You are AMAZING

We need to talk about the menopause!

Meet Menopause Café founder Rachel Weiss, who's giving women across the UK the chance to meet up and fan down hot flushes over a cuppa

By Carole Richardson

t 52, Rachel Weiss has yet to encounter the full-blown symptoms of the menopause that are inevitably round the corner.

Whether she'll be plagued by debilitating mood swings, hot flushes and brain fog or be one of the 20 per cent of women who sail through 'the change' is anybody's guess. What's for certain though is that she'll be wellversed on the subject.

"I'm actually quite curious because I don't know what it will be like for me," admits Rachel, who was inspired to set up the world's first Menopause Café.

The idea of creating a welcoming environment where women - and even men - can meet up to discuss anything menopausal came to her while watching a documentary on the subject by journalist Kirsty Wark (pictured).

The programme set her thinking. "It struck me that it was a bit odd how

nobody talks about menopause given that it affects half the population. There aren't many certainties in life but, if you're a woman, the menopause, like puberty, is one of them," she says.

As a secondary school teacher who confident about one thing. "I know talking helps," she adds.

> And if she needed any further proof of that, she only had to look at the success of the Death Café she'd already set up in her home city of Perth, Scotland, which gives people the chance

'It's possible to be serious and have fun. We absolutely want to raise people's spirits'

to get together to talk about another of life's certainties. "I then wondered if that same model would work for a menopause cafe," she adds.

Tentatively, Rachel put out a post on Facebook asking whether anybody would be interested in such a café where they could chat about potentially embarrassing menopausal problems.

"To my amazement, loads of women said ves and two women - Gail Jack

The format was simple. Rachel explained that there was no agenda other than to chat together and share concerns, experiences and tips for coping with any menopausal worries,

become more empowered to deal with coffee and cake. "Tell what works for

you but don't tell everybody else what to do." she advised.

"I am not a medical person but it seems to me that not everyone has the same experience. There isn't a clear-cut solution apart from common sense," she adds.

The chance to share the common sense from women who are going - or have gone - through the same thing proved instantly popular. At the next café meeting, more people turned up and its popularity continued to grow.

A Facebook group and a publicity campaign followed and Rachel's

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husband Andy (51), who works in IT, agreed to create a website for them encouraging others to set up Menopause Cafés in other areas. A year later, 60 had popped up, including one in Toronto. And the world's first menopause festival, was held in Perth in March where attractions included talks, group singing and lots of chances to get together to chat.

Today, with Rachel at the helm and Kirsty Wark as its patron, the charity is going from strength to strength. While acknowledging that her original idea could actually have turned into something gloomy, Rachel is glad her fears

were unfounded. One woman who attended an early event was musician Debra Salem, who introduced the idea of singing to the group and even changed the words of popular songs such as Gloria Gaynor's I Will Survive to give it a menopausal theme! Donna Summer's hit Hot Stuff became 'Hot

Having a cuppa together and talking things through really helps

"It's possible to be serious and have fun. We absolutely want to raise people's spirits," says Rachel.

Her ultimate aim is to see menopause cafés right across the world "in any country that needs them". When that happens, she'll then be happy to be made redundant from her role to concentrate on her day job of counselling.

By then, it's likely that Rachel, who has three grown-up children and whose hormone levels show she's officially peri-menopausal at the moment, will probably have her own personal menopause experience

Undaunted by what's ahead, she adds: "I will deal with my own menopause as and when it happens. One thing I have learnt from hearing other people's stories is that I must exercise more and look after myself."

■ Do you have any words of wisdom about coping with the menopause? Write to the Yours address.

If you would like to find out more about setting up a Menopause Café in your area, or find one near you, visit www.menopausecafe.net

retrained as a counsellor, Rachel was

and Lorna Fotheringham - said they would help me," she recalls. "At the first meeting in a local coffee lounge, we wondered if anyone would actually turn up. To our surprise, 28 people did."

lt's good to talk: Menopause

Café founder Rachel Weiss

from migraines to incontinence.

The aim was to learn more and their own menopause symptoms over

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