



# ‘I’m so glad menopausal women are not ignored now’

RTÉ presenter Maura Derrane says she had aches and pains for five years before realising was perimenopause, writes **Rebecca Daly**

**I**N AN upstairs room of The Grayson restaurant, off Stephen’s Green in Dublin, RTÉ journalist and presenter Maura Derrane sips a coffee and is ready for her first interview of the day, before heading to Cork in the afternoon for her *Today* commitments.

She is keen to talk about all things menopause. It’s part of her ambassadorship with Active Iron, marking World Menopause Month.

Derrane has been open about her menopause journey and has spoken about how it triggered her irritable bowel syndrome. She believes in keeping the conversation about women’s midlife hormonal changes in the public domain.

“Every woman goes through menopause,” Derrane says. “For years, nobody talked about it. Nobody talked about perimenopause, and women didn’t really know the symptoms.”

“They didn’t know that when they started getting aches and pains in their 40s, in their knees or whatever and feeling fatigue and all that, that it was perimenopause.”

Derrane felt achy for about five years before the more recognisable symptoms of perimenopause appeared. At the time, she was worried there was something more sinister at play, such as an undiagnosed illness.

She recalls being in a health shop

in Britain, enquiring about herbal remedies. A staff member told her there was no need to take any herbs if she

didn’t have hot flushes.

Derrane later travelled back to Ireland and felt something coming on soon after landing at Knock Airport.

“I sat in the car, and I got a hot flush. I was like, ‘I don’t believe it!’”

The presenter says she has been taking supplements since she was in her 20s and still uses them now, through menopause.

“I’m really in to the science of food and the science of our physiology, how food can be a fuel, and what it does.

“And also supplementation, because the reality of life is, we’re never going to get everything [we need nutritionally] if we’re really busy,” she says.

Derrane takes evening primrose oil, fish oils, multivitamins, and black cohosh, but she is not on HRT. “The reality is heavy periods and sporadic periods. This is what happens in perimenopause, and this can go on for years, because you can have a period. As you’re coming towards menopause, it doesn’t mean your periods end. It could mean that you have one, and then, two months later, you’d have a really heavy period. So, blood loss equals low iron, which equals fatigue.” (An Active Iron survey found that 67% of women experience heavy

periods. Yet, 41% of women admit they have never considered that their menstrual cycle could be causing low iron levels, resulting in fatigue.)

She says she was “lucky” when it came to her periods - they were regular and were rarely heavy.

When she became perimenopausal, however, she started to get much

heavier periods.

“Even for me to get a very heavy period during that time was a big deal. It’s very uncomfortable. You’re worried when you’re working and all that.”

Being honest about periods and menopause is essential to the Inishmore native, and coming “from a

house of little women — four sisters” means she has always been open about female health issues.

Even with those around her at work, Derrane says they “never stop talking” about periods, menopause, and perimenopause. “I’m surrounded by women at every hormonal stage of their lives in my team.”

She welcomes this, because society hasn’t always been so open. “In my mother’s day, nobody ever talked about menopause. Nobody ever talked about the ‘change’. It was almost like you just shouldn’t do it.

“It’s very recent that we’re talking about menopause and perimenopause. I’m so glad that women are not being ignored anymore.”

Derrane knows much more can be done, particularly about menopause in the workplace.

“I think if men were going through the menopause, we’d have accommodated them,” she says.

Listening to your body and not ignoring symptoms is essential for the

Inishmor woman. She encourages other women who may be suffering from their menopause or perimenopause symptoms to get help, and says that there are plenty of resources available.

Derrane became a mother in her 40s to son, Cal, who is now 10, and says it “didn’t knock a feather out of her”.

“I was probably more tired than if I was in my 20s, but I’ve got really high energy.”

The presenter was back on television screens just three months after giving birth and says that she didn’t have time to think about the chaos around her — having a newborn, work commitments, and her husband, former TD John Deasy, being away from home, but, in hindsight, she says she was “crazy.”

She wishes she had more self-confidence at a younger age, but says that ageing has pros and cons.

“It’s not good for the lines around your eyes, but it’s wonderful for your mind, because you get better with age.”

Regardless of what hormonal phase you’re in, Derrane says it’s important not to run yourself “ragged”.

“Don’t just suffer on, do something.”

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**TV presenter Maura Derrane welcomes the openness about menopause because in 'her mother's day' no one discussed it.**

Picture: Gerard McCarthy