

by Claire Coleman

**H**OT flushes, night sweats, dry skin, tempestuous moods and weight gain — when it comes to menopausal symptoms, you probably think you've heard it all before.

Yet there's one you might not have heard quite so much about, as the evidence around it is mostly anecdotal. But for many women, it's one of the cruellest: discovering that the perfume you've worn your whole life — your signature scent — suddenly smells different, wrong, unbearable.

Why does this happen? To understand, you have to go back to the evolutionary advantages of being able to smell.

'There is good research showing that, when she is menstruating, a woman's sense of smell is more acute at different points in her cycle,' explains London-based hormone specialist, Dr Daniel Sister. And, according to Professor Tim Jacob, who studies the psychophysiology of smell at Cardiff University, there's a very good reason for this.

'Body odour plays a role in mate selection,' he says. 'There are a set of genes, called HLA genes, that control our immune system and, in a complex manner, also determine body odour.'

'Mating with someone who has a different immune system to yours is likely to create healthier offspring, and that might explain why women and men tend not to like the smell of people who have similar HLA genes to them.'

'Women's olfactory sensitivity peaks at the point at which they are ovulating, making them better able to choose a suitable partner at their most fertile.'

High levels of the hormone oestrogen are, as Dr Sister explains, what accounts for the heightened sense of smell: 'Oestrogen has a role to play in more than 400 processes in the body.'

Of course, from an evolutionary perspective, as soon as you're beyond reproductive age, it's no longer so important.

As a result, around the menopause when oestrogen levels are diminishing, it would be normal for a woman's sense of smell to become less acute. But it seems to be far more complicated.

'I've had menopausal patients who have totally lost their sense of smell and have found that starting HRT has returned it, but different women seem to have different experiences,' says Dr Louise Newson, the Midlands-based GP behind the website [menopausedoctor.co.uk](http://menopausedoctor.co.uk).

'Some will have a heightened sensitivity to certain types of smell, some may find they like smells they didn't like before, and can't stand ones they used to love. It's not something you can see, touch or feel, and that might explain why there's so little research on it.'

You can understand why it can be distressing, especially when these changes to the olfactory system are happening at the same time the innate smell of a woman's body is also changing.

'Body odour can change in menopause,' says Professor Jacob. 'Many women have reported this although — again — it is not a well-researched area. Hot flushes are accompanied by increased sweating and this can cause a change in body odour.'

So what's the solution? For those affected, Dr Newson says it's about doing what you can to make the menopause as positive an experience as possible.

'I'm very pro anything that will improve a woman's sense of well-being, and setting out to find a new signature scent to start a new phase in your life is a small, but important, step that could help.'

But where to start? Here are

some scents that it might be worth sniffing out...

### PEPPER HELPS YOU LOSE POUNDS

IF YOU want to *seem* to shed the middle-aged spread, add a spicy note, such as pepper, to your perfume.

Researchers at the Smell & Taste Treatment and Research Foundation in Chicago discovered a combination of floral and spicy notes led to men thinking that a woman weighed, on average, 4lb lighter.

Better still, men who *liked* the floral and spicy perfume thought the woman was around 12lb lighter. Try:

■Rituals Eau d'Orient (£9.50, 10ml, [rituals.com](http://rituals.com)). With a layer of Persian pepper mixed with sweet, grassy top notes.

■Fiery Pink Pepper Eau de Toilette, (£45, [Molton Brown](http://Molton Brown)).

Pink pepper with tangerine, nutmeg and cedarwood.

■Miss Dior (£90, [dior.com](http://dior.com)). Rose and bergamot meet rosewood and pink pepper for a true spicy floral combo.

### GRAPEFRUIT TO TURN BACK TIME

THOUGH they don't yet understand why, researchers at the foundation in Chicago found a grapefruit fragrance made men think women were five years younger. Try one of these:

■Comme Des Garçons Series 8 Eau De Toilette (£34, [libertylondon.com](http://libertylondon.com)). A collection of three scents, grapefruit, lemon and lime, to wear alone or layer.

■Grapefruit Cologne (£45,

[jomalone.co.uk](http://jomalone.co.uk)). Sharp, bright, uplifting and refreshing — a modern classic guaranteed to give you a boost.

■Guerlain Aqua Allegoria Pamplelune (£52, [debenhams.com](http://debenhams.com)). From a great range of fruity, floral scents, this is a splash of freshly squeezed grapefruit.

### ROSE TO BEAT HOT FLUSHES

FLORAL scents — most commonly based on rose or jasmine — may be a good option for menopausal women.

Warmer skin as a result of hot flushes can cause the top notes of a perfume to evaporate more quickly, leaving just the heavier ones behind, making a fragrance smell different. Perfumes based on florals, which tend to be lighter fragrances, are more likely to stay 'true' to their scent. Try:

■Diptyque Eau Rose (£35, [Space NK](http://Space NK)). A rose but with a slash of green so it's more freshly-cut rose petals than dusty talc.

■Raw Silk & Red Roses (£20, [4160tuesdays.com](http://4160tuesdays.com)). A serious sock of roses with rose absolute, rose geranium and a drop of jasmine absolute.

■Jean Patou Joy (£48, [garden.co.uk](http://garden.co.uk)). Unchanged since 1930, this combination of rose and jasmine is a true classic.

### LAVENDER TO HELP YOU RELAX

'LAVENDER contains a natural anaesthetic called linalool, which is why it has a reputation for being relaxing,' explains Professor

Jacob. And if lavender conjures up a sense of old lady, you're looking at the wrong lavender. Contemporary fragrances have a sharper, less powdery edge. Try:

■Guerlain Jicky (£59.95, [allbeauty.com](http://allbeauty.com)). Launched in 1889, this complex fragrance has lavender at its heart.

■4711 Acqua Colonia Lavender & Thyme (£20, [strawberrynet.com](http://strawberrynet.com)). A refreshing cologne from the brand behind the iconic 4711 eau de Cologne.

■L'Occitane Lavender Eau de Cologne (£46, [loccitane.com](http://loccitane.com)).

Blended with citrus to capture a stroll through a sunny Provence field.

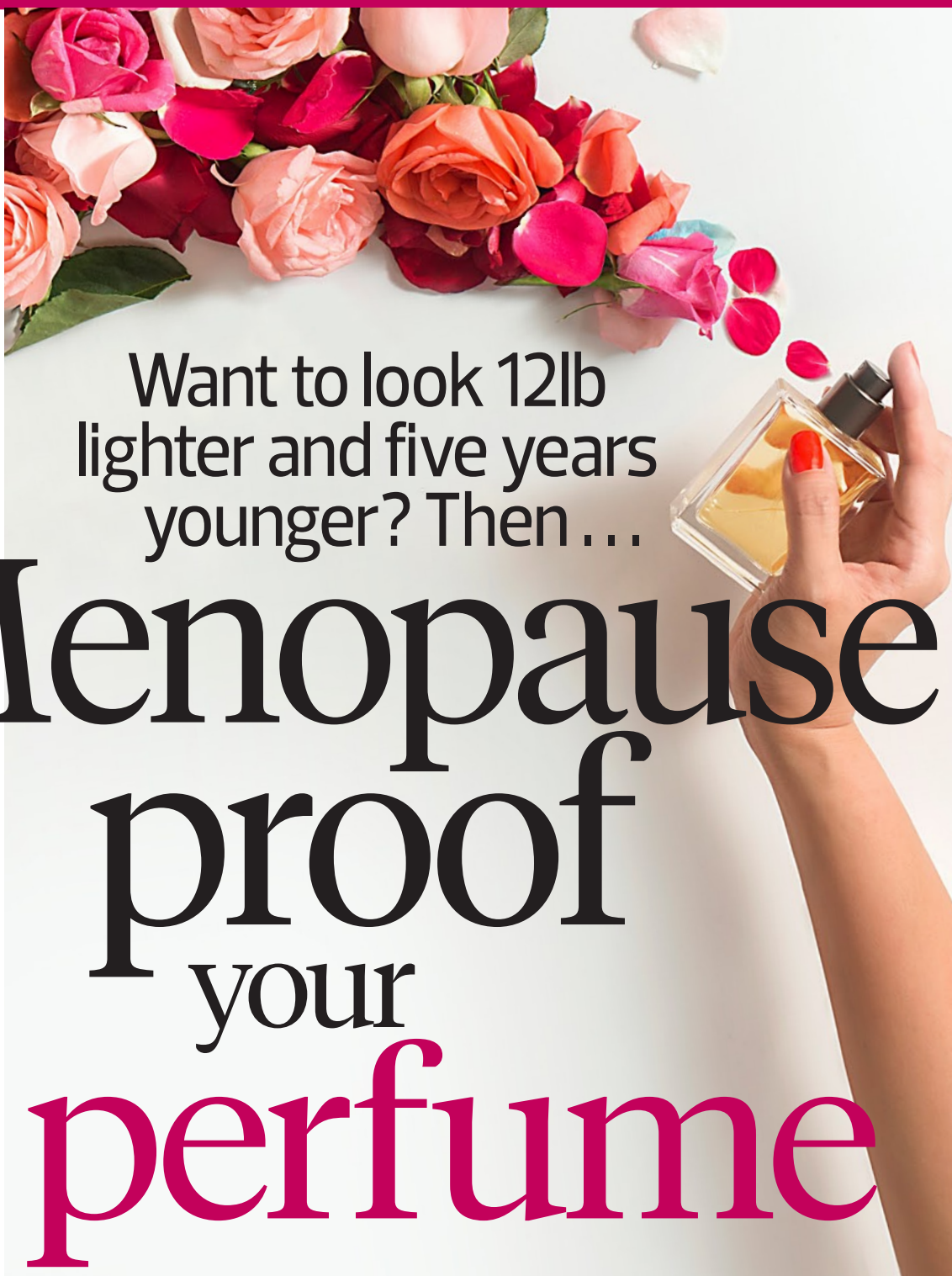
### LEMON & LIME TO CHEER YOU UP

CITRUS scents have a significant amount of research around them and, according to Professor Jacob, have been shown to have anti-depressive effects. Try one of these:

■Dior Escale a Portofino (£62, [johnlewis.com](http://johnlewis.com)). A feel-good blend of lemon, orange blossom and bitter almond that transports you to Mediterranean citrus groves.

■Bloom Lime, Basil & Mandarin (£5, [superdrug.com](http://superdrug.com)). A perfume that has been more than a little inspired by the Jo Malone original — but at a fraction of the price.

■Pomelo (£70, [joloves.com](http://joloves.com)). A compelling new citrus scent from the creator of Jo Malone's Grapefruit Cologne.



## Is it just ME?

Or are you sick of companies asking for feedback too?

THESE days, every company we encounter seems desperate for our approval. A dedicated online shopper, I struggle to buy a pair of shoes or a pot plant without being asked to share my feelings on the matter.

'Tell us everything about your shopping experience,' begs a French catalogue, with Gallic intensity. Well, I logged on at ten past two...

A boutique implores me to score them out of ten, for how 'likely I am to recommend them to a friend'. I like my new earrings. But surely a ten would require something out of the ordinary, like their deliveryman singing me a jaunty song?

Like a judge on Strictly, I give them a solid eight. 'Tell us why,' comes the wounded reply. No! Life is simply too short. (And now they're down to a six-and-a-half.)

TripAdvisor, the website that turned us all into hotel

*How to improve my customer experience? Stop the surveys, for starters*

critics, surely led the charge; followed by Uber, the cab service that asks you to rate your driver. Now feedback culture is everywhere, enabled by automated emails and texts.

I ring a customer helpline, and the tired call centre worker asks if I'll stay on the line to rate her performance. If I don't, will her rations be slashed to bread and water?

After I cancel an order, a sports giant sends me a survey that takes 'five minutes or less, to guide us in improving your experience'.

Stop the surveys, I type — that would improve this customer's experience.

But wait! Another email has arrived. Let us know what you think of your last purchase, it teases me, and you'll get 20 per cent off your next order.

I know what I need to do. 'This pot plant,' I write, 'is not just any pot plant. It is a champion among pot plants...'

by Emma Rowley