

ONE FOOT IN FRONT OF THE OTHER: RUNNING A BUSINESS WHILE MENOPAUSAL

This **International Women's Day**, Managing Director of Algar Air Simone Kidd opens up about her experience of menopause.



I'm 42. I'm also perimenopausal which, in case you didn't know, is the technical term for your body transitioning to its post-reproductive years. You might wonder why I'm telling you this.

To be honest, I'm wondering why I'm telling you this, but I'll get to that in a minute.

THE REAL MENOPAUSE

Everyone knows the sort of cliched symptoms of menopause – the hot flushes (I haven't had those yet) and mood swings (I've definitely had those) – but that's the sort of narrow, obvious, cartoon version. Living with menopause brings with it lots of symptoms you may not know about. And they can be really scary.

You never quite feel yourself. You start suffering lots of ailments you never experienced before (mine were digestive, which came as a shock). You stop eating properly. You stop sleeping properly. You get vertigo. Your eyesight deteriorates(!). There's restless leg syndrome, which is where your legs develop a kind of overwhelming urge to Riverdance. It usually happens at night and makes it even more impossible to sleep.

LOSING MY MIND

Then there's the worst symptom of all: brain fog. Brain fog is so much more than forgetting the odd word here or there. It's a total brain block. I can get halfway through a sentence and not know why I started it. That's scary for anyone, but I'm supposed to be running a successful air compressor business. I'm supposed to be 'on it'. And yet, since my menopause began, I've found myself feeling so stupid, so often. I hate it.

When you wake up not knowing whether your brain is going to let you down mid-sentence, it makes you anxious. The more your brain messes with you, the more your anxiety builds. Until I was diagnosed, I really worried that I was losing my mind.

In truth, I wasn't dealing with it very well. I wasn't functioning properly. It was a real challenge to get out of bed. I wasn't my usual pro-active, energetic, got-my-shit-together self. Where once I would never leave the house without full makeup, now I was just throwing on some clothes and putting a brush through my hair. I wasn't me. I was someone else. And that person was just putting one foot in front of the other and trying to get through each day.

People told me as much. They'd ask me what the matter was. Until I was diagnosed, I honestly didn't know what to say. And until last Thursday, I couldn't say it without dissolving into tears.

FIGHTING FOR DIAGNOSIS

A week last Thursday I started to turn a corner. My HRT (hormone replacement therapy) kicked in for the first time. I've been on it a while, but it takes a while to find your ideal prescription levels, and for the levels of oestrogen to build in your body.

Last Thursday I had my dosage upped and, for the first time in as long as I can remember, I feel much more like my old self. The effect was almost instantaneous – not perfect, but much better. Apparently, over time, even my brain fog should lift. Things will ebb and flow. I'll have good days and bad. The medication will need readdressing as my hormone levels change. But at least things are better. What I've realised, from talking to lots of other women in similar positions, is that diagnosis is a real issue. 42 is young to be perimenopausal, but it's far more common than you'd think. Yet because the conventional wisdom is that menopause happens to women in their 50s, lots of GPs overlook the menopause as a likely issue and jump straight to anti-depressants.

I'm grateful for having a GP who listened to me and has been completely on my side, but I know from the women I've spoken with that's not always the case.

BE AWARE. BE THOUGHTFUL. BE KIND

So why am I talking about this now? Firstly, because I can, which is something I simply couldn't have done just a few days ago.

I'm talking about this now because I want women who are around my age and wondering what the hell is wrong with them to think 'menopause', get checked out and push for a diagnosis.

And I'm talking about this now because it needs to be talked about. Every woman in business will face what I've faced or something like it. We can't have 50% of the workforce suffering in silence and the other 50% wondering what's wrong with them.

A few months ago, I was at a particularly low point. My vertigo was really bad so I couldn't drive and my motivation was at an all time low. I hadn't been in the office a great deal because I couldn't get to the office – and because I couldn't face the office.

When I did eventually drag myself in, one of our engineers said "What's happening with you? I haven't seen you around much."

He only said it in passing. He didn't mean anything by it other than a genuine curiosity about where I'd been. But I can't tell you how much it triggered my anxiety and sent me back into a doom spiral.

So I'm talking about this now to tell that engineer the things I couldn't say back then. To raise the level of awareness and understanding. And to encourage everyone to be thoughtful and be kind.

The menopause isn't a two-minute fix. It takes years. It's life changing. It really has hit me like a tonne of bricks. I'm glad more people are talking it about it more openly. And if writing this helps just one other person put one foot in front of the other and keep going until they feel better, then it's worth doing.

> **Discover more about Menopause**

> **Discover more about International Women's Day**