# SUNDAY

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# DPP's Lai calls for dialogue with China after winning presidency

More rain,

more rats?

| **A4** 

Taiwan's new leader gets 40% of votes but DPP loses majority in legislature

**Yip Wai Yee** 

**Taiwan Correspondent** 

TAIPEI - Taiwan's president-elect Lai Ching-te, of the independenceleaning Democratic Progressive Party (DPP), called for dialogue with China "to replace confrontation", shortly after winning 40 per cent of the votes in a three-way race for president on Jan 13.

However, he warned that Taiwan must also be safeguarded against threats from China.

Addressing supporters following his declaration of victory at 8.30pm, Mr Lai pledged to maintain the "cross-strait status quo".

"We will use exchanges to replace obstructionism, dialogue to replace confrontation and confidently pursue exchanges and cooperation with China."

It remains to be seen how Mr Lai will approach dialogue with China, as he has not made clear the basis on which it can proceed. This is a sticking point with China, which insists that exchanges can happen only if both sides agree that there is one China.

Mr Lai, 64, headed into the race as the front runner, though recent polls had shown it too close to call, with many Taiwanese frustrated with economic issues including stagnant wages and housing affordability.

Mr Hou Yu-ih of the main opposition Kuomintang (KMT), as well as Dr Ko Wen-je of the smaller Taiwan People's Party (TPP), conceded defeat on Saturday night, four hours after vote counting had begun, and it became clear that Mr Lai's lead was too wide to overcome.

The candidates who lost were seen to be friendlier towards



Taiwan's president-elect Lai Ching-te with Ms Hsiao Bi-khim, who will be the vice-president, celebrating with other Democratic Progressive Party members in Taipei on Jan 13. Mr Lai pledged to maintain the "cross-strait status quo" and called for talks with China "to replace confrontation". ST PHOTO: CHONG JUN LIANG

Beijing. Both had blamed the DPP for deteriorating cross-strait ties, and had pledged to foster closer economic ties with China.

On the other hand, Mr Lai, whose party champions a distinct Taiwan identity, was repeatedly singled out by China as a dangerous separatist and "troublemaker".

Mr Lai said: "We are also determined to safeguard Taiwan from continuing threats and intimidation from China."

Results showed that he secured about 40 per cent of the votes, while Mr Hou gained around 33 per cent and Dr Ko, about 26 per cent. Voter turnout was nearly 70 per

But Mr Lai's vote share was less than that of incumbent President Tsai Ing-wen, also of the DPP, in her first presidential contest in 2016, which was also a three-way race.

She garnered 56.1 per cent, as opposed to KMT's Eric Chu's 31 per cent, and 12.8 per cent for Mr James Soong of the People First Party.

Preliminary analysis suggests that Dr Ko had made some inroads with young Taiwanese weary of the two main parties.

Commenting on Mr Lai's electoral victory, China said that the result of the election shows that DPP cannot represent the mainstream sentiments of voters on the island. "Taiwan is China's Taiwan," it said.

The vote "will not impede the inevitable trend of China's reunification", Beijing's Taiwan Affairs Office spokesperson Chen Binhua said in a statement carried by state news agency Xinhua.

Beijing also said it would not tolerate "separatist activities" in Taiwan. "We will adhere to the 1992 Consensus that embodies the one-China principle and firmly oppose the separatist activities aimed at 'Taiwan independence' as well as foreign interference."

Conceding defeat at a KMT event to thank voters in New Taipei City, Mr Hou said: "I have let everybody down, I want to convey my apolo-

He congratulated Mr Lai and Ms Hsiao Bi-khim, who will be vicepresident. The latter was most recently Taipei's de facto ambassador to Washington.

On his part, Dr Ko thanked the youth voters who backed him.

"We have shown to the world that Taiwan is not just about the Green or Blue camp. Democracy is Taiwan's most valuable asset," he said, referring to the party colours of DPP and KMT respectively.

Mr Lai's win means that the DPP has secured an unprecedented third presidential term.

No political party has won more than two consecutive four-year terms since presidential elections

### **Presidential** election results

Number of votes

Mr Lai Ching-te

(Democratic Progressive Party)

40.1% (5,586,019)

Mr Hou Yu-ih (Kuomintang)

33.5% (4,671,021)

Dr Ko Wen-je (Taiwan People's Party)

**26.5%** (3,690,466)

TAIWAN CENTRAL ELECTION COMMISSION SUNDAY TIMES GRAPHICS

were introduced in 1996.

However, the DPP failed to maintain its legislative majority in the parliamentary elections held at the same time, which will limit the president-elect's ability to pass ma-

jor reforms. In fact, none of the main parties secured a majority in the 113-seat

legislature. The KMT took 52 seats, the DPP 51, the TPP eight, while two went to

independents. In his post-victory speech, Mr Lai said he understood and respected the people's expectations of effective government with strong

checks and balances. He pledged to embrace talent from different political groups, prioritising issues that have consensus among the political parties, without providing specifics.

"We will work to set aside differences while maintaining clear lines of communication," he said.

At the DPP's victory rally held outside the party's headquarters in Taipei, thousands of euphoric supporters started chanting "Hello, president" when it became clear Mr Lai would win.

Restaurant manager Kuo Yingkuei, 37, donning the campaign's official green baseball jacket, told The Sunday Times that she can now heave a sigh of relief.

"When I saw footage of the huge turnout at the TPP rally on the eve of the election, I was really worried for Lai's chances. I can rest easy now that we have a leader who will do his best to protect our precious freedoms."

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**SEE THE BIG STORY • A8** 

## US strikes at Houthi militia in Yemen for second straight day

WASHINGTON – The United States carried out another strike against the Houthi militia in Yemen, the US Central Command said, bombing a radar facility as part of an effort to further degrade the Iranbacked group's ability to attack ships transiting the Red Sea.

It was the second straight day that the US military fired on a Houthi target, after a US-led barrage of military strikes that was aimed at securing critical shipping routes between Europe and Asia. The strikes come amid fears of a wider escalation of the conflict in the Middle East.

The strike, carried out at 3.45am local time on Jan 13 by the USS Carney using Tomahawk missiles, was "a follow-on action on a specific military target", the Central Command said.

A Pentagon official said the strike was meant to further the job begun by the widespread coordinated air and naval assault by the US and Britain on a number of Houthi targets in Yemen the night

Lieutenant-General Douglas Sims, director of the US military's Joint Staff, told reporters on a conference call before the new strike that the Pentagon was more than ready for a response from the Houthis. "We simply are not going to be messed with here."

White House spokesman John Kirby said the strikes, ordered by

President Joe Biden, had not been intended to ignite a wider regional

"In fact, everything the President has been doing has been trying to prevent any escalation of conflict, including the strikes last night." NYTIMES

**SEE THE BIG STORY • A6&7** 





RECIPES TO REPENT FOR SEASON OF EXCESS • Soothing teas and vegetarian soups |CIO&11

EXPORTING SHIOK • Singaporean eateries in London, Idaho and Dubai named Shiok | C8&9



The number of women seeking medical help for perimenopausal and menopausal symptoms has surged. But most women cannot tell the symptoms, are afraid of treatment and suffer in silence.

Stephanie Yeo finds out why.

C2&3

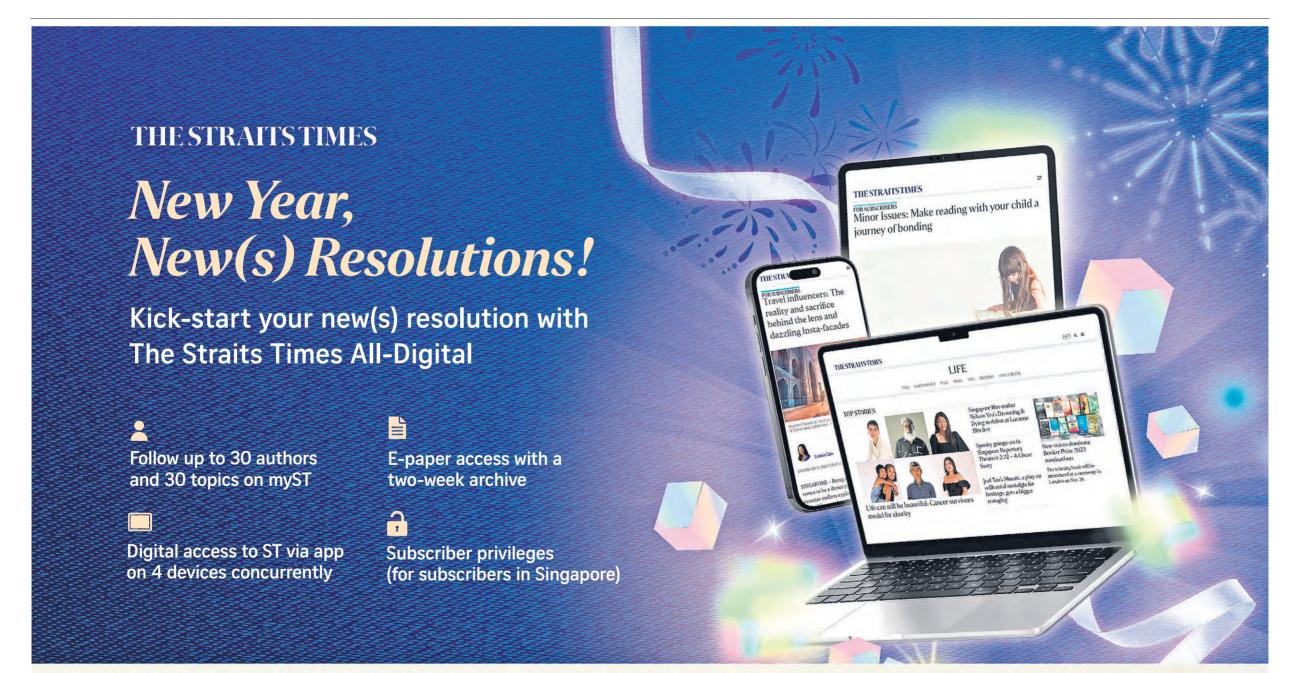
Finds out why.
C2&3

Pause for the rapy has helped Ms Chen Xujin, 63, to continue living an active lifestyle.

Menopausal hormone therapy has helped Ms Chen Xujin, 63, to continue living an active lifestyle.



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## *features* | *life* | <sup>C3</sup>

# Could it be menopause? Don't dismiss the signs

THE SUNDAY TIMES | SUNDAY, JANUARY 14, 2024

Six in 10 women in an NUH study have moderate to severe menopause symptoms, but many suffer in silence



Stephanie Yeo Senior Correspondent

Ms A was a high-achieving teacher in a tuition centre when she started experiencing hot flushes and night sweats in her late 40s.

It affected her sleep and concentration and she started making mistakes at work, which led to negative feedback from students and

After a poor work appraisal, her self-identity crumbled and she entertained thoughts of suicide. She quit her job.

During mental health counselling, she was advised to seek a medical assessment at KK Women's and Children's Hospital (KKH), says Associate Professor Rukshini Puvanendran, co-director of the KK Menopause Centre.

That was when Ms A found out she was in perimenopause. This transition period before a

woman's last period is a time when hormones fluctuate wildly and periods may become irregular. Symptoms, which may seem unrelated, can range from the irritating (itchy skin, dry mouth) to the

embarrassing (incontinence, the

urge to pee often) to the debilitat

ing (anxiety and depression). Perimenopause symptoms can last up to 10 years before a woman hits menopause, which is defined as 12 months without a period.

In Singapore, menopause typically occurs from ages 45 to 55. The average age of menopause here is 49, earlier than the Western society average of 51.

While menopause has always been a part of a woman's life cycle. its social and economic repercussions are growing, thanks to rapidly ageing societies like Singapore and more women entering the tend to outlive men." workforce.

By 2025, an estimated 1.1 billion women worldwide will be post- ary KK Menopause Centre in Octomenopausal, according to The ber 2023 to cater to the anticipated Menopause Society (formerly demand. known as The North American Professor Yong Eu Leong, emercosts in the United States alone, ac-solute figures are not available.

Clinic Proceedings.

menopause symptoms is estimat- on Singapore women. ed to cost about US\$1.8 billion a Not every woman will seek vear in the US, the researchers treatment for her symptoms, That figure does not include the every doctor will link the widecost of women scaling down their ranging symptoms to the meno-

working hours, losing their jobs, pause transition. retiring early or changing jobs because of symptoms, said the study, age menopausal sympwhich surveyed some 5,000 wom- toms at home or en aged 45 to 60 who were patients through primary-care at the Mayo Clinic.

### SIX IN 10 HAVE MODERATE TO SEVERE SYMPTOMS

Menopause awareness has skyrocketed in Western countries since around 2019, thanks to celebrity advocates, including talk-show hosts Oprah Winfrey and Drew Barrymore, former US first lady Michelle Obama and British television presenter Davina McCall. Some of it has trickled down to Singapore as well.

man of the division of obstetrics "While the number of women with perimenopausal and menopausal tripled from 2009 to 2023, it is still a small proportion, given that Singapore is an ageing population. By aged 65 and above and women A Clinic For Women

The hospital expanded its menopause service into a multidisciplin-

Menopause Society), a non-profit itus consultant in the department organisation of leading clinicians of obstetrics and gynaecology at and other experts. That is about the National University Hospital one in eight people in the world. (NUH), has seen "a significant in-A staggering US\$25 billion crease" in the number of women (\$\$33.3 billion) can be attributed requesting menopausal consultato menopause-related medical tions in recent years, although ab-

cording to a study published in Since menopause is a stage of life April 2023 in the journal Mayo and does not usually require hospitalisation, there is scant data to Lost work productivity linked to show the true extent of its effects which can vary over time, and not

"Many women may manphysicians rather than seek hospital treatment. Consequently, it

is challenging for hos-

2030, one in four citizens will be **DR CHUA YANG,** a gynaecologist and obstetrician who runs private practice

**TOP FIVE MENOPAUSE** SYMPTOMS AMONG **WOMEN IN SINGAPORE**  Muscular and joint discomfort (arthralgia) Sleep problems Vaginal dryness Physical and mental exhaustion Hot flushes SOURCE: NATIONAL UNIVERSITY HOSPITAL'S INTEGRATED WOMEN'S



Singapore women experience more aches and pains and sleep disturbances than the typical hot flushes and mood swings. The symptoms are therefore less specific and not Professor Tan Hak Koon, chair-immediately thought of as menopauseand gynaecology at KKH, notes: related. Women may suffer lethargy and tiredness from the symptoms and not realise symptoms seen at KKH has almost it is due to menopause.

scale of the issue. ed over 15 publications to date. ures from other developed coun- adult sons. tries, Prof Yong says.

would correspondingly increase."

Prof Yong says.

ed in December found that three NUH's cohort study. out of four of the women studied had arthralgia. Prof Yong says the SUFFERING IN SILENCE reason is unclear.

symptoms were more likely to suf- Service. fer from moderate disability and Dr Chua Yang, a gynaecologist weaker lower-body strength. They and obstetrician who runs private also rated their health status as practice A Clinic For Women, adds: poorer compared with others. out of the 1,200 women in the co-disturbances than the typical hot hort study were taking menopau- flushes and mood swings. The sal hormone therapy (MHT). This symptoms are therefore less spetypically involves taking oestrogen cific and not immediately thought and progesterone in the form of of as menopause-related. Women gels, patches and/or oral prepara- may suffer lethargy and tiredness tions under a doctor's guidance. from the symptoms and not realise Civil servant Susheela, 57, start- it is due to menopause."

ord or track menopause cases," ed experiencing joint pain about Ms Chen Xujin, six months after surgery to remove 63, sought He adds: "Women will be living a fibroid that covered one of her treatment for her more than a third of their lives after ovaries and her womb. The operation, done eight years symptoms early

menopause due to increasing lifespans. The problems with undiag- ago to remove her uterus, induced and now enjoys a nosed menopausal symptoms surgical menopause, but she did range of sports not follow up with a gynaecologist as well as NUH's ongoing Integrated Wom- after she was discharged. en's Health Programme (IWHP) Madam Susheela, who declined ISTOCKPHOTO, gives a glimpse into the possible to reveal her full name, thought she JASON QUAH was having cramps at first, but the Started in 2014, this cohort study continuous pain in her elbows, of 1,200 women aged 45 to 69 aims hips and knees persisted, gradually to holistically identify symptoms increasing in intensity. She rates of menopause and its associated the pain as eight on a scale of one medical conditions. It has generat- to 10, and has also been diagnosed with osteoporosis

A study published in October Because she has had to slow 2023 found that over six in 10 of the down her movements to avoid women reported at least one mod- pain, it takes her twice as long to erate to extremely severe symp- cook and clean at home, where she tom, which is consistent with fig- lives with her husband and two

"I now take the pain as part of my Interestingly, the No. 1 symptom life because I don't want to go to here is muscular and joint discom- see the doctor and then have to see fort (arthralgia), whereas hot a physiotherapist. It's very timeflushes are the most common consuming and I can't keep taking symptom in Western countries. time off from work," says Madam The IWHP's latest study publish- Susheela, who is a participant in

Rounding up the top five symp- Perimenopause can be a confusing toms among women in Singapore time for women, who may not are, in descending order, sleep—think they are entering the menoproblems, vaginal dryness, physipause transition as they still have cal and mental exhaustion, and hot their periods, says Prof Rukshini, who is also head and senior con-Those suffering from severe sultant of KKH's Family Medicine

"Singapore women experience Despite their symptoms, only 21 more aches and pains and sleep

dancing. PHOTOS:

PHOTO: KKH

Asia Pacific Menopause Federaterm oestrogen use is much lower be very sensitive. tion and the Menopause Research than the risk conferred by obesity, Says Prof Wong: "The need to Society (Singapore).

"Several studies have shown that life Asian women lack knowledge on Prof Rukshini says subsequent lation." trustworthy sources of informa- cluding for cancer.

ed belief that MHT's risks outweigh der the age of 60 with bothersome mother with two teenagers lashed symptoms or their mental health, the benefits, a legacy of a flawed menopausal symptoms who are out at her family, and her husband then healthcare providers will Women's Health Initiative study in not at risk of breast cancer or blood moved out. Her younger son also need to get updated with these the US in 2002 that was subsectlots," she says. quently misrepresented in media 
In fact, letting perimenopausal guilty about his parents' separation. their patients accordingly." reports. That led women and even symptoms fester and suffering in She realised what was happening doctors to stay clear of MHT in silence may lead to bigger prob- to her only when her sister took her droves for almost two decades.

inactivity and alcohol use. Besides the lack of knowledge, "If women have reduced their really affect their social lives and pause is not a disease that women Asian women tend to have "neutral" own risks of breast cancer by not mental health. On numerous occa- should be afraid or ashamed of. attitudes" towards menopause, smoking, drinking excessively, not sions, women share that they do says Prof Rukshini. Many believe becoming obese or sedentary, they not go out so often because of the ductive phase, but is also a new bethey should endure it, as compared would have very little fear about fear of troubling their friends and ginning for them to take charge of with Caucasian women, who the very marginal increased risks companions by the constant need their life – emotionally, mentally proactively seek out ways to man- added if they need to consider us- to look for toilet facilities. ing MHT for improved quality of "As a result, they tend to remain Dr Chua adds: "I would love to

menopause and are unprepared for research has shown that women in Prof Rukshini also recounts the even more. They are the demand. If this transition in their lives. They their 50s who use MHT experience case of a patient, Mrs B, whose hot they need all our cost-effective also have several misconceptions a lower risk of heart disease, frac-flushes and night sweats led to food to be less sugary and less oily, and there is a demand for more tures and "all-cause mortality", in- poor sleep and irritability, while then the supply will naturally "MHT has been shown to be safe sex with her spouse.

lems down the line. Dr Chua says: "It is important to For instance, urinary urgency or leviated her symptoms and she is put the risk of breast cancer assothe need to pee often is a common seeing a counsellor to improve her ciated with MHT into clinical consymptom as decreasing oestrogen relationships.

Ms Leeanne Beveridge, 58, developed irregular periods in her 50s which she thought could be fibroids. She also had hot flushes, insomnia and weight gain, as well as aches and pains. "When you put them all together,

it's like you don't know yourself any more," says the former draughtsman who is an Australian citizen and a permanent resident

But it was when she became a "little volcano of rage" around her husband and daughter, who started to avoid her, that she knew she needed help.

"The mood swings and anger were my biggest problem. Things would come out of my mouth before they even crossed my mind. I would feel really bad and almost want to cry," says Ms Beveridge, who is a patient at the KK Menopause Centre.

Activities she used to enjoy, such as riding her motorbike, also became painful as her hands became The mood swings and inflamed, making it difficult for her to hold onto the clutch at traffic

anger were my

biggest problem.

out of my mouth

before they even

crossed my mind.

MS LEEANNE BEVERIDGE (above),

Going on menopausal hormone

therapy has helped reduce those

It marks the end of

their reproductive

phase, but is also a

new beginning for

of their life -

afraid or ashamed of

and physically.

them to take charge

emotionally, mentally

ASSOCIATE PROFESSOR RUKSHINI

PUVANENDRAN (right, in photo),

co-director of the KK Menopause

Centre, who says that menopause is

not a disease that women should be

look for restrooms frequently can

to KKH for a consultation. MHT al-

volcano of rage' when her

life the way she did before

58, recalling how she became a 'little

rimenopausal symptoms flared up.

ymptoms and enabled her to enjoy

Things would come

"Taking MHT helped to reduce those symptoms and enabled me to keep enjoying life the same way as before," says the keen outrigger ocean paddling enthusiast. Ms Chen Xujin, 63, took a more

proactive stance after seeing how her mother suffered from bone loss and "emotional issues" following the menopause transition. The latter developed a hunchback and was eventually bedridden.

"I was deeply affected and told myself that I needed to do something about it when I faced menopause, so that I don't follow in her otsteps. I want to lead a goodquality and healthy life and don't want to burden my loved ones," says Ms Chen, who used to work as a gynaecologist and obstetrician in China before moving to Singapore, where she is now a citizen.

So, when she started having irregular periods, heart palpitations and hot flushes so intense her T-shirt would be wet in seconds, she sought medical help.

Then 47, the single mother was having a particularly hard time juggling studying for a bachelor's degree and looking after her teenage daughter. She declined to reveal her occupation or degree

details. A patient of KKH, she was put on MHT, which relieved her symp-

Fast-forward 16 years later, Ms Chen now enjoys an active lifestyle that includes swimming, jogging, cycling, table tennis and dancing. "It is important to be open to your loved ones and educate them on menopause and how it will affect them. We cannot assume and expect that they will understand what we are going through, but we still need to communicate with them," she says.

"When my daughter was in primary school, I went through the female reproductive system with her, from the first menses to menopause. When she saw me taking MHT, I explained it to her. She now Dr Chua is a past president of the text. The risk associated with long-levels cause the bladder lining to helps support me by driving me to work or for my studies and is always the calm one."

> Prof Rukshini adds that meno-"It marks the end of their reproand physically," she says.

at home, with resultant social iso- see Singaporeans understand and be responsible for their health vaginal drvness made her fearful of move in that direction.

Similarly, if women need to talk Among their fears is an unfound- and effective in most women un- The 47-year-old stay-at-home about their menopause and their developed depression after feeling management options and counsel

stephyeo@sph.com.sg

## **Viewpoint**

# Why aren't we talking about menopause in Singapore?

**Stephanie Yeo Senior Correspondent** 

All I knew about menopause was that my mother had suffered bad hot flushes and night sweats, but refused treatment because she was afraid of the side effects.

I didn't know that the mood swings I had in my mid- to late-40s were signs of perimenopause, the often turbulent transition years before a woman's final menses. I didn't know that the random episodes of

needing to pee urgently – I once spent half a night on the toilet bowl because of an extreme case – were urinary urgency, a sign of And I didn't know that my joint pains, which

made me feel like I was twice my age, were also signs of perimenopause. I went from being able to do a headstand in yoga to not being able to bend my knees in

I took for granted my wonderful arm mobility until I developed frozen shoulder, an agonisingly painful condition that affects many perimenopausal women. Twice. I couldn't hook

my bra behind for months. It was as if my body and my mind were falling apart, piece by piece. Because I was clueless, I couldn't ask for help from my family or friends. Let's just say my close relationships were severely strained.

I hit the big M (12 months without a period) during the pandemic, when menopauserelated content exploded on social media, podcasts and books. Only then did I connect the dots.

None of the many doctors and specialists I saw over the years for my various ailments mentioned that my symptoms could have been menopause-related. And if I brought it up, the best I got was a non-committal "could be". My friends either didn't seem to have the symptoms I had or didn't even know if they were in perimenopause. I felt so alone and had to look for answers in Facebook groups. Still, I resisted seeking help, thinking that if

I just held on, I could outlast whatever symptoms came my way. Mindfulness and non-religious meditation practices helped somewhat, but I still did not feel like myself. I finally came to my senses in 2023 when I saw a menopause specialist who told me that some of my hormone levels were very low. No

wondering I had been having such a hard time. Taking menopausal hormone therapy (MHT) was a game changer. It was as if I was a deflated balloon figurine and MHT was the air I needed to stand tall again. Considering how I have to spend a third of

my life postmenopausal, I know it was the right decision. I no longer feel helpless. In fact, I wish I had started on MHT when I was perimenopausal and saved myself – and my family - many years of anguish. Late in 2023, my husband had to drag me

out of a samba club in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil, because I wouldn't leave the dance floor at midnight (we had an early tour the next day). There is no way my best years are behind me as I edge towards my mid-50s in 2024. I know there are other women like me who have suffered needlessly during the

menopause transition, but nobody seems to want to talk about it. Is it because older women are invisible in society? Is it because women of my generation have been conditioned to take pain and

suffering in our stride (periods, pregnancy and menopause) because we don't want to be labelled as "difficult" or "b\*\*\*hy"? I am putting myself out there because I have a daughter, 22, and I do not want her to suffer

the way I did. I want her and her peers to grow older and bolder in a society that has the resources to identify and treat perimenopause symptoms early.

Women in mid-life don't just deserve to survive. We deserve to thrive.