

MOVEMENT FOR MENOPAUSE

Writer **Joanna Ebsworth** felt like she didn't know her own body (or mind!) before she visited The Body Retreat's new Menopause Retreat. Seven days later, she felt empowered with all the tools she needed to futureproof her health

Are you prepared for the menopause? Or even perimenopause, for that matter? At 45 years old, I'd always imagined both were something I'd be dealing with in the distant future. But the reality was I'd been experiencing horrendous adult acne for a couple of years; steadily gaining hard-to-shift weight around my midriff that wouldn't respond to my regular workouts; and my joints were feeling painful after high-impact exercise, to the point

where I was thinking about ditching my runs altogether. Brain fog was also hindering my ability to concentrate at work and communicate with friends and family, and I didn't feel comfortable in my clothing or my own skin. In short, my confidence was at an all-time low.

For a long time, I was in denial, but also secretly freaking out. It was only when I interviewed Jessica Ennis-Hill about her new perimenopausal programme on



Targeted workouts teach you how to maintain muscle mass

her Jennis app that I discovered the symptoms of perimenopause – the pre-phase before you finally stop menstruating – can start in your 30s and last for up to 10 years. A chat with my mum shortly afterwards revealed she'd experienced early menopause in her 40s, and the pieces suddenly fell into place.

So, when I read the itinerary for The Body Retreat's brand-new week-long Menopause Retreat, I instantly knew it was the educational, holistic experience



Education forms a big part of the retreat



The Body Retreat's conscious eating mantra



Jo discovers the benefits of cold-water therapy



Personal trainer Brealy adapts training for midlife



Participants ranged from 44-to-68 years of age

I wanted to give me some much-needed solutions, as opposed to going on a regular bootcamp or weight-loss retreat to try to reclaim my body without getting to the root cause of the problem.

Founded by personal trainer Julie Brealy and women's wellness coach and clinical hypnotherapist Juls Abernethy, The Body Retreat has been providing a variety of wellness and weight-loss retreats for 14 years, and it is reportedly the only retreat in the UK run exclusively by women. This, however, is their

first menopause retreat, combining all their accumulative expertise, but specifically adapted and carefully curated to help guide, educate and empower women 'into, through and beyond' menopause with the help of visiting top doctors, nutritionists, therapists and movement specialists.

On arriving at the retreat, hosted in a stunning private rental property in Somerset, I receive a warm welcome and a tour of the impressive facilities from bubbly, straight-talking Irish woman Abernethy, followed by a health assessment with quietly-confident

Brealy, which is optional because, while the retreat isn't focused on weight-loss results, it can be an additional side effect from all the gentle exercise and nutritious food we'll be enjoying.

After a relaxing swim in the indoor pool and dip in the outdoor jacuzzi, I head to the dining room to eat my perfectly proportioned, nutritious

and very delicious dinner while learning all about Abernethy's Conscious Eating philosophy we'll be practising every mealtime. The method, on which she has written two cookbooks, is designed to promote

'I instantly knew it was the educational, holistic experience I needed'

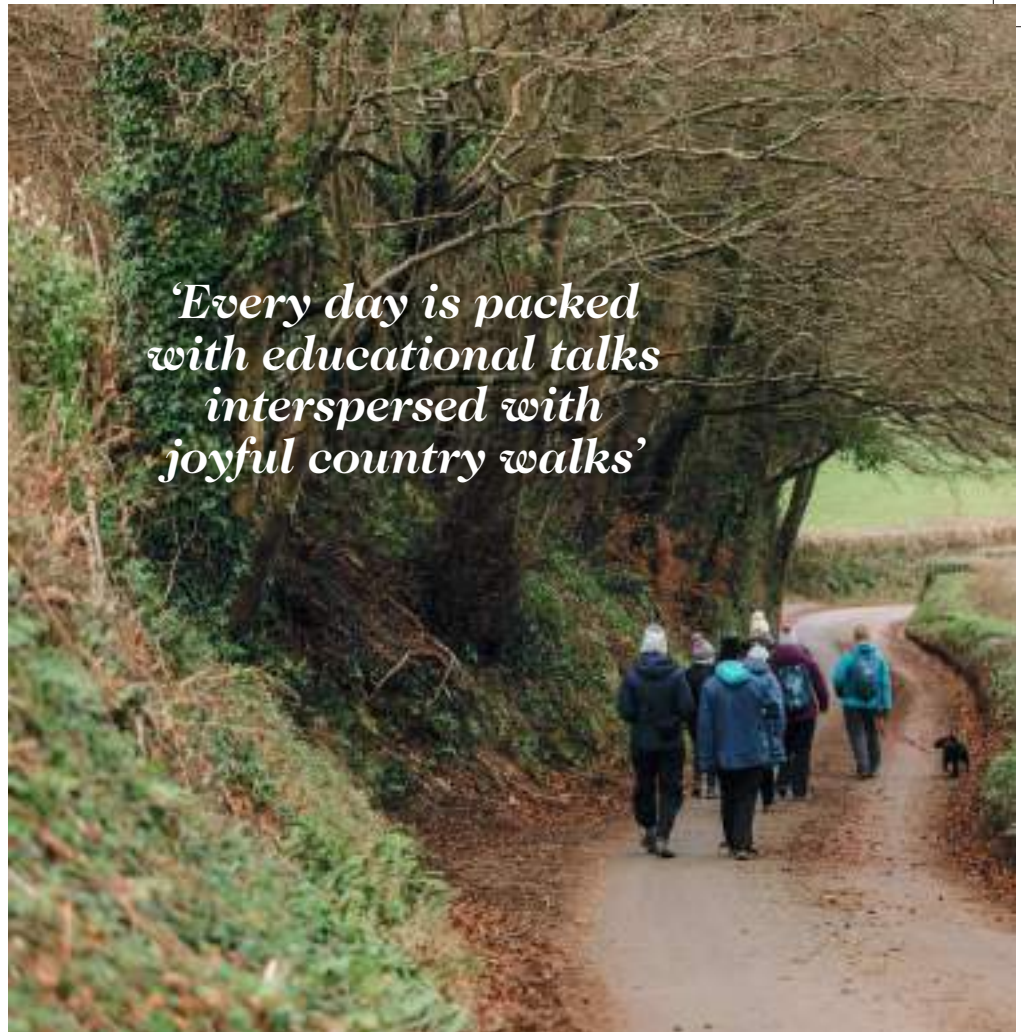
slow, mindful eating so the body has a better chance to digest food, register it is full to prevent overeating, and reduce bloating by swallowing less air.

I struggle to eat consciously for at least three days, but the benefits become apparent with practice, and my uncomfortable bloating quickly becomes a thing of the past. This is massively helped along by our fasting for 14 hours overnight to give our digestive system a chance to recuperate, and it doesn't take long for me to realise I'd previously been wolfing down my food, overeating at mealtimes, and mindlessly snacking at home late at night.

Starting each morning at 7.45am with a wake-up workout, every day is packed with educational talks interspersed with joyful countryside walks with Brealy and her adorable dogs, plus practical fitness and nutrition workshops covering everything from pelvic floor Pilates sessions to stocking our cupboards with all the essential nutrients, ingredients and supplements we need for good health in midlife.

It might sound intense, but it's the

'Every day is packed with educational talks interspersed with joyful country walks'



Mindful eating is central to the retreat



Finding joy in connecting to nature



Delicious meals fuel Jo's learning journey



Jo has weight training sessions with Brealy

complete opposite. Everything wraps up by 5pm so you can head off for 'swim and spa' time, and you get plenty of free time after dinner at 6.30pm to relax, enjoy a range of wellbeing and beauty treatments from visiting therapists, and digest everything you've learnt that day.

In all honesty, the information I hear in every single workshop is mind-blowing. During the 'Signs and Symptoms of Menopause' talk, I learn that 'menopause is like

puberty in reverse', only trickier to navigate due to the natural ageing process. I realise I've been experiencing so many symptoms of perimenopause without knowing and end up feeling more than a little frustrated that I've been struggling with zero guidance from my GP. That anger soon turns into gratefulness, however, for finally being able to learn so much about the menopause from the retreat's incredible guest experts, including hormone and wellbeing specialist Dr Monica Lascar.

As a qualified PT, I'm humbled to discover all the ways I should be adapting my workouts as I approach



topic with other women ranging from 44 to 68 in a safe, comfortable, nurturing environment – along with subjects such as HRT and other alternative treatments – helps me to feel forewarned and forearmed.

By the end of the week, I feel I’m regaining control of my body again.

Abernethy believes menopausal women need more support



The Cognitive Behavioural Therapy (CBT) and homework tasks we have practised have helped to imbed me with good lifestyle habits I can take forward to counteract the negative impact of my fluctuating hormones – just a few of which can include poor sleep and blood sugar regulation; low sex drive and energy levels; increased anxiety, irritability and stress; and generally, not feeling like yourself. Ultimately, I leave the retreat feeling physically and mentally stronger, nine pounds lighter, and totally empowered by everything I’ve learnt. If I end up feeling a bit lost later in life due to menopause, I won’t hesitate to return in a hot flush – I mean flash! 🌪

The Body Retreat Menopause Retreat starts from £2,900 all-inclusive for seven days, and runs through the year in the Dorset location; thebodyretreat.co.uk

midlife. Aside from knowing about the advantages of heavy lifting, I’d been ignorant to the benefits of Sprint Interval Training (SIT) and plyometrics to keep my tendons strong. Or that incorporating more ‘stomping’ moves into my training (think doing plank push-ups but stomping the palms of your hands on the ground at the top of the movement) will help to increase my bone density further. Experiencing the delights of cold-water bathing and breathwork several times during the week to release euphoric feel-good hormones and reduce inflammation in the body is another eye opener, too, and I start to believe I can reclaim my runs.

As the days pass, I realise the fitness, nutrition and lifestyle adaptations I’m learning will help me futureproof my health so I am better able to cope with all the changes I will continue to go through. I might not be experiencing vaginal atrophy just yet (oh yes, we talk about that, too!), but being able to openly chat about this taboo

Photography: The Body Retreat



Jo learns relaxation techniques to reduce her cortisol levels