible. There is a huge wealth of advice and information on menopause, available now, much of it conflicting. This can be overwhelming and can add more pressure at a time when we may already be feeling overwhelmed and pressured.

My main aim is to introduce you to a simple 'map' for menopause. The map I use is based on the model of the '5 Elements' from Traditional Chinese Medicine. This model is intuitive and easy to grasp, and can give you a structure that you can rest into, a lens through which to look at and make sense of your experience, and a step by step way of listening to the wisdom that you already have inside you, in your body and soul.

There are other places where you can learn about hormones, medical and holistic treatment options and dietary advice, for example, some of which are listed at the end of this ebook. Please look at everything I am offering here as just that: an offering, an invitation. If something doesn't work for you, you can adapt it or just let it go.

Rather than telling you what to do, I hope the offerings in this book serve to encourage you to give yourself *permission*:

Permission to nourish yourself in the ways that are right for you, within the realities of your life.

Permission to rest deeply where you can; so important in menopause.

And permission to honour your emotions, and your process; to navigate this life transition in a way that is right for you.

This book begins with a brief introduction to menopause, and an overview of the 5 Element model and the specific Elements we go through during menopause. We will then visit each Element in turn, with an outline of the Element's qualities and the related phase of menopause and suggestions for your own explorations.

## INTRODUCTION

# A Brief Introduction to Menopause

Menopause is the permanent ceasing of menstruation (periods) due to lowering oestrogen levels. The medical definition of menopause is the moment exactly one year after the date of the last period, so medically speaking menopause is a moment in time. Perimenopause means 'around menopause' and refers to the transitional time before menopause. We may experience a range of physical and emotional symptoms as our bodies adjust to the changing levels of oestrogen and other hormones. Perimenopause can last anything from a few months to around 10 years, with the average being around 4 years. The rest of our life after menopause is known as post-menopause.

Menopause happens on average around the age of 50, although this age can vary considerably, and the average varies in different countries, cultures and ethnic backgrounds. Children, teenagers and younger adults can experience menopause, too. If menopause is reached before the age of 45 it is classed as 'early menopause'.

Menopause can happen naturally as a part of the aging process, or it can be brought on due to medical treatments such as surgery to remove the uterus (hysterectomy) or the ovaries, or cancer treatments like chemotherapy.

Sometimes you may hear people referring to the whole process as the 'menopausal transition'. Herbalist and author Susun Weed uses the phrase 'menopausal years' as she dislikes what she sees as the medicalisation that comes with the word perimenopause. I like the phrase 'menopausal years' too as, to me, it suggests that this is a time in my life which is precious – I only get to live my menopausal years once! Although I am now post-menopause in medical terms, as I write this, I still feel like I am in the psychological process, as I emerge out the other side of menopause. So I still think of myself as 'menopausal'.

Some people don't like the word menopause at all, as it speaks only to the ending of menstruation (meno = menses, pause = stop) and doesn't honour the huge psychological changes and evolution that can happen as we go through and emerge from this time of transition. Bonnie J. Horrigan came up with the term 'Red Moon Passage' which she used as the title for her book celebrating menopause as a spiritual journey of transformation.

I encourage you to trust your own sense of where you are in the menopause process and use the words and language that feel most helpful and empowering for you.

## JOURNALLING QUESTIONS

**Where do you feel you are in the menopause process?**

**What happens in you when you hear the word 'menopause'?**

**What are your deepest fears related to menopause?**

**What is your 'core wound'? What would you love to transform? If menopause was an opportunity for deep healing or growth, what would you like to heal or change?**

**If you were able to hear wise words from someone who had been through menopause and come out the other side, what would you most want to hear from them?**

## THE MENOPAUSE MAP

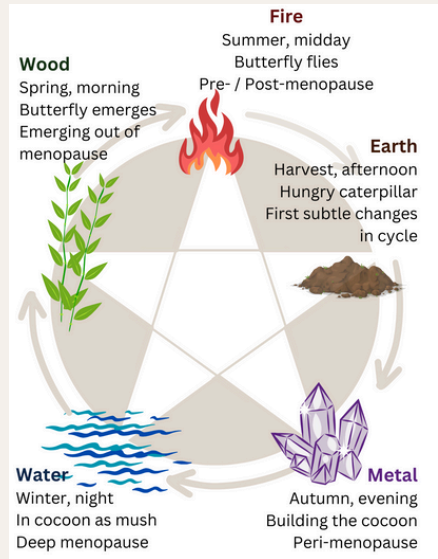
# The 5 Elements & the Menopause Journey

Menopause is not just a biological process. It is also a psychological process, a journey of the soul. The 5 Elements model from Traditional Chinese Medicine is a practical yet poetic, simple yet sophisticated, model of the cyclical nature of life and as such can speak to us on a 'soul' level.

The 5 elements are: Wood, Fire, Earth, Metal and Water. These elements can be seen in all natural cycles from the seasons of the year and the turning of the day to the human life cycle and... the menopause process!

Viewing menopause through this lens, we can see that it is process of descent and rebirth. From the summer-like 'Fire' of our young adult lives we move into the late summer of 'Earth', with the majority of menopause then happening in the Metal and Water phases (an inner autumn and winter), before we emerge into the 'Second Spring' of our post menopause lives.

Another useful analogy here is the life cycle of the butterfly; with the hungry caterpillar taking in nourishment (Earth / very early perimenopause), building its cocoon (Metal / perimenopause), turning to mush (Water / deep menopause), emerging as a butterfly (Wood / emerging) and finally flying off in all its colour and fullness (Fire / post menopause).



Our consumerist society values growth and expansion (Wood and Fire) above all else, and fails to recognise that periods of decline and death (Metal and Water) are a natural part of life and are necessary for anything to be wholesome and sustainable. In a sense we could say that going through menopause is a counter-culture process.

The Five Elements can help us to trust in menopause as a natural cycle, and see that something new and valuable can emerge on the other side.

## THE MENOPAUSE MAP

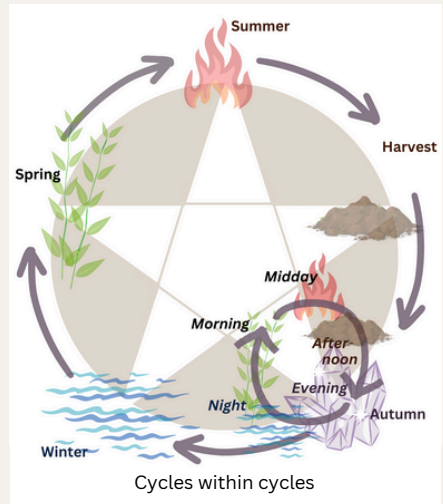
# Some Notes & Cautions

The Menopause Map is simply one way of looking at the menopause journey. It is intended to be a tool and like any tool there may be times when it is useful and times when it is less so. Above all, the purpose of a tool is to be in service to the person using it. So please do not fall into the trap of trying to 'fit yourself into the map', or thinking that there is a 'right way' for the menopause journey to look.

Although the different Elements are presented as separate phases, in reality there may not be clear dividing lines; they may merge gradually into one another, just as the seasons merge one into the next.

Bear in mind that sometimes we can see patterns more clearly with the distance of hindsight; while you are 'in it' it may be difficult to see which phase you are in, but when you look back you may be able to see your process more clearly. And bear in mind too that sometimes we may go through smaller cycles within the bigger menopause cycle, just as we go through many smaller cycles of day and night, even while we go through the larger cycle of a year.

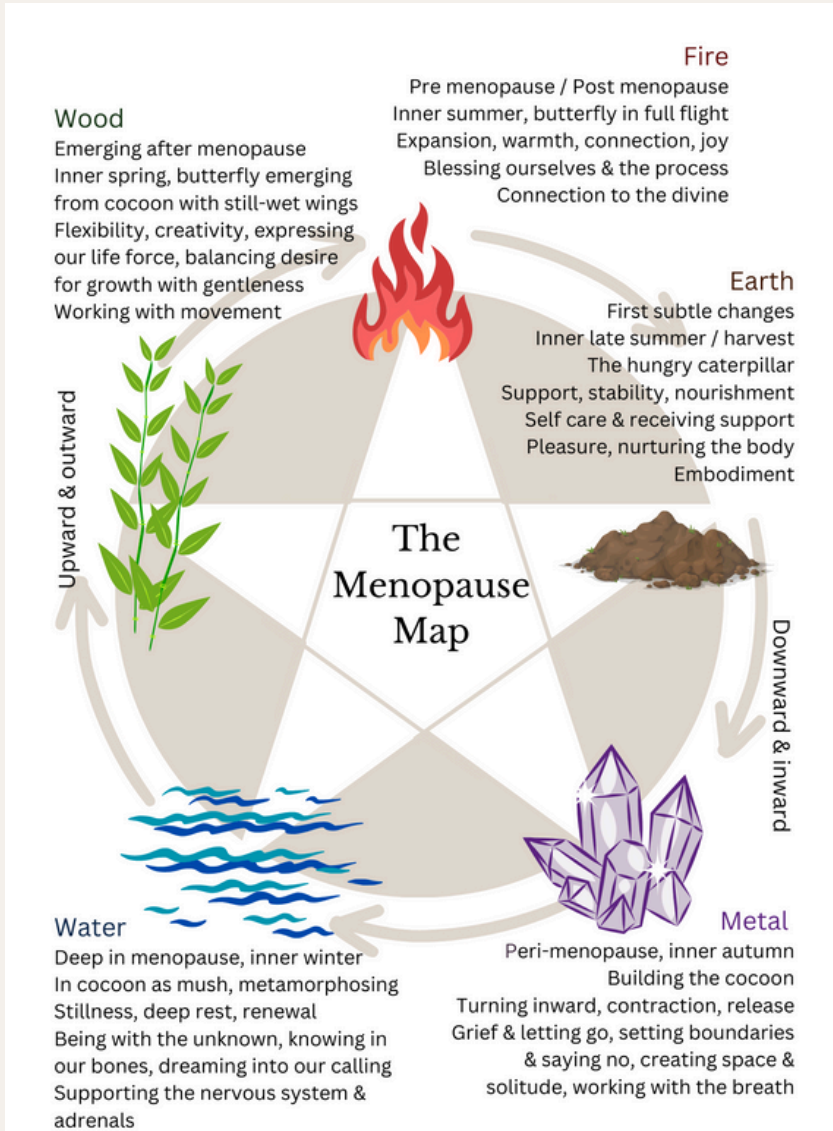
Each element relates to a specific phase of the menopause process, however they also have gifts for us that we can call upon at any time during our journey.



While each phase has its own tasks, gifts and self-care 'superpowers' please remember that menopause is an initiatory journey, and that as well being an opportunity for us to work on ourselves it is more importantly a time *where we are worked on* by forces bigger than us. It may require us to let go of trying to 'get it right'.

Everyone who goes through menopause will experience it in their own way. There may be common themes, but your experience is unique. A useful affirmation could be: "This is my unique journey and there is no right way for this to look."

# The Menopause Map



EARTH

# The Earth Element

Even though most of us may not realise it at the time, our menopause process really begins in the Earth element. This is the phase just before perimenopause, or very early perimenopause. Just as the shift from summer to harvest time may be very subtle, it can be easy to miss. However if we are awake to it, we may notice subtle changes in our monthly cycle. We may notice a need to slow down and nurture ourselves more. We may find that the way we've been living feels a bit harder to maintain. Perhaps we can't get away with so many late nights, or skipped meals, or junk food. In a perfect world, the time just before peri-menopause would be the perfect time to start listening a bit more deeply to ourselves, and to start nourishing ourselves deeply on all levels, like gathering in the harvest in readiness for winter.

What words and qualities come to mind when you think of Earth? (You could imagine your putting your hands in soil or lying on the ground somewhere beautiful in nature.)

Here are a few of my words:

Supported, nurtured, nourished, held, rooted, richness, grounded, abundance, receptive...

You may also want to look at my Pinterest board where I've collected some Earth element images. <https://www.pinterest.co.uk/themenopausemap/earth/>

Like each of the elements, the Earth element is a phase in the menopause process, AND a resource that we can draw on at anytime wherever we are in our menopause (or life). In essence Earth is about nourishment, support, receiving. It's also about letting go of perfection, finding a sense of 'enough-ness'.

Earth is about the body, particularly the flesh - there is huge value in regularly remembering to come back to the body and listen to what the body needs. This wonderfully earthy line from the poem Wild Geese by Mary Oliver comes to mind: 'You just have to let the soft animal of your body love what it loves'.

There are so many ways to nourish ourselves, to let the 'soft animal of [our] body love what it loves', but when we try and figure out what we need with our minds we can easily get overwhelmed. We may notice we are speaking to ourselves in 'shoulds': "I should be doing yoga every day, I should be eating more of this, I shouldn't be eating that, I should be meditating, and lifting weights, and sleeping more... and... and...". However if we can come back to the body we are likely to find an Earthy kind of self-care that is simpler, more do-able, and right for us.



## EARTH

If we're not meeting some ideal of 'perfect self-care' it can be tempting to judge ourselves, but we're not doing anything wrong. There may be real world demands on our time and resources that prevent us taking care of ourselves in the way we'd like to. And we may sometimes get in our own way, sabotaging ourselves. The act of simply noticing our patterns around giving and receiving can be useful, and menopause can call us to slow down and notice. Becoming aware of our unhelpful patterns is the first step to healing them. In either event, a helpful way round can be to tune into what we would ideally want and then find a way to give ourselves a tiny drop of that.

Take a moment to settle in to yourself, becoming aware of the body as a whole. Now bring your attention to your flesh, really feeling the fleshy places in the body, such as the belly, thighs and cheeks. Ask yourself the questions: What would be really nourishing for me? What am I hungry for? What would be nurturing for my mind, body and soul? Don't hold back, give yourself full permission to really tune into what you want. You could ask: And what would be even more nourishing even than that? And what would make it even better? Let yourself be touched by whatever images, dreams and fantasies come to mind. Images can speak to the soul and have an effect on the body. Now, is there a way you can give yourself just a tiny drop of your fantasy? For example if your fantasy was to swim in warm seas under a golden sun, can you run yourself a candle-lit bath with sea salts crystals? If your fantasy was to be held in the arms of a mother goddess, can you create a comfortable nest of pillows and blankets and give yourself 10 minutes of holding yourself in your own arms?

Other ways to connect with the Earth element:

Create an Earth element altar:

Find an object that reminds you of the Earth element and place it somewhere special in your home where you will see it regularly.

Begin a daily practice:

A daily practice can be a way of getting regular small drops of nourishment in our lives and a moment to check in with ourselves. A daily practice can also provide us with a sense of holding. What would be nourishing for you? What would be pleasurable? What would be do-able? Listen to your body (my earth element meditation audio may help you with this) and start small, really small – you can always add to it later. Some ideas:

15 minutes in bed each morning with a cup of your favourite tea and a journal and pen.

5 conscious breaths each morning before you get out of bed

Dance to one great song every day

A beautiful practice I did for several years was to start each day by going outside and collecting a small natural object to place on my personal altar. If I wasn't able to go outside for any reason I would look out the window and 'collect' a cloud or a tree! It was beautiful, meditative and easy to fit into my life.

PRE MENOPAUSE SUBTLE CHANGES HUNGRY CATERPILLAR HARVEST  
LATE SUMMER DOWNWARD SUPPORT STABILITY NOURISH RECEIVE  
READYING PREPARING LEARNING EATING WELL SLOWING DOWN

# In the Earth Phase...

**You may be:**

**Noticing subtle changes in your monthly cycle**

**Feeling that something's different but you can't put your finger on what**

**Noticing that you need to take care of yourself more than you used to**

**Becoming aware of menopause as a subject, feeling fascinated by it, or noticing you're in denial**

**Aware that you're moving towards a different phase in your life**

**Healthy Earth enables us to really nourish ourselves, gather in the harvest to see us through the autumn and winter**

**This may be challenging if we've been habitually over giving and find it hard to receive**



JOURNALLING QUESTIONS & PROMPTS - EARTH

**Sometimes it's hard to let myself really receive because...**

**What gets in the way of me really nourishing myself is...**

**If I really allowed myself to receive...**

**If I really allowed myself to let good things in...**

**What would be really nourishing to me right now is...**

METAL

# The Metal Element

After beginning to slow down and let in the nourishment of the Earth phase, we arrive in the Metal phase. This equates to what most of us would think of as peri-menopause. We may be noticing definite changes in our monthly cycle, physical symptoms and changes in our mood. The Metal phase is our inner autumn, and it may be a gentle time of naturally contracting and turning inward, of clearing out and letting go. Or it may feel like the autumnal storms suddenly come swooping in, shaking us to the roots, robbing our branches of their leaves, bringing in the winds of change. There is no denying it any longer: we are in our menopause process!

Pause for a moment to think of Metal, and notice what images, words or qualities arise. Metal can include natural ore and crystals, as well as the many objects that humans make from metal. Notice what happens in your body in response to any words and images that come to you.

My Pinterest board contains a wealth of Metal element images which may give you some ideas: <https://www.pinterest.co.uk/themenopausemap/metal/>

You may find yourself thinking of:

Hard, sharp edges, cold, useful, practical. Metal can be made into an axe, sword or knife; functional tools that can cut away what is no longer needed, or protect our boundaries. Armour protects our boundaries too, in a different way. Metal is also beautiful and valuable; think of diamonds, gold coins and precious jewellery. And Metal can conduct, communicate and connect; electricity cables, telephone wires, bells, and chimes are all made of metal. In the cycle of the year Metal relates to autumn, where the air is becoming colder and nature is contracting, trees and plants concentrating their energy into their roots, animals starting to bury themselves away. In the life cycle of the butterfly it is the time of building the cocoon. The caterpillar is literally creating a boundary, the necessary protection for transformation to happen.

Metal is an element of paradox. In Traditional Chinese Medicine it is associated with the Lungs and Large Intestine and the skin. In the in-breath and out-breath we experience both contraction and letting go, like a tree in autumn which is simultaneously contracting as it gathers in all its energy, and releasing as it lets go of its leaves. The skin is literally our 'edge', the dividing line between us and everything that is not us, and so represents our boundaries. At the same time our skin is our biggest sense organ and through our sense of touch connects us, with great sensitivity, to the world around us. This kind of paradox can also be seen in the image of a diamond, which is the hardest natural substance on earth and also reflects the light in beautiful, ethereal sparkles that appear to shimmer in the air.

## METAL

Metal is associated with the emotion of grief – which I believe includes rage, denial and resistance as well as sadness. In the Metal phase of menopause we may feel loss as we start to face the fact that we are letting go of our fertile years. Our emotions may feel all over the place – rage, grief, denial. The Metal phase is also the time of building the cocoon; we may find that we need more time alone. We may find ourselves clearing out what we no longer need, to make more space for ourselves. Or if we live alone we may need more holding, to feel contained so that we can be with our feelings. We may experience a shortness of temper but this can help us prioritise, to get clear on where we can and can't put our energy. Although it can feel pretty bumpy, there are some gifts that can come with this time. Metal is hard, and solid, and practical. It can cut. It is not soft or flowery or 'pretty', but it can be beautiful – and it is precious. This is a time where we can really learn about what we value most and explore treating ourselves as precious. Sometimes our anger and rage can be a gateway to this. We may then need to communicate our boundaries clearly.

Poet Donna Ashworth conveys something of the metal in her short piece 'Awakening', Jeff Foster's 'You will lose everything' so perfectly conveys the preciousness of Metal (<https://www.lifewithoutacentre.com/writings/you-will-lose-everything/>), and this poem by Linda Pastan speaks to the different faces that grief can wear: (<https://wordsfortheyear.com/2018/01/21/the-five-stages-of-grief-by-linda-pastan/>)

We can support ourselves in the metal phase by taking time alone – in the cocoon (even just micro moments can work here if its all we can get – remember the enough-ness of getting even one drop from the Earth element) and by honouring all our feelings, and by remembering that the process we are in is one of descent and it's ok if it looks a bit messy or feels a bit like falling apart at times.

Other ways to honour the Metal element:

Find an object that reminds you of the Metal element and place it somewhere you will see it regularly. You may like to place it with your Earth element object as the beginnings of a 'menopause altar', a place to gather objects that feel meaningful to you and which will keep you connected to your inner process.

Meditate on or work with the breath. Visualise clearing out the old and creating space for yourself with each breath. If emotions arise welcome them as much as possible.

Is there anyone you need to communicate with? Menopause can require that we renegotiate boundaries with those around us. Or perhaps children, partners and friends have noticed that we're acting differently and it could be helpful to share the menopause map with them, to help them understand the process we're going through. We may need to let them know that although we may be less available than we once were, it's not personal and we will come back. Connecting with the Metal element through our breath and tuning in to our skin can help us find the clarity and discernment around who we need to share with and how we can best communicate.

PERI-MENOPAUSE BUILDING THE COCOON AUTUMN EVENING  
CONTRACTION AND RELEASE LETTING GO CLEARING OUT BEING  
CLEARED OUT PRUNING BACK SORTING SETTING BOUNDARIES  
VALUING OURSELVES DISCERNMENT

# In the Metal Phase...

You may be:

Feeling the 'winds of change', shaken up, stirred up, rattled, raw

Experiencing turbulent and intense emotions such as irritability, rage and grief

Experiencing the onset of physical, mental and emotional symptoms

Aware of your inner critic

Feeling regret, looking back, feeling a sense of loss

In some shock, asking "Is this really happening?" Thinking I'm not ready!"

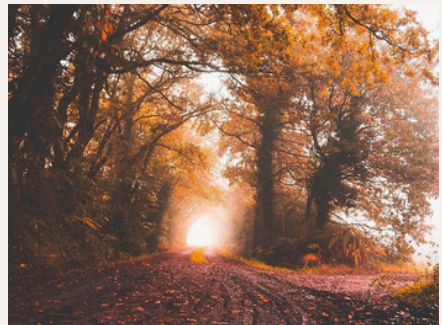
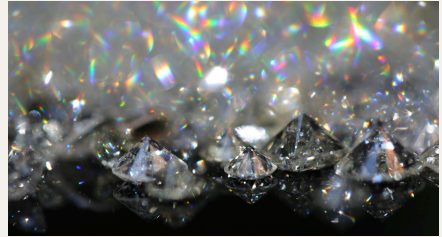
Resisting letting go, in denial

Longing to be on your own - having fantasies of running away to live in a cave or on the top of a mountain

Feeling conflicted

Needing to organise, clear out, pare back, simplify systems and processes, cut away what no longer serves

This time can be particularly challenging if we're not supported through healthy boundaries, the ability to cocoon ourselves away at least for periods of time and being able to clearly communicate our needs



JOURNALLING QUESTIONS & PROMPTS - METAL

I am grieving...

I am letting go of...

.I am ready to let go of...

I am done with...

If I really allowed myself to let go...

If I really took space for myself...

WATER

# The Water Element

Water, in the menopause process, is what we might call 'late peri-menopause', or the time around menopause itself, the 'one year after our last period' landmark, when the initial storms and 'winds of change' of our Metal phase / inner autumn have settled down, and we may find ourselves experiencing a sense of acceptance or at least resignation: 'This menopause thing is really happening then, no point fighting it!'. Our monthly cycle may feel less chaotic too, with longer and longer gaps between our periods. In the cycle of the seasons, the Water phase equates to winter, when everything in nature has gone underground and is at rest. In the life cycle of the butterfly, it is the caterpillar literally turning to liquid in its cocoon. We can also think of the Water phase as being like a seed underground, just resting, not doing anything. It will sprout when spring comes but for now maybe it is just dreaming of it's future tree-self! Or maybe it's not even dreaming...! Here we see the true potential of menopause; to clear out everything that's no longer needed and come down into our deepest essence, our 'seed self', in readiness for the new beginnings awaiting to be born out of that deeper connection with soul and self.

Pause for a moment to think of water, and notice what images, words or qualities arise. Notice what happens in your body in response to these words and images.

The images that come might include:

The sea, a river, a deep still lake, rain, waterfalls, swimming, a baby in the womb...

Words may include:

weightless, peaceful, flowing, stillness, fear (of the dark, of the depths, of the unknown), fluid, powerful...

You may also want to look at my Pinterest board where I've collected some Water phase images: <https://www.pinterest.co.uk/themenopausemap/water/>

In Traditional Chinese Medicine Water is about stillness, deep rest, renewal. Water is the stillest, most yin element but it also has it's own power. Think of how rainwater, even just a drip over a long enough time can wear away stone... or how the ocean is always still at its depths no matter how stormy it is on the surface. Water is the dark, the unknown, the shadowy depths.

Water relates to:

The bones – think of the life giving marrow in our bones

The Kidneys, Bladder and adrenals, the nervous system. Our healthy stress and healthy relaxation response (and also unhealthy stress, burnout, exhaustion).



## WATER

Taking time out to calm and regulate the nervous system is particularly crucial for us in menopause. One of the functions of oestrogen in the body is that it prevents too much of the stress hormone cortisol from being made. As our oestrogen levels decrease our cortisol levels can rise increasing bodily sensations associated with stress, which can in itself be alarming and cause us to feel even more stressed. On top of this, we are living in a culture that seems to be designed to keep our nervous systems activated, with mobile phone notifications constantly pinging, emails, voicemails and social media feeds constantly updating. Just 40 years ago, when I was growing up, the only communications the household had to deal with was the phone calls that came through on the one landline (with no answer machine) and the mail. In contrast, think how many different streams of communication we are expected to keep up with nowadays.

We can support ourselves by unplugging from stresses and demands where possible and resting as much as we can. We may have to lean into the Metal element for some good strong boundaries here, or lean into the Earth and find a way of giving ourselves enough, just a drop. Giving yourself micro rests throughout the day can be a game changer, such as setting a timer for 5 minutes and lying on the floor with your legs up the wall, or focusing on your breath for 5 minutes, taking deeper, slower belly breaths to calm the nervous system. Or you could take some time in nature. Take breaks from mobile phones, t.v., electric lights and all the stressors that keep our nervous systems in a constant state of activation. Tune into your bones and ask your bones what would support you to rest deeply and find stillness.

Water relates to the Shadow, the unknown, the dark, unexplored depths of the sea. Often menopause can bring to the surface (draw our attention to) old survival strategies and coping mechanisms that are no longer serving us. These could include behaviours such as: overworking to try and prove, to ourselves and others, that we are good enough; people pleasing to in an attempt to gain approval and avoid conflict; needing to be independent and tough and 'do it on our own' and so avoid being vulnerable. These may be strategies that worked once upon a time but in menopause we can suddenly find that we no longer have the energy to sustain them. It can feel really scary to no longer be able to rely on these old patterns and survival mechanisms. It can take courage, and support, to turn and face them. We originally developed these survival mechanisms for good reason, possibly because we had no other alternative at the time. In this sense menopause is asking us to 'face death', as aspects of our personality which we may have identified with as 'who we are', are revealed as outdated behaviours that are needing to die.

You may wish to find an object or image that reminds you of the Water element and place it on your altar.

Finally here is a Water poem for you: <https://inspirare.blog/2011/09/15/the-trough-by-judy-brown/>

MENOPAUSE PUPA IN COCOON TURNING TO MUSH WINTER NIGHT  
SEED STILLNESS RESTING AND RENEWING PURIFICATION DREAMING  
BEING IN THE VOID MEETING FEAR FACING THE SHADOW HEALING  
MORE LETTING GO HOLDING FAST SLEEPING LISTENING TO THE  
WHISPERS OF THE SOUL

# In the Water Phase...

**You may be:**

**Low on energy, tired, exhausted**

**Needing more sleep, Having difficulty sleeping**

**Wanting to hide away, avoiding social situations**

**Lost, unsure of who you are, questioning your worth**

**Feeling down, depressed, empty, disconnected**

**Losing hope, asking: "Will this ever end?"**

**Resigned to it, acceptance, an increasing sense of peace**

**Facing your fears, dealing with shadows, past memories coming up to be dealt with and healed**

**Dreaming into new possibilities, glimpsing new callings and inspirations**

**Finding easier, slower ways of doing things**

**Enjoying the slower pace, appreciating the simple things**

**This time can be challenging if we're not able to get the deep rest we need or if we've burned ourselves out earlier in life**



JOURNALLING QUESTIONS & PROMPTS - WATER

If I allowed myself to be really still...

What gets in the way of me really 'dropping' is...

Deep down in my bones I know that...

What causes me most stress in my life is...

My deepest fear is...

If I could deeply rest...

WOOD

# The Wood Element

Wood is the time of emerging, when we begin to come out the other side of the menopause process. It may be some time, perhaps a year or two, since we had our last period, and many of the symptoms we've had may be settling down. The most important sign though comes from within us. The arrival of the Wood phase can simply feel like something has shifted. There may be a sense of ease, relief and opening up and we just know that we are no longer 'in it' in the way we once were. When we finally realise we are emerging out of our menopause process it can be a huge relief, like the light has suddenly returned. We may get ideas, and a vision, of what our post menopause life could look like, in any and all areas of our lives, including work, our relationships, hobbies and lifestyle. Or we may just feel an urge to be part of world and the dance of life again. But this is a very delicate phase - think of the snowdrop emerging at the end of winter, or the way the butterfly emerges from the cocoon with still-wet wings, not yet able to fly. It is vital that we go gently with ourselves in this phase, that we give ourselves permission to remain 'unformed', resisting any inner or outer pressure to burst forth as some perfect, finished version of ourselves! Remember that plants are rooted, growing down as well as up. Wood invites us to stay flexible, to say "maybe" to possibilities without pinning anything down too quickly. The Wood phase of the menopause process can be a period of experimenting and trying things out, with a playful approach, and a sense of lightness. And maybe retreating back to the cocoon from time to time if we need to.

Pause for a moment to feel into what the Wood element might mean to you. (The Wood element can be thought of as 'plant life' and is evoked by wood as we find it in nature; alive, growing, seedlings, plants and trees, rather than the 'dead' wood we might use for building or making furniture.) Notice what images, words or qualities arise. You may also want to look at my Pinterest board where I've collected some Wood phase images: <https://www.pinterest.co.uk/themenopausemap/wood/> You may find yourself thinking of words like growth, energy, flexibility, exploration... You may think of trees; saplings, and giant oak trees, and the whole forest, growing and thriving in cooperation. Or a supple bamboo plant flexing and bending in the wind, without breaking, seedlings finding their way through the cracks in paving slabs, tree roots pushing up concrete, or the vital energy of spring and morning, birds singing and children playing. Notice what happens in your body in response to these words and images.

In Traditional Chinese Medicine the Wood element is associated with upward movement, flexibility, creativity, and decision making (think of the branches of a tree reaching out left and right), life force, movement, looking forward, vision (imagine looking out at the world from the top of the tree canopy). It relates to the muscles, joints, ligaments and sinews in the body, the Liver and Gallbladder, and the eyes. The emotions associated with Wood are anger and playfulness or humour.

## WOOD

As with all of the elements, the Wood element can also be a resource or ally that we can draw on, or that may call for our attention, at any stage of the menopause process. Wood may speak to us at any stage of the menopause journey through our stiff, aching joints, maybe the rising energy of hot flushes, and through our anger, frustration and rage. Rage is such a common experience in menopause. My view on this is that a) we may be clearing a backlog, clearing out all the times in the past that we didn't speak up, all the times we shut ourselves down, or were shut down. And b) we are trying on something new, practicing being with this strong energy, trying on our new post menopause power of truth speaking, fierce love and not caring (as much) what other people think. Anger and rage can be challenging for many of us, especially if we've been brought up with messages like "it's not nice to get angry", but they can bring gifts. Anger can help us notice where something needs to change, and if we are stuck in our inner critic, victim mentality or blame, accessing our anger can help us break through into Wood's creativity and life force.

Suggested ideas for further exploration of the Wood element:

Find an object (or image) that reminds you of the Wood element and place it somewhere where you will see it regularly or on your menopause altar.

Make time (or get the support of a friend or professional) to listen to your anger. You don't need to do anything with the anger or 'fix' it. Simply be with the sensations and feelings in your body. Breathe. Become aware of and really feel your skin, your boundaries, as a way of 'containing' the feelings.

Move your body, especially anything that stretches your side body; dance, walk, run or stretch. Or do something creative. Let yourself play, and be a beginner, enjoying the process without becoming attached to the outcome.

Explore moving the Wood element in your body with my Wood element movement meditation or by using music to support you to listen to and move the joints and sinews, exploring where the body wants to move and stretch out and where it wants to be still and slow. I've made a playlist of music suggestions on Spotify, music for 'emerging' to:  
<https://open.spotify.com/playlist/7bc29wujuseRjPWk1kH4BZ?si=162d3aa694cd4>

EARLY POST-MENOPAUSE BUTTERFLY EMERGES FROM COCOON WITH  
WET WINGS SPRING MORNING NEW SHOOTS EMERGING  
GOING GENTLY RESISTING THE URGE TO GO TOO FAST FLEXIBILITY -  
FREEDOM CREATIVITY

# In the Wood Phase...

**You may be:**

**Blinded by the light of the new day**

**Relieved that the dark night of the soul is over, feeling disbelief, gratitude**

**Feeling excited, exhilarated, giddy**

**Feeling tender, vulnerable, wobbly, awkward, nervous, not ready**

**Feeling a sense of push/pull**

**Bursting with ideas, inspired**

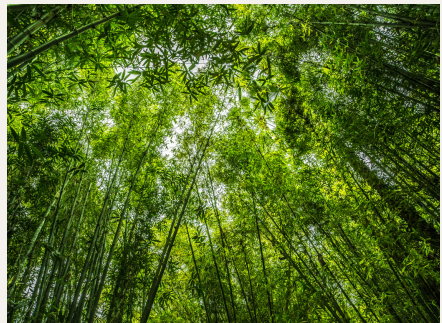
**Feeling a sense of promise and possibility**

**Finding it hard to pace yourself, forging ahead then crashing and burning**

**Learning how to handle this new energy**

**Finding your feet**

**Experimenting and trying things out, exploring new avenues**



JOURNALLING QUESTIONS & PROMPTS - WOOD

**If I allowed what wants to emerge...**

**If I let myself be more creative...**

**When I was a child I always dreamed of...**

**If I allowed myself to play...**

**I would love to explore...**

**If I was really gentle with myself...**

JOURNALLING QUESTIONS & PROMPTS - WOOD - CONTINUED

**My vision for myself is...**

**If I allowed myself to be curious...**

**I am angry that...**

**If I let my life force flow...**

**If I allowed myself to see things differently...**

**Maybe I could...**



FIRE

# The Fire Element

Pause for a moment and allow an image of fire to come to you. You might imagine yourself lighting a candle, sitting around a campfire, or basking under the summer sun. Notice what happens in your body in response to these images. What other images arise? And what words or phrases come to mind?

You may find yourself thinking of words like:

Warmth, light, expansiveness, peace, flickering, dancing, alive, heat, passion, community...  
I have gathered a range of Fiery images on my Pinterest board: <https://www.pinterest.co.uk/themenopausemap/fire/>

Fire is passion, blossoming, relationships (with self and others), joy and love. It is the energy of summer and midday. In the body, Fire relates to the heart and circulation, and to the tongue, and the voice.

In the menopause process the Fire element represents our post-menopause life. We have completed our descent and our time in the dark, and come out the other side; we have emerged from the cocoon and are ready to fly! There is no set time frame for this. It is our inner knowing that tells us that we are 'done'; we know we are complete, or at least complete enough. Fire is our blossoming into our post-menopause self and whatever your post-menopause life is going to be. The potential here is to 'live the Fire element'; the giving of our gifts from our heart. Fire can burn with an intensity, a passion. It might be that your way of giving your gifts involves using your voice or fighting for a cause, a mission you feel fired up about, committed to, full of energy for. And Fire can also burn like the gentle, steady light of a candle flame. So living your life's purpose could simply be living a quiet, humble, everyday life but with a sense of love at the heart of it all. The potential of our post-menopausal life could be summed up by asking: 'How does love want to live through me?' The way we find that is engaging with more questions, such as: 'What lights me up? What would bring me joy?' and following the threads that emerge, little or big.

Menopause can be an opportunity to uncover our calling. In the Metal phase we are clearing away all that is superfluous, all that is not the real 'us', which gives us the necessary space to dream in the Water phase. In the Wood those dreams become visions, ideas of how our calling might manifest, and in the Fire phase we are invited to live that vision, to become 'love in action'.

Whatever it might look like, we are different than we were, we are changed. I have the sense that the flower I am going to be in my post-menopause 'second summer' is more spiky and exotic, definitely less pretty than the flower I was in my young adult life!

## FIRE

Fire is also a resource or ally that we can draw on, or that may call to us, at any time in our menopause journey. If we look at the diagram of the 5 Elements we see that Fire is positioned at the top, like the sun shining down on the other Elements. One of the potential gifts of the Fire element is to invite us to 'shine our own sun' upon ourselves, to open our hearts to ourselves, to ask: 'How can I be loving towards myself, whatever it is that I'm going through, whatever stage of the process I'm in? Can I take a moment to see myself through the eyes of love, to see this whole process as part of something bigger, to trust it?'

Some suggestions of ways to honour the Fire element:

Add a candle or some other object or image that can represent the Fire Element to your menopause altar. Take a moment to acknowledge yourself for how far you have come and for the journey yet to come.

Connect with your heart. Place a hand on your heart centre and another hand on your belly and breathe into your heart. Notice whatever feelings, sensations and emotions arise and see if you can welcome them all. The heart is big enough to hold it all. Your love is big enough to hold it all.

Listen to music that touches your heart. Poetry also speaks to the heart. Read it out loud and savour every word.

Here are a couple of Fire poems for you:

'I will not die and unlive life' by Dawna Markova speaks to the passion, intensity and generosity of the Fire: <https://www.awakin.org/v2/read/view.php?tid=552>

'Life at Midlife by Mary Anne Perrone evokes the peace of Fire and the potential for living our post-menopause calling in a humble, everyday way: <https://www.mindfulnessassociation.net/weekly-challenge/no-longer-waiting/>

POST MENOPAUSE BUTTERFLY IN FULL FLIGHT SUMMER MIDDAY  
EXPANSION PEACE BLESSING CONNECTION WARMTH HEART LOVE  
JOY LIVING YOUR CALLING BRINGING YOUR GIFTS ACCEPTANCE  
ONE FOOT IN THE EVERYDAY AND ONE IN THE DIVINE

# In the Fire Phase...

**You may be:**

**More accepting, of yourself, of the perfectly imperfect nature of life, of others**

**Feeling clearer on your direction, your calling**

**More able to trust your inner guidance**

**Less looking outside of yourself for validation and approval**

**Able to speak up, and speak out**

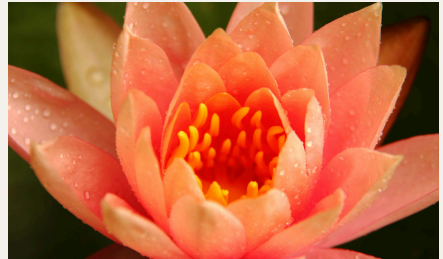
**Humbled, taking more pleasure in the simple, everyday things in life**

**Desiring to serve, wanting to mentor others, able to give without giving yourself away**

**Feeling passionate, fired up, connected to your fierce love**

**Feeling more at home in yourself and in your life**

**Developing and tending to new projects, passions and interests**



JOURNALLING QUESTIONS & PROMPTS - FIRE

**I am grateful for...**

**I am proud of myself because...**

**I love myself because...**

**My heart's desire is...**

**I love...**

**I bless...**

## CONCLUSION

# The End... And A Beginning

We have come to the end of our journey through the Menopause Map. I hope that after travelling with me through these pages you will find yourself thinking and talking about menopause differently. I hope that you will find yourself being kinder with yourself and prioritising your self care where you can. And I hope that more and more you will be able to shake off society's negative messages about menopause, women and older people, and instead honour yourself and the process that you are in for the sacred time that it is.

I believe that we don't just go through menopause for ourselves, but for the world. I believe that the world needs more of the yin qualities that we are invited into during the menopause transition; more rest, more stillness, more deep listening. And I believe that the world needs more people who have been through conscious menopause, who have faced the darkness and come out the other side, rested and renewed and ready to serve. In short, the world needs the wisdom, compassion and fierce love of empowered post-menopausal women and people!

## What's next?

You may like to continue your menopause enquiry through some or all of the following:

- reading (there is a reading list at the end of this ebook)
- listening to podcasts (again, you will find a list of suggestions at the end of this book)
- attending one of my online Menopause Map courses or in person workshops.
- I also offer one to one support, in person and online
- You could find a menopause circle or set up a listening partnership with a friend who is going through menopause, in person or on the phone or Zoom. (How to set up a listening partnership – a guide written for parents but transferable to any situation <https://www.handinhandparenting.org/2016/08/listen-launch-post-what-is-a-listening-partnership/>)

I encourage you to revisit this ebook from time to time as you travel through menopause, as different elements will speak to you at different times. And sometimes it is only by looking back that we can see how far we have come.

## JOURNALLING QUESTIONS

**Having read about the menopause map, are you thinking about menopause differently? Are there any images or key words that particularly stand out for you?**

**What is most challenging about the stage of menopause you are currently in? What are the gifts you might get from this phase?**

**Which do you think is the most challenging or uncomfortable of the 5 Elements for you? Which is most comfortable?**

**What (if anything) are you most apprehensive about regarding what's ahead? What are you looking forward to?**

**What is the most important thing you are taking away with you from your initial explorations of the menopause map?**

## APPENDIX - FURTHER READING

# Further Reading

I have found something useful in each of these books but please note that I don't necessarily agree with all the authors' views. Particularly when making decisions about your health and possible treatments and interventions I encourage you to consider a variety of perspectives, get professional/medical advice where necessary and to trust your own intuition.

**Lara Briden, *Hormone Repair Manual: Every Woman's Guide to Healthy Hormones After 40*, 2021** – Written by a naturopathic doctor, this is an in-depth guide to understanding what's happening on a hormonal level during menopause, why we may experience certain symptoms, and how we can manage symptoms and take care of our health using nutritional supplements, dietary changes and hormone therapy.

**Kate Codrington, *Second Spring: The ultimate self-care guide to help you through menopause*, 2022** – If you were to buy just one book on menopause I'd recommend this one; a big, generous, and big-hearted book. Holistic, inclusive, down-to-earth and affirming, 'Second Spring' successfully blends both the soul and the science of menopause in accessible bite-size chapters. Includes a 4 phase model of the menopause which is slightly different to, but relatable to, the 5 elements cycle on which my menopause map is based.

**Caroline Harris (editor), *M-Boldened: Menopause Conversations We All Need to Have*, 2020** – Aiming to open up the conversation around menopause. 21 chapters by a diverse range of contributors from across the globe offering personal perspectives on topics ranging from surgical menopause, racism and gender bias in medicine, and midlife as a potential time of passion, rage, empowerment and activism.

**Bonnie J. Horrigan, *Red Moon Passage: The Power and Wisdom of Menopause*, 1996** – Collected stories, experiences and wisdom from an eclectic mix of writers and visionaries on the theme of menopause as an initiation and the gateway to our wise woman years.

**Marian Van Eyk McCain, *Transformation Through Menopause*, 1991** – slim but substantial, thoughtful and thought-provoking book on menopause as a psychological and spiritual developmental journey, with suggestions of creative exercises for your own explorations.

**Diana Richardson & Janet McGeever, *Tantric Sex and Menopause: Practices for Spiritual and Sexual Renewal*, 2018** – Offering an approach to sex and intimacy that the authors believe is a perfect fit for for menopausal and post-menopausal women. Outlines practices to connect with the body's intuitive wisdom, and move towards a more holistic, mindful and heart-centred approach to sex.

## APPENDIX - FURTHER READING

**Dr Annice Mukherjee, *The Complete Guide to the Menopause: Your Toolkit to Take Control and Achieve Life-Long Health*, 2021** – Practical rather than spiritual, this book provides a clear and easy to understand introduction to menopause and its associated symptoms from a biological point of view, suggesting medical and lifestyle approaches.

**Susun S. Weed, *New Menopausal Years: Alternative Approaches for Women 30-90, 2002*** – A guide to supporting your health during menopause and beyond with herbs and other natural and complimentary approaches. I love the delightfully irreverent character 'Grandmother Growth' who speaks to us throughout the book. Also contains some beautiful suggestions for rituals to honour the different stages of menopause.

**Alexandra Pope and Sjane Hugo Wurlitzer, *Wild Power: Discover the Liberating Power of Menopause to Awaken Authority, Purpose and Belonging*, 2022** – An in-depth and empowering guide to menopause as an initiation and opportunity to awaken into our personal power and life purpose. Based on a 4 phase cyclical model which is slightly different to, but relatable to, the 5 elements cycle on which my menopause map is based.



## APPENDIX - OTHER RESOURCES

# Other Resources

**Black Women In Menopause**

[www.blackhealthandbeyond.co.uk/gallery/blackwomeninmenopause](http://www.blackhealthandbeyond.co.uk/gallery/blackwomeninmenopause)

UK based newsletter, events and social media account providing “a safe space for black people and people of colour, to ensure that they have access to accurate information about how the menopause affects them and content relevant to their needs.”

**Jewels Wingfield**

Hour long ‘Wombdala’ talk by Jewels Wingfield on Youtube (search in Youtube for ‘Wombdala Talk’)

I was at this talk which gives Jewels’ overview of how she sees women’s cycles as a gateway to empowerment; the section on menopause was what initially sparked my interest in and passion for menopause.

**‘Life: An Inside Job’ podcast**

[www.katecodrington.co.uk/category/podcast/](http://www.katecodrington.co.uk/category/podcast/)

Podcasts on the subject of cyclical living including episodes on menopause  
Loads of useful resources and blog posts on Kate’s website too

**Menoclarity**

[www.menoclarity.com](http://www.menoclarity.com)

A not-for-profit educational forum providing evidenced based information, created by a global group of menopause professionals who were “concerned about the over-medicalization of the menopause transition and the prevailing climate of fear.” A wealth of information on hormones, diet, medical and holistic approaches. Their resources page also includes links to resources for those seeking support around specific issues related to early menopause, surgical menopause, queer/LGBTQIA+ menopause and more.

**Menopause Whilst Black**

[www.thekarenarthur.com/menopausewhilstblack](http://www.thekarenarthur.com/menopausewhilstblack)

Podcast centring the menopausal experience of Black UK based women.

**The Red School’s menopause podcasts**

[www.redschool.net/blog/menopause-podcast-series](http://www.redschool.net/blog/menopause-podcast-series)

A wealth of interviews and podcasts by the menstrual cycle awareness and conscious menopause pioneers

## APPENDIX - ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

# Acknowledgements

I first learned about Five Elements theory as part of my shiatsu training at the Bristol School of Shiatsu, and I acknowledge all of my shiatsu teachers, especially Keith Phillips, my principal teacher, whose soulful approach to the Five elements has greatly influenced me and my approach. I acknowledge my Shiatsu teachers' teachers, and their teachers before them. The Five Elements forms part of Traditional Chinese Medicine which has been practised, shared, taught and passed down for over 3,000 years.

Jewels Wingfield first introduced me to the concept of menopause as a rite of passage, and a time of potential empowerment, through her 'Wombdala' model, a four sided model of change on which she bases her teachings on the menstrual cycle and the menopause. I then came across the books 'Coming Into Your Own' by Barbara Cecil, 'Second Spring' by Kate Codrington, and 'Wise Power' by Alexandra Pope and Sjane Hugo Wurlitzer which all offered their own four sided models of transformation, and which inspired me to think about how the Five Elements model might apply to menopause. In particular the work of Kate Codrington, Alexandra Pope and Sjane Hugo Wurlitzer has informed and inspired me.

## APPENDIX - ABOUT ME

# About Me

I am a Shiatsu practitioner and certified Shadow Work coach and group facilitator, with almost 20 years' experience of supporting people to connect with their bodies, and safely and gently release traumas and heal old patterns. I offer one-to-one sessions and group programmes both online and in-person.

My menopause years began 7 years ago (at the time of writing this) when I was 42. I am now emerging out the other side, so I have walked the journey you are on myself and, although I know that each person's menopause experience is unique, I know what it's like to struggle, to find a way through and to emerge feeling stronger, full of passion, and more aligned than before.

I live surrounded by the wild nature of Dartmoor National Park in Devon, with my husband and teenage step-daughter. My work with clients is supported by post graduate shiatsu training including Transformational Dialogue and Body Focused Enquiry with Keith Phillips, and experience from my own healing journey and personal practice of 5Rhythms Dance, yoga and Tai Chi. Other passions include drawing, writing and being in nature.

The Menopause Map is one pillar of my approach which also includes somatic work and Shadow Work. If you are interested in working with me you can find out more at [www.melanieward.co.uk/menopause](http://www.melanieward.co.uk/menopause)

