

Why Did I Walk into This Room?

Finding the Humor When
Perimenopause is Kicking Your Ass



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Introduction

Be honest. In your youth, did you ever give any thought to middle age? Or old age? I'm guessing you didn't because when we're young, we think middle age is old, and old age is death adjacent. Sure, as a kid I noticed my grandma's saggy arm flab and crepey leg skin, but it never dawned on me that her body hadn't always looked like that, or that one day mine would morph into that same condition.

My grandma lived only two hours away, but anytime she came to our house for a visit, the first thing she did was make a beeline for the couch (or davenport, as she called it) to take a nap.

How could she be so exhausted from a two-hour car ride? I wondered as a little girl.

Sure enough, after a little snooze, she was fit as a fiddle and had all the energy in the world—or at least enough to watch Wheel of Fortune and play a hand of Euchre while munching on chocolate-covered peanuts. My other grandma would never admit she was tired (kind of the way toddlers do), but she was constantly dozing when she sat on the couch. It was fun to call her name whenever I saw her eyes start to flutter shut because she'd always declare, "I'm awake! I'm awake!"

I'm guessing she didn't want to admit that aging was kicking her ass. Apparently, it was doing a number on my mom, too, because she lived for naps as well. I remember thinking how sad it was that all the women in my life wanted to sleep their lives away.

Now that I've reached middle age, my perspective has shifted on

quite a few things. Not only do I have a new appreciation for what my mother's and grandmothers' minds and bodies went through, but I also have a delayed appreciation for my own youth and the things that came easy back then. For instance, I could fall asleep anywhere, at any time, on any surface, and stay asleep despite my surroundings. I could pass out at the bottom of the stairs and sleep so soundly that a marching band could meander through the living room and I wouldn't budge.

I think my grandma who refused to concede fatigue was trying to fill in the blanks for me in a roundabout way when she would say to me, "Oh, honey, what I wouldn't give to have your spunk and energy!"

Deep down, we all know we're going to age, but who wants to sit around ruminating about that? Isn't it better to pretend time isn't ticking by? The only problem with deflection and denial is that aging sneaks up on you, attacking you when you least expect it.

You may bend over to tie your shoe and throw out your back. You may sneeze and pee your pants. You may wake up one morning and notice that all words are suddenly tiny and blurry. This shit never happens when you're young, but once you inch towards forty and beyond, you can start placing bets with your middle-aged friends about who is going to mysteriously wake up injured. I'm not kidding. I've lost count of the number of times I've gone to bed perfectly fine and woken up with some part of my body in a state of ache, hurt, twist, or pinch. Also, your bones pop like a mofo. Last night, my cat was curled up next to me. I moved my shoulder and it popped so loudly that my poor kitty sprang straight up into the air like a cartoon character. The startle reflex is strong in that one.

I now know that this all starts with this bullshit called perimenopause. According to Dr. Mary Claire Haver, perimenopause expert and author of *The New Menopause*, perimenopause is your body's natural transition to making less estrogen. If you've read that this period of time leading up to menopause may be brief, I'm going to give it to you straight. If you only deal with perimenopausal symptoms for a few months, consider yourself blessed because typically this phase lasts a good several years (not to be confused with several good years), and it may go on as long as a fucking decade.

During perimenopause, life as you know it changes completely. Sex. Sleep. Sensitivities. Clear thinking. Clear vision. Clear skin. You look in the mirror, and staring back at you is a face and body you don't recognize. So, if you find yourself asking, "What the actual fuck?" on a regular

basis, don't be alarmed. In fact, I believe that "What the actual fuck!" should be the war cry of perimenopause. And if you're not regularly uttering this phrase, you likely have not yet entered perimenopause.

But, hey, perimenopause is part of aging. The only way to avoid aging is to die, and that's not ideal. Isn't it a bummer to think that you're older now than you were when you first started reading this page? And now...you're seconds older than that. Well, fuck.

Still...just because we're aging women with changing and depleting hormones doesn't mean we have to suffer for years on end. That's how it was for females for the longest time back when Hormone Replacement Therapy (HRT) was considered taboo. We now know as the result of extensive research that HRT is not only safe but smart.

Warning—if you feel like shit and finally work up the nerve to go see your doctor, steel yourself to get some version of the following message: "Suck it up, buttercup."

When this happens, I encourage you to respond with a big, "Ef you," then find yourself a functional medicine doctor, homeopathic doctor, holistic doctor, or someone well versed in HRT to get their advice on next steps. This is key because according to Midi Health, 80 percent of OB/GYNs are untrained in perimenopause and menopause. No wonder they are oblivious. It's understandable why you would think you could get reliable health advice from your OB/GYN or GP, but apparently asking them their thoughts on why you are struggling with weight gain, fatigue, mood changes, insomnia, and low libido is futile. Hell, you might as well ask your dentist about hot flashes, joint pain, and brain fog because you'll likely get the same answer from both. They'll either respond with a blank stare, or they'll tell you that you're fine. There's just one problem with that message: You're not fine, and you deserve to feel better.

Prior to entering this stage of life, you are like a child's treasured toy—fun, frisky, and full of zip. You're on the go, nonstop, doing all the things and never complaining because you've got stamina like the Energizer Bunny. Then you notice, however, that your battery starts depleting. Next thing you know you've lost your charging cord, which means you continue slowing down and growing more lethargic. This is sucky enough, but then one day you're left outside in the rain and get rusted out. This leaves your joints so stiff and sore that you can barely move. Given all of this, you no longer feel fun or treasured anymore, and that sucks.

There's good news, however. With the proper guidance and support

from the right people, you can recharge, reboot, reconnect, and return to your former glory.

Perimenopause is a journey, but it's not one you have to walk alone. This book is here to show you that you're in good company. That means that we can laugh about some of this shit, and we can work on fixing the shit we can't laugh at. At the end of each chapter, I've also included the title of an inspiring, empowering, or motivational song. I invite you to listen to these songs on difficult days to remind you that you are fierce, capable, and precious.

Fair warning: Since entering perimenopause, I've embraced my inner sailor, so in case you haven't already deduced it, there will be some salty language in this book. I've read, however, that people who swear are more trustworthy, so you're getting the God's honest truth from me!

My feeling is that by the time you reach middle age, you should be able to do whatever you want and not feel bad about it. Life is short, but holy shit, can it feel long sometimes. So, you do you. Now, let's talk about fucking perimenopause.

Chapter 1



My Brain Is on a Long-Ass Vacation

In February 2020, just before news broke that the COVID pandemic was brewing, I was in the middle of a spin class at the gym when suddenly I started feeling woozy and chilled. I also experienced this weird sensation of feeling like no matter how deeply I inhaled, I could not get enough air. That night, I woke up at 4 a.m. with vertigo and a bizarre metallic taste in my mouth. On top of that, I could swear I smelled natural gas. I was so sure of it that I got up and walked around the house, sniffing mightily like a bunny rabbit, but I found nothing.

As I lay there wondering if I was dying or losing my mind, I began thinking about how when I do kick the bucket, I don't want to be buried. I want that other thing where your body is burned to ashes. What is that called? My mind kept searching for the word "cremation," but it wouldn't come to me. The harder I tried to force myself to think of it, the further away it seemed to be. This frustrated the hell out of me, especially since I'm a writer. Nothing pisses off a writer more than being unable to find the right word.

Another day I was out running in the freezing cold and thought, *I hope I don't get...oh, what is the word? Numbing skin? Frigid fingers. Shit!* For the life of me, I could not recall the word "frostbite."

Spring came, and on another run, I passed a yard full of yellow flowers. I thought, *Oh, I remember when my kids used to pick those for me. What*

are they called? I kept thinking “sunflowers” but knew that wasn’t right. My seemingly broken brain could not summon the word for “dandelion.”

In the biggest twist of irony yet, the following week I couldn’t call to mind the word for “amnesia.”

I kept thinking “laryngitis,” even though I knew that was when you lose your voice, not your memory. When it finally came to me, I felt like I had just spent my collective brain power for the week by fishing my mind for this one fucking word!

All humans occasionally experience tip-of-the-tongue phenomenon (this is an actual thing I remember learning about in school; this I remember). What I was dealing with now, though, felt different. Once the coronavirus news spread and we started to learn about all the weird symptoms of COVID, like lingering brain fog, I told my husband that I must have had COVID back in February and this was related brain fog.

He gave me such grief about that theory. “That would essentially make you patient zero,” he said. “You hardly go anywhere, Christy. You work from home. When would you have been exposed to COVID?”

“It’s the only thing that makes sense,” I said.

The more he argued with me, the more I wanted to prove him wrong. Not that there was a way to really do that. Although when I had gone to the doctor back in February, I had tested negative for both flu and strep; at that point the COVID test wasn’t yet available. Hence, my theory.

“You’re crazy,” he said, shaking his head.

Sure, I thought. Crazy from COVID.

Only now, years later, as I put the puzzle pieces together, did it dawn on me that in February 2020, I was forty-seven years old. I hate to say my husband was right because he really does love to rub that shit in, but I probably didn’t have COVID. My symptoms—wooziness, vertigo, phantom smells, weird taste, brain fog, and that sensation of not being able to get a deep enough breath (called oxygen hunger)—were likely the start of perimenopause.

Brains are such big, bright, beautiful things...when they are working properly. We take our brains for granted. Just like we take our health, our relationships, and our youth for granted. But once brain fog strikes you in perimenopause, you begin longing for the good ole days when you could remember what you were doing, why you were doing it, and the word for what you were doing.

If you wonder what it’s like to have brain fog in perimenopause, think about how your mind functions when you’re coming out of surgery

and waking up from anesthesia. You're loopy and nonsensical. You can't find your words. You repeat yourself. Everything seems fuzzy. That's how perimenopausal brain fog is. You walk into a room and have no idea why you entered. You lose your keys, your phone, your glasses, and while you can still remember the lyrics to every song you ever heard in high school, the rest of your memory is like Swiss cheese.

Speaking of old music, the other day I heard Eddie Money's song "I Wanna Go Back." Boy, do those lyrics resonate. He sings about growing older and longing for his younger years when everything was so damn good. Eddie was waxing poetic about young love/first love/lost love, but man, this is how I feel as I long to return to life pre-perimenopause. I, too, want to go back, dammit! Back to when my body didn't ache and my mind didn't short-circuit. Back to when I could concentrate through the day and sleep through the night. Back to the days of good eyesight, a taut tummy, and non-itchy ears (yes, that's another odd perimenopausal symptom).

During perimenopause, it feels like every day you wake up to a new nightmare, a new conundrum, a new *What the actual fuck is this?* Restless Legs Syndrome (RLS) was another issue that began plaguing me when I laid down to bed. There I was, dog tired and eager to get some shut eye, but my lower extremities staged a revolt, twitching, itching, and aching. I can't begin to tell you how annoying it is to be close to dozing off and have your legs start twitching involuntarily. Not only does it feel super weird, but it messes with your ability to fall asleep. When I mentioned it to my primary doc, he said nothing of perimenopause. He just prescribed Ropinirole, a medication that mimics dopamine.

Around this same time, I noticed that I was becoming increasingly clumsy. It's almost like I turned back into a toddler, walking into walls and crashing into shit. I banged my calf on the dishwasher door, smashed my finger in a drawer, bashed my thigh into a coffee table, hit my elbow on the stair railing, dropped a giant container of kitty litter on my toe, dropped my phone on my other toe, and whacked myself in the eye by pulling up the bed covers too forcefully. On a regular basis my husband, Eric now asks me, "Where did you get that bruise/cut/scrape/bump?"

"Peri," I say.

He nods because he knows.

God bless my sweet mom. I used to give her a hard time every time she had a memory slip or mess up, like when she called me by the cat's name or forgot to pick me up from dance class. I got frustrated when she had no recollection of promising to run the school carnival, and I chuck-

led if I found a bottle of nail polish in the freezer. Now, of course, I know Mom was stumbling through perimenopausal brain fog, something I'm in the thick of now.

Sprawled across my desk, kitchen counter, car's cupholders, and bathroom mirror are Post-It notes in every color. These notes remind me to refill my prescriptions, schedule an appointment with my life insurance agent, print pictures from my phone (I'm six years behind on that task), ask Eric how to download those pictures from my phone to my computer (because it's been six years and I've forgotten how to do it), mail a get-well card to my friend who had undergone surgery, and make out a sympathy card to my friend whose cat died (yes, I do that because it hurts so fucking much to lose a pet). I also make bulleted to-do lists on notepads and recycled paper. These notes prompt me to scoop the litter boxes, go to Bath and Body Works for soap and more candles that I don't need but want, balance the checkbook, pay bills, and organize my den. When I complete these tasks, I get to cross them off the list and/or crumple up the Post-It note, both of which are so satisfying.

I also create lists in the "notes" section of my phone because sometimes I'm out and about without access to paper. I jot down reminders to buy more readers, change the air filters, and try on the new swimsuits I ordered online. This last item is tricky, however, because I won't put on a swimsuit after I've eaten or if I'm too tired or if I'm feeling bloated or if I'm on my period or if I'm sweaty or if my skin is ghost white or if I'm feeling self-conscious about my body or if I feel unpretty. This leaves roughly fifteen minutes out of the year that I can complete this odious task.

Let's face it. There's always something to do. Let pants out. Get pants hemmed. Get pants zipper fixed (I can't sew, can you tell?). Get the oil changed. Buy new tires. Order cat supplies. Call dentist. Call dermatologist. Call gynecologist. Call therapist. I'm tired just making this list, but if I don't make a list, it won't get done, and even if I put it on a list, it still might not get done.

Reminding myself by repeating it in my head doesn't work, either. For instance, I can be climbing the stairs to get a sweatshirt from my bedroom closet, and I'll tell myself to grab some tissues from the linen closet to take down to the powder bathroom on my way back down the stairs. Even though only two minutes have lapsed between my thought and my going back downstairs, I won't remember to do it.

The same is true when I'm in the checkout line at the grocery and the cashier is ringing me up, I tell myself over and over, "Buy stamps, buy

stamps, buy stamps.” Then I’ll leave that checkout line without stamps. I swear, my life could be on the line, and I could be told that I’d live as long as I did Task X; I’d still forget to do Task X, and then I’d croak.

One day I came home after running errands and stepped inside my house like I’ve done a million other times before. The security alarm was beeping to remind me to punch in the code to disarm it. In that moment, my mind went blank.

OMG, what is the code? I freaked.

I had ninety seconds for it to come to me or an obnoxiously loud alarm was going to sound and scare the living shit out of my poor cats. Some random numbers sprang to mind, but they didn’t seem right. I realized those numbers were for our garage code.

I glanced at the keypad, watching the numbers tick down. I felt like I was in one of those movies where I knew I only had moments left to deactivate a bomb.

Shit! What is the code?

I would be mortified for the alarm company to call and ask me to prove I was the homeowner by relaying the secret code that only my husband and I know. I couldn’t recall the numbers I plug in on a daily basis so do you think I could recall the secret code that I’ve never needed to use? No! If I couldn’t provide the digits, cops would be at my door, pronto. And then what would I say?

“Sorry, officer, but I’m a sweaty, clumsy, neurotic perimenopausal woman who can’t remember shit. But I do live here, I swear.”

Beads of sweat collected in my cleavage as my heart pounded.

By the grace of God, with three seconds to spare, the numbers came to me.

Panic. Confusion. Frustration. More panic. This pretty much sums up perimenopause.

A few years ago, I attended a workshop on dementia for an article I was writing. Little did I know that soon I would be having memory issues of my own. For instance, last week I went into my den to feed the cats and noticed their bowls were missing. So of course I did what every half of a married couple does. I blamed my spouse.

“What did you do with the cat bowls?” I asked.

Even as I posed the question, I knew it didn’t make sense because I’m the one who takes care of all things cat.

“I didn’t do anything with them,” he said.

“They’re not here.”

“Well, you must have moved them,” he said.

“Why would I do that?” I asked.

I was genuinely creeped out. Because if my husband didn’t move them and I didn’t move them, what ghost stole my plastic cat dishes?

“You had to have put them somewhere,” he insisted.

“Oh, sure, gaslight me, why don’t you?” I said.

“I just mean that you’ve been forgetting things lately...”

He needed to stop talking.

Now I was confused *and* pissed.

Whatever. I got out two new dishes, fed the cats, and started vacuuming the floor. That’s when it hit me that the day before, I had moved the cat dishes up to the top of the bookshelf because my piggie cat, whom I affectionately refer to as Le Oink, was going to town on the dry food. He’s overweight by like five pounds, which in kitty pounds is probably something like fifty pounds, so I took up the food to stop his binge. Only I had forgotten that I’d done that, and now I had to admit to Eric that it was I who moved the dishes. I was the fucking ghost.

There’s no doubt about it; perimenopause messes with your ability to do normal things. I’ll give you an example. Last spring, our family vacationed in California. When we got to the airport, we parked in the parking garage where the posted sign instructed us to take our parking ticket with us.

“That seems dumb,” I told Eric. “There’s a better chance of us losing the ticket over the next week than there is of someone breaking into our car and finding a way to steal it in an airport parking garage with video surveillance.”

Ever the rule followers, we did as we were told and took the ticket with us.

“I’ll put it in this zipper section of my purse so we won’t lose it,” I said.

We went on to have a lovely week away. The morning we checked out of the hotel we had the day to kill because check-out was at 11 a.m. and our flight wasn’t until 11:30 p.m. We decided to spend the day at the hotel pool, so we asked the bell boy to hold our luggage.

In the late afternoon, we brought our car around and asked the hotel staff to collect our bags. When the bell boy handed them to me, I pulled out the luggage claim ticket and a ten-dollar bill. Twenty minutes later when we were gassing up the rental car, I checked to see if the parking garage ticket was still in the zipper pocket of my purse. To my horror, it was not, but what was there was a crisp ten-dollar bill. Apparently, I had handed the

bell boy both claim tickets rather than the bag ticket and his tip.

Shit! I thought, picturing the sign hanging in the airport parking garage: *In the event of a lost ticket, driver must pay maximum amount of dollars.*

“We’ll probably owe a thousand bucks and have to donate a kidney to retrieve our car,” I said.

“Let’s just go back and explain what happened,” my husband said.

We drove back to the hotel where I relayed my mess-up to the hotel staff. We tracked down the right bell boy, who said that he had thrown away the ticket (probably because he was pissed that I had tipped him with an airport claim ticket rather than real dollars). I asked if he remembered what trashcan he had put it in as I was fully prepared to dig through the garbage. Indeed, he had, but the can had been collected five minutes earlier, and since Disney resorts don’t allow their guests to go dumpster diving on property, I was SOL.

I was already feeling low, but then we got to the airport terminal shopping area where my husband pointed out a Spanx store and asked me if I wanted anything.

“Excuse me?” I asked. “Do you have a problem with my body?”

He feigned ignorance, claiming that he thought it was exercise wear, but my pitiful perimenopausal mind with the crippling self-esteem was certain he was criticizing my jiggly parts.

To take my mind off this depressing conversation, I decided to kill time by sending out some text messages. Unfortunately, I proceeded to text “love you” to my mechanic, Stephan, rather than my friend, Stephanie. Then I actually texted Stephanie to tell her what I’d done because I knew she would make me feel better by either sharing an equally humiliating story or sending me a hysterical meme that sums up life as a female.

Seriously, one of the best parts about having female friends is commiserating with them over shitty life circumstances, whether that’s relationships, careers, parenting, or health. In talking to my friends about memory, one of them told me she had forgotten to sign up her son to ride the school bus, even though she’s been doing that for the past ten years.

Another friend shared that she poured food into her dogs’ bowls but then forgot to actually set the bowls down on the floor for her pups; she found the filled bowls sitting on her pantry shelf four hours later.

My cousin told me that she got a call from someone telling her that the baby chicks she ordered had arrived, and she was like, “What baby chicks?” Apparently, she had ordered baby chicks a few months earlier but had no recollection of doing so. (To be clear, she runs a farm, so

this wasn't some drunken stupor baby chick shopping spree. Although a drunken stupor baby chick shopping spree would also be awesome.)

Another friend said that she plays in a co-ed pickleball league for men and women between the ages of forty and sixty years old.

"The men have to keep score because none of the women can ever remember the score or who served last," she said.

I'm telling you, ladies. We are all in this together.

A couple of weeks ago, my son had gotten his braces tightened. He swore his mouth was too sore to eat chewable food and insisted ice cream was the only solution so off I went to get a gallon of cookies-n-cream.

At least I'll be in and out in a flash since I only have to get one thing, I thought, as I headed inside the store.

As I was waiting in the checkout line, the cashier asked the woman in front of me if she would like her ice cream bagged. That's when it hit me that I had forgotten to get the one thing I had come to the store for. I had bread, milk, dish detergent, and peach salsa on the conveyer belt but no ice cream. Thankfully, there were two women in line behind me who looked about my age. I told them what I had done.

"Perimenopause for the win!" I said, referring to my brain fog.

"Girl, preach!" one lady said.

"Go grab your ice cream," the other added with a chuckle.

Again, I say: we are in this together.

Kick-ass tune: "I Wanna Go Back" by Eddie Money