



Maturescence: a new perspective on the menopause

I love to use the perspective of **TCM** (Traditional Chinese Medicine) as well as modern knowledge to understand more deeply how a woman's body and soul change during the menopause. TCM inspired movement and awareness practices also offer useful ways of support for these times.

Maturescence is your body's natural cycle of ageing. For women, it includes preparing to end your menstrual cycle and then integrating the changes. It is an important resetting of your body and soul to prepare you for the rest of your life. This process lasts on average, 14 years: from age 42 to age 56 years.

If you like this approach you can find more information on my YouTube channel @Wellmother.

I am also offering a 30% discount on my online **Extraordinary Women's Cycles** course to those attending Ann Marie's "**Hot Flash**" Summit September 2025.

<https://www.wellmother.uk/course/extraordinary-womens-cycles/>

I am writing a book on the cycles of lives from birth to death from the lens of TCM and modern knowledge. Keep your eyes out for this.

I welcome comments on this document. If there is anything which feels unclear please get in touch with me suzanne@wellmother.uk

Maturessence

From "Mature: wisdom, evolution, ripening, 'essence': life force, energetic DNA,

Maturessence= ripening of your soul,

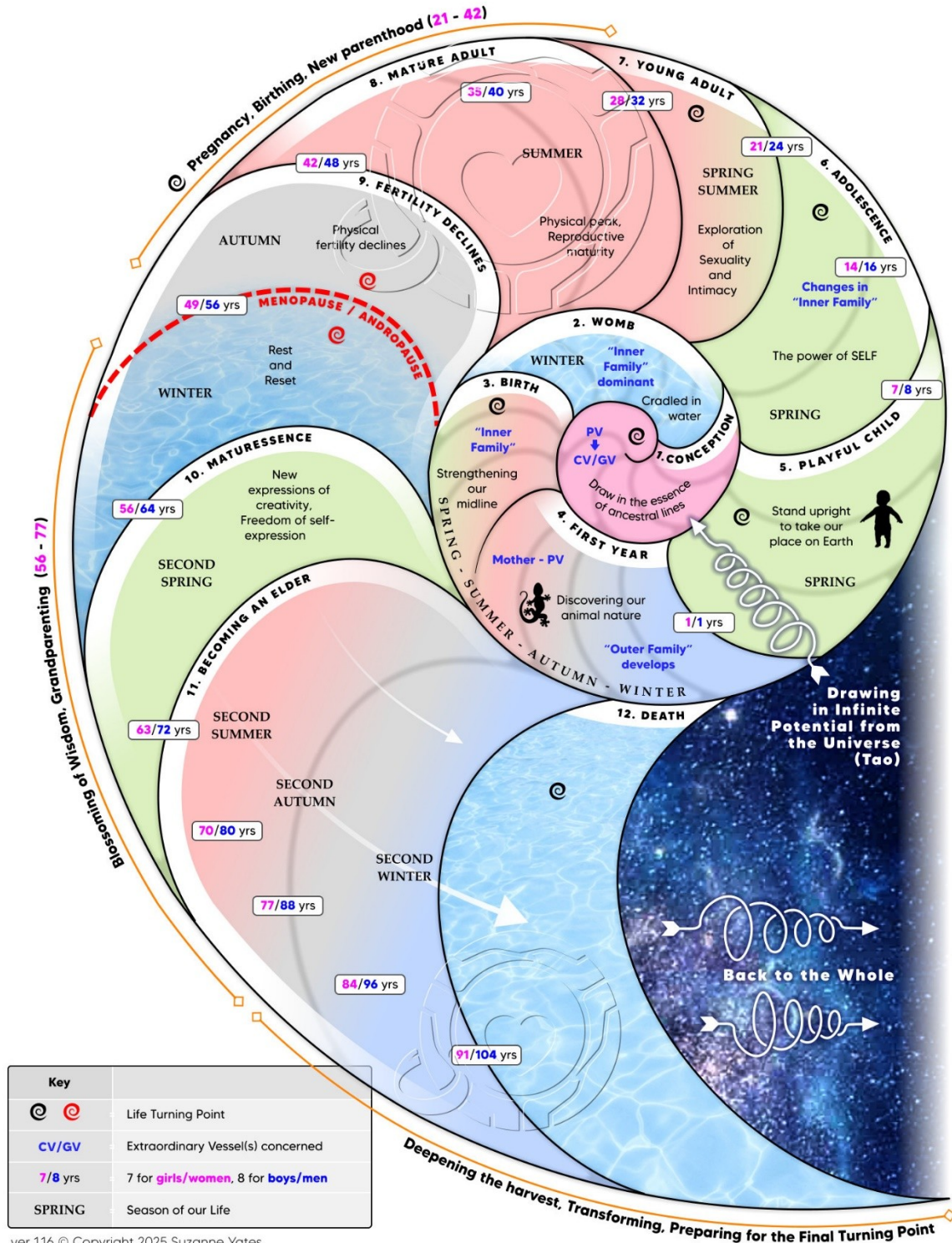
Your life as a cycle of seasons

If we see our life as cyclical and moving through seasons, we emerge from the protective waters within our mother's womb, to arrive on earth. We are like a new shoot pushing through the soil, entering the **spring** of our life. We expand, we explore, we are active, like a new plant growing. As we mature, we become fertile (by 14) but still need to grow, like a plant. Spring moves gently into **summer** as we become a young adult (21). We become the flower and fruits of the summer, expressing peak physical fertility and strength. In autumn, like plants, as our fertility declines, we gather in our harvests, leaves fall from the trees. We slowly return to the earth and hibernate in the soil in the winter (42 -56). Then we re-merge, like a new shoot in the spring, once we have integrated the changes in our fertile energy. This is our second spring with new expressions of creativity. This moves into a second summer of new fruits before we harvest for a second time. Towards the end of our lives we go back to the winter and dying, but this time leaving our physical body. The natural cycle of our lives is 100 years according to one school of thought in TCM. In another it is 120 years: the cycles of 12 years of the animals which are celebrated at the Chinese New Year.

Some people have their most fruitful and fulfilling times of their lives during these second seasons. You are freer to express yourself how you want, without the ties of raising young children. Parenting your grandchildren drawing on the wisdom of having parented your children may be part of these years. You can focus on your needs to create a richer and more integrated self.

There are times during our life cycle which are potent. These are when our body changes and offer opportunities to imprint our soul. They are marked in the chart as "turning points". They are: conception; birth; standing upright; puberty; our first sexual experience; becoming pregnant and giving birth. The last one before death is the menopause. Death is the final turning point when we leave our body.

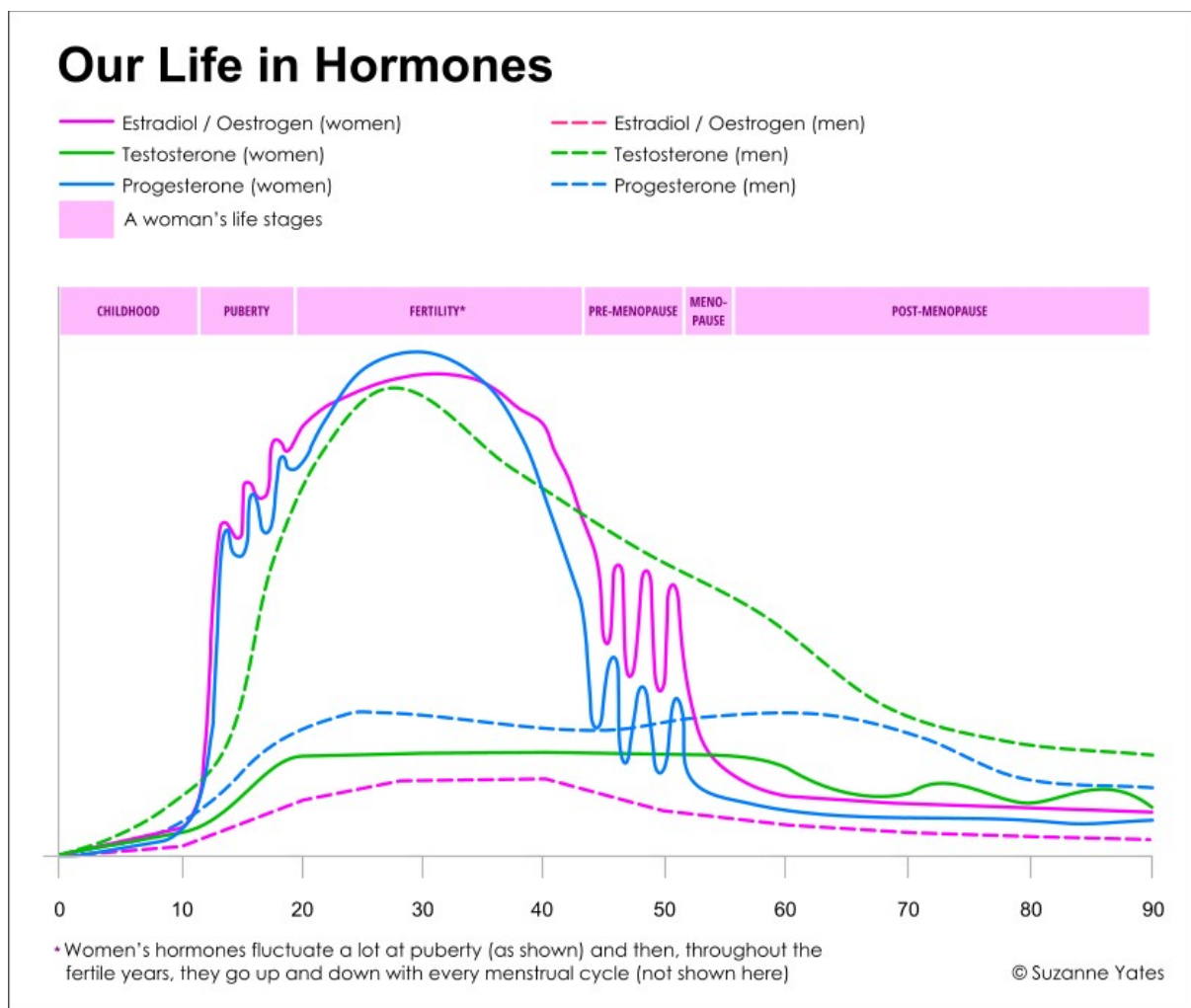
Our Life Cycles and Turning Points



How do the seasons mirror hormonal changes?

The ancient Chinese view is that the early menopause is a “second spring”. We rediscover the energy of the playful child, but with our new found wisdom. This can be a creative and playful time of our life.

Often, this time is seen as a time of “deficiency”, but it is fascinating that our hormones go back to similar levels before our periods. We needed them during our fertile years so that our body could potentially produce our baby. Now our periods stop we don't need them and we can once again become the child who can be nourished. We need to learn how to nourish and play with our inner child.



We are the “baby” we need to nurture

In Chinese medicine, the changes are similar to the changes of the first trimester of pregnancy when we need to send more energy to our womb to nurture a fertilised egg.

In the perimenopause this energy is sent to our womb to nourish us. It involves a shift in our Essence and the powerful Extraordinary Vessels (more below) especially the Penetrating Vessel which regulates our Blood. Blood is more than simply blood flowing in our blood vessels and cells but an energy which nurtures us physically and emotionally. As Blood changes its movement it can become erratic, like the changing hormones. We can support it by being grounded, taking time to rest, to eat nourishing foods and to be supported by nourishing relationships and environments. When women are supported in this way, many find they either don't suffer from morning sickness (pregnancy) or hot flushes (menopause), or these symptoms become much more manageable.

What is Essence and why it is so important to nourish ourselves?

Our eggs are expressions of what the Chinese call our "Essence. Essence is used during the menstrual cycle to mature the egg and to clear out the lining of the womb. It is used to nourish a baby in the womb and after birth through breastmilk. But Essence is much more than this. It is our life force or our energetic DNA. When it runs out we die. We inherit it at conception, and so it is strongly influenced by our ancestors, like our DNA, and it is constantly influenced by our environment, also like our DNA.

We use our Essence to grow and develop and it supports us in our ageing. This is why at a certain age; we need to care more for our Essence. The quality of our later years depends on how we have lived our life up to this point (post-conception Essence) as well as the Essence that we have inherited (pre-conception Essence). Essence flows in 7 year cycles for women and 8 years for men and is linked closely to the gateways of change. It is circulated in powerful channels called the Extraordinary Vessels.

The Chinese saw the peak flow of Essence in its physical aspect happening around 5 cycles - 35 years for women and 40 years for men. I find it fascinating that modern science recognises this as peak fertility! After this time our Essence shifts away from reproduction towards supporting our ageing body.

Since the quality of our Essence influences us in all aspects of our life, there was a strong emphasis on how to support it. If we take care of ourselves, physically and emotionally, we don't use our Essence so quickly. This means having sufficient rest, nourishing food, appropriate movement, nurturing relationships, supportive environments and so on.

Essence is stored in our energetic Kidneys, which include our adrenals. Interestingly the Chinese understood that stress depletes it. Modern science also understands how stress affects our hormonal levels and brain functioning.

Why is our Essence often depleted in modern societies?

Modern societies with their focus on productivity, achievement and activity, don't emphasise enough the need to rest and to nourish our Essence. Rest is Yin (night) and activity is Yang (day), and it is important to have a balance between the two. Especially now, with the internet, there are activities for us to do through the whole 24 hour cycle. In traditional societies people would rest when it got dark, and in the winter this meant even more rest – almost hibernation. Constant stimulation is ultimately depleting.

The Chinese recognised that after menstruation, our energies are low and we need to rest to build them up. If you have children, then after birth, they emphasised the importance of postnatal recovery – ideally at least a year! They felt that if women didn't take this time to fully renew their energy, then severe depletions can be created which are more difficult to replenish later on. Most women in modern societies don't take enough time after giving birth to recover - often only a few weeks. We could argue that they need longer than in the past because they have often had more stressful and depleting births, and many were working right up till the end of their pregnancy.

This means for women who have had children, they often enter the perimenopause in a low energy state. Even if you have not had children, many women work long hours, and may be juggling caring for elderly relatives. It is vital to embrace the "winter" season so that you can draw in to rest and renew and support your reset.

Most people don't live in tune either with their daily and inner seasonal cycles. For women, the menstrual cycle offers opportunities to connect with an inner seasonal cycle, which changes during the month, but most women are not aware of its rhythms. As we age, we need to change our activities, although, if we are healthy, that doesn't necessarily mean slowing down excessively, until we reach our 80's or 90's, as long as we have appropriate periods of rest.

In addition to this, many people eat nutritionally poor, processed foods and are overweight. This means they are more at risk of the modern diseases of the heart and circulation, high blood pressure, diabetes, osteoporosis and brain related disorders.

Ageing is harder if our Essence is weak – but we can always transform our Essence

If our Essence is already depleted as we enter the turning point of the perimenopause, it is likely to bring up many of the typical symptoms women experience. The main challenges, due to the changes in flow of Blood and hormones are the oft talked about hot flushes, along with skin redness or irritation, night sweats, vaginal dryness and

reduced sex drive. Women may also experience disturbed sleep, mood swings, anxiety, depression and confusion. These are all symptoms of depletion of the Penetrating Vessel, which we can support.

We can't increase our Essence, but we can improve its quality. If we see all these symptoms as signs that something is out of balance in our life, we can make changes. This will take time, and not necessarily be easy. We will need the support of our loved ones. We may realise that those we are close to are not necessarily giving us the support and love we need and decide to end some relationships or friendships.

Even if we feel well, emotionally, this time brings its challenges. We may feel grief for the children we wanted and never had, we may be mourning the loss of our parents who are reaching the end of our lives and dying, our children need us less and may be leaving home.

One issue, I find is much less talked about is shoulder issues. Weakness in the pelvis, including pelvic floor and lower back are often mentioned but less so shoulders. I've worked quite a lot with women who have injured their shoulders, including me. Even though my work is giving and teaching shiatsu and massage, which can be nourishing, I had, and to some extent still have, a tendency to push myself too much. I tend to think I am invincible. Riding my bike one day through the park, a dog ran out in front of me. To avoid it I swerved and fell off, damaging my shoulder. It took me the best part of a year to get my mobility back and it was a wakeup call to take more time to look after myself.

Our shoulders are where many of us build up tension, from pushing ourselves forward in life, taking on too many responsibilities. They are connected with the Linking Vessels which I see as like our wings. If we get too blocked we can forget our expansive nature.

Half way through our potential life span, the menopause is a time of reckoning. How we passed through the previous gateways plays a key role. Any unresolved themes and challenges can come back to haunt us. This includes issues from our childhood, even our time in the womb.

What are the Extraordinary Vessels?

These are extra channels (meridians) in TCM which circulate your Essence. By working with them you can nourish your Essence, but also release any patterns which may be holding you back.

Stepping Vessels help you to be in current moment, regulate your nervous system and strengthen your legs and balance

Girdle Vessel helps you release what you no longer need from your pelvis and keeps it strong

Linking Vessels regulate your arms and shoulders, helping you to open your heart as well as to release what you no longer need. They help keep your shoulders flexible and strong.

Penetrating Vessel (which I now like to call **Nourishing Vessel**) deeply nourishes you in all ways, helping you to feel at home in your body and your place on earth.

Governing and Conception Vessels hold everything together by strengthening your vertical midline, regulating your nervous system and keep you strong.

I have lots more information on these on my YouTube channel

Here is the playlist for the Extraordinary Vessels. It includes talks on their role, movement practices and visualisations.

<https://www.youtube.com/playlist?list=PLRyKR6A8Bqdbzvqs9guKwvpHQa4i-02VH>

We need to rediscover how to support ourselves

We may need to take care of our body differently, physically, emotionally or both. We need to learn how to “mother” ourselves. This may be challenging if, like me, your mother was not able to fully be present for you as a child.

I find the Extraordinary Vessels offer powerful tools to work with all these different levels and use them as the basis for my work. For the ancient Chinese our body holds emotional and physical memories.

You can draw on the gifts of the phases of the menstrual cycle. It is especially important to still connect with what I call the “Releasing and transforming” phase (menstruation) because there is no longer the physical release of menstruation. Without this release, we have to take even more care of what we put into our body from the outside, physically and emotionally.. As we age, and may tend to move less, we need to keep strengthening and creating flow in our pelvis. This means supporting our Girdle Vessel.

We need to know how to gather in and nourish ourselves, as in the follicular phase after menstruation, and how to nourish ourselves so we can nurture our projects, as in the early luteal phase. This is about supporting our Penetrating Vessel.

Working to release physical and emotional tension in our shoulders means working with the powerful Linking Vessels. You can open your wings up to fly like a bird and discover new ways of being and new challenges.

Movement practices to support you

I have made many movement practices for the powerful eight Extraordinary Vessels. Practising these movements supports you to adapt to these changes and to enjoy the maturing of your Essence.

Gifts

I enter my second spring, summer, autumn and winter: new phases of wisdom and learning.

I find new expressions for my creative energy, respecting that my physical strength is waning, but my capacity to direct my energy is growing.

I rediscover the playfulness and flexibility of the child, with my newfound wisdom.

Challenges

Can I release the past to be fully present?

Can I release what I no longer need without the physical support of menstruation and ovulation?

Can I release limiting patterns which keep me held in the past, depleting my energy?

Am I able to release my youth and embrace my ageing gracefully?

Journal prompts

How do you experience endings in your life?

Look in a mirror and see yourself as a young adult.

Have you let go of that version of you? Can you fully accept who you are now?

Wherever you are in your cycle of life, take a moment to ponder how you view the end or decline of your fertility.

Can you explore it as a second spring; a chance to reconnect with your playful child?

Do you welcome a chance to express yourself in different ways?

Are you afraid of it?

What do you feel about getting older? Your second summer, autumn and winter.

About the physical changes in your body?