

Meg Mathews
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LIFE, LOVE AND THE MENOPAUSE

Aloe vera shots and dog walks at dawn are a far cry from the Meg Mathews of '90s Britpop hedonism – but she likes herself far more *now* »

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Once famous for her rock-star husband and weekend-long parties with Kate Moss and Sadie Frost, Meg Mathews now wants to be known for her wellbeing and transformed lifestyle. And, boy, is she rolling with it.

Sitting in her Primrose Hill house, she's listing what she puts into and on her body every day. "I don't eat until 11.30am. Just a fresh mint tea in the morning," she begins. "Then a superfood salad for lunch and salmon or chicken for dinner. I take magnesium, vitamin B complex, vitamin C, vitamin D3, calcium for the bones, a shot of cider vinegar, a big shot of aloe vera, red clover for my hot flushes, evening primrose oil and fish oils." And that's before administering her hormone treatments (more on that later). But why such a full-on regime? Because Meg Mathews is new, improved... and menopausal.

The poster girl for Britpop hedonism and a firm member of the Primrose Hill set, Mathews is now the poster girl for the Gen-X menopause. "I want women to have open, honest and frank conversations about the menopause," she says. "I don't want it to be this taboo subject."

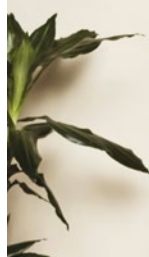
If any biological transition in a woman's life needed an unexpected cheerleader, it's the menopause. It was Christa D'Souza's liberating book, *The Hot Topic*, released last year, that finally got women talking honestly about what they were going through – from the peri menopause (up to 10 years before the menopause, when symptoms start) to the fully fledged 'change', when periods have stopped for a year. For Meg, it all began one day in January 2016, when she woke up with dry, itchy skin, anxiety and no energy. Over the next few sleepless nights the symptoms worsened. "I thought I was losing it," she says. "I was nauseous, my boobs hurt, I was sweating at night. Every symptom you've had in your life for PMT or pregnancy, I got all of that; scatty brain, aching joints. I felt like an old woman." Blood tests confirmed it was the menopause. "I just felt relieved I finally knew what it was and could start treating it," says Mathews.

I'M INTERVIEWING HER ON HER 51ST BIRTHDAY.

Fresh from a workout, in a Stella McCartney for Adidas tank and leggings, she flings open the door as Oscar, her seven-year-old Boston terrier and Ziggy, her Hungarian vizsla, bark excitedly. Inside, Anaïs, her 17-year-old daughter, is mixing batter for cupcakes ("Mum won't eat them because they're not gluten-free, but it's her birthday so I'm making them anyway"). There's a bunch of purple, pink and white flowers ("from Kate") sitting on the floor and Diptyque Feu De Bois candles burning on the tables.

In the next two hours, another bouquet arrives, Anaïs produces her baked goods and the three of us sit on a white rug on the floor, leaning back onto white leather sofas and propping our arms onto Bella Freud cushions.

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Mathews roars with laughter as she recollects wearing a crop top to visit then-prime minister, Tony Blair, with her then-husband, Noel Gallagher (Anaïs' father and Oasis songwriter), back in 1997. "Back then *nobody* got invited to Number 10," says Mathews. "For someone who left school without any qualifications, ran away from home and hitchhiked to London, that was a big deal. I was really proud of it. And I wore a bloody crop top!" The invitation marked Blair's era of 'Cool Britannia', the height of Britpop and sparked the paparazzi's obsession with Mathews. "BBC Two did a documentary about 1997 and they told me I was the third most written-about woman in the newspapers that year, after The Spice Girls and Princess Diana," she says.

Mathews was born in Guernsey but grew up in South Africa, then Norfolk. She came to London aged 18, lived in squats, had a purple mohican and launched a career in fashion PR, music management, and then party planning. In one of her short-lived columns for *The Sunday Times*, Mathews announced she had dyed her hair platinum to "match her credit cards". She and Gallagher married in 1997 and went through an acrimonious divorce in 2001. I wonder how their relationship is now, especially with a model daughter gracing catwalks and magazine covers. "Shush, no, we can't talk about him," she insists. "It really backfires. We have a great relationship but we agreed... we just don't. It's my interview, isn't it?" Fair enough.

Is she dating anyone now? A recent tabloid story cited Mathews as having a Tinder profile. She pauses before speaking, a wry smile emerging, then a cackle. She is on Raya, the app for the creative industries, which has a strict vetting process. >>

I beg her to show me who's on there. The first is a famous sportsman. "I've only been on a couple of online dates," she says later. "But I don't really want to date anyone right now. I'm enjoying being on my own and I want to make sure I'm feeling 100% before I meet anyone. I don't want to be lying in bed [with a man] having hot sweats. I think I used to date guys because they were 'the cool guy', but it's just about someone you can laugh and feel comfortable with."

THE PARTY YEARS ARE WELL AND TRULY BEHIND MATHEWS.

"I was hardcore, we all were," she says. "I probably never enjoyed Sunday mornings. But now I wake up energised, not with a pounding headache." It's been 10 years since she gave up "all that" and seven months of being sugar-, gluten-, dairy- and booze-free. "I'm not a nice drunk," she says. "I think I'm being the funniest at the party when really I'm just the loudest." Dancing at dusk has been replaced with walking the dogs at dawn. Three times a week she trains with weights at KX in Chelsea.

"The menopause was the kicker to reassess everything," she says. "I cut out all the crap food, started exercising and, once I'd found the treatments that worked for me, started to feel great. I've got more energy and feel in control." The treatments Mathews speaks of aren't for the faint-hearted (consult your doctor; these are all prescription medicines). "I have the Mirena coil that releases progesterone every month," she explains, "then I use oestrogen cream and testosterone gel." Testosterone? "It helps me get up and go. It helps stabilise my body. And boost my libido. And it's made my hair thicker." At this, she tips her head down and shakes her characteristic shaggy blonde locks. "Go on, feel it," she urges. She's right; it does feel thick.


A stint in rehab 11 years ago and cognitive behavioural therapy sessions have also contributed to Mathew's self-love. "It's taken years. But now I'm the most happy, confident and self-accepting I've ever been." Anaïs nods along to this. The two clearly have a close bond and often finish each other's sentences – between Anaïs rolling her eyes at Mathews' elaborate stories. "We have an amazing relationship," says Mathews. "I'm very sensitive and she's 100% like her dad. Thick-skinned and articulate. If we ever have an argument, I'm the one screaming and crying and she's the sensible one! I love it when she asks for my



FROM TOP: Mathews with friends at her 50th birthday party; with daughter Anaïs



advice, but I ask for her advice all the time, too. I look at her and think, 'Wow.' She is so comfortable in her skin. I wasn't at all."

I press Mathews again for stories about her heyday but she won't tell. I get it – she's moved on. "I wouldn't change a thing. I've lived my life but I'm glad I've learnt to grow and appreciate it and where I am now. I don't wish I was this wise at 20; I loved raving, being a punk and in that scene, I did it all at the best time. But now, I finally like Meg." A few hugs later, I leave Mathews' house thinking how much I like her, too. 

MEG'S ADVICE ON HOW TO HANDLE THE MENOPAUSE

The average age of the menopause is 51, but some women have a 'premature menopause', which is defined as occurring before the age of 40. If you are concerned, your first port of call should be your GP. Here are Meg's own suggestions...

1 TELL THE PEOPLE CLOSEST TO YOU FIRST

– don't be embarrassed. "I sat Anaïs, my then-boyfriend and my two business partners down to explain what I was going through. You'd be surprised how accepting people are."

2 TRY EVERY TREATMENT UNTIL YOU FIND THE ONE THAT WORKS FOR YOU.

"Ask other women for advice." Mathews tried HRT tablets, but they didn't suit her. So she uses OestroGel, available on the NHS. "After three days my mood and sleep were better and my skin cleared." She also has testosterone, which can be prescribed by a menopause clinic (and privately), but she recommends you ask to be referred to an NHS clinic. Private treatment isn't always the only option, she stresses. "I tried bioidentical [hormone treatments made from plants, available privately] creams and lozenges, but didn't like them."

3 GO TO BED AT THE SAME TIME EVERY NIGHT.

"Your sleep pattern will almost certainly be affected. I always go to bed at 10pm, fall asleep straight away and then get up at 5.30am."

4 GET A TRAINING PARTNER.

"We have a chat on the treadmill before working out so I now look forward to exercise – and it makes me feel great."

5 EAT CLEAN – AND GO EASY ON ALCOHOL.

"Your body is going through enough without a hangover, too. Don't deprive yourself, but be sensible."

6 INVEST IN A GOOD MOISTURISER.

"Your skin will thank you. I use Clarins or Dr Hauschka."

7 READ UP ON SUPPLEMENTS.

"They genuinely work. Your body is starting to deplete a lot of nutrients so it's important to replenish."

Starting in June, read Meg Mathews' exclusive health diaries on REDONLINE.CO.UK