

Ep #17: Listener Q&A 2



Full Episode Transcript

With Your Host

Maisie Hill

Period Power with Maisie Hill

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If you are in the horrors with menstrual cycle issues or you want to learn how to harness your hormones then you are in the right place.

Welcome to the *Period Power* podcast. I'm your host Maisie Hill menstrual health expert, acupuncturist, certified life coach and author of *Period Power*. I'm on a mission to help you get your cycle working for you so that you can use it to get what you want out of life. Are you ready? Let's go.

Hello folks, this is episode 17 of the Period Power podcast and today is another listener Q&A special, this time it's all about being autistic. And I think you're going to find this useful whether you're autistic or not, whether you're interested in autism or not because some of the stuff I've had to figure out is going to be beneficial to all of you. So I'm really looking forward to sharing it with you.

I'm going to be talking about the intersection of autism with my menstrual cycle, sensory challenges. I'm going to be looking back at my early childhood, how being autistic impacts my work, burnout etc, etc. You've asked some fantastic questions. But before I get into that I want to take a moment to thank you all for the incredible response to last week's episode. Where I shared about my experience of realising that I'm autistic and what the process to being assessed and diagnosed was like and so many of you have reached out to me to share your experiences.

And a significant number of you have said that after listening to that episode you are now seriously considering if you are autistic. So I'm so glad that I did it and I'm glad you found it helpful. And I'm looking forward to getting into things today with you. So let's do this, let's start off with talking about the cycle because there were quite a lot of questions, understandably, about this.

So the first one is from Jo Fostergram who said, "How do you deal with that time in your cycle when you desperately achingly need to shut down or have some quiet time and get this well needed quiet time when you're a mother with a young son and possibly have other constraints, any

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techniques or ways to manage this? And thank you for all your amazing work.” Well, you are welcome Jo. And this is such a great question to start off with because I think my answer is going to be helpful to all of you whether or not you’re autistic.

So as is often the case with anything that’s related to the cycle, my recommendation is to just make it non-negotiable, non-negotiable for you, because when it’s non-negotiable for you it becomes non-negotiable with how you communicate it with others. So I’ve coached myself considerably on this and I’ve been coached on this. But ultimately I’ve really sold myself on why that time away, that quiet time, that downtime benefits everyone because it really does.

But I wanted to look at how it benefits me, how it benefits my partner and my son, their relationship, our time together as a family, how it improves my work, all of those things I just made a very long list of why that’s important, really sold myself. And then it just becomes kind of automatic with them. The people around us, by the way, don’t care as much as we think they do. I hear this so much with my clients, it’s like yeah, we’re all making this a bigger deal than it needs to be. So I just made it non-negotiable.

When it comes to the parenting dynamic with my son I am largely sensory avoidant and he is like a lot of kids, sensory seeking. And that brings its challenges to the parenting dynamic I would say. It’s definitely got a lot better since I started renting a studio space to work from, so I get to leave the house and then come back, that makes a difference. I have recently been testing out some sound reducing earplugs, which I do think are making a bit of a difference, not enough. I live with humans that do like to make noise, both of them.

But what I found really helpful, and this will be true for all of you who have any kind of cycle related symptoms, or challenges that you experience, I communicate my needs in advance of them happening. I make those requests in plenty of time by just saying, “Just a heads up, I’m about to

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ovulate, that means things are going to be changing and it would be great if we could do this, and this, and this.” And that makes a huge difference.

It also helps knowing the things that will tip me over the edge. And they can be quite small things but it’s been helpful to bring awareness to them and to know that they are an issue. So that could be things like my son, maybe his fingernails are a bit too long and when we’re holding hands I feel them. That will push me over the edge on a sensory level, very quickly. So I just make sure that his fingernails are kept short.

If our washing machine is running or there’s a kettle boiling in the background and I’m trying to have a conversation with my son or my partner, and especially if this is in the second half of my cycle. Then those competing audio inputs will be challenging for me. So I just won’t have the washing machine running. I mean I need the kettle boiling because I love a cup of tea. But I will just pause it so that my son can talk and I’ll turn it back on because I can stop the kettle, I cannot stop my son as hard as I try, I can’t stop him.

Okay, Annie Jackson asks, “I’m wondering if you’ve noticed a connection between sensitivity levels and your menstrual cycle?” So as I mentioned, yes, there is a definite difference here for me. And I can actually tell when I’ve ovulated by how I’m feeling on a sensory level. So what I would say now that I’ve got a bit older is that there’s a bit of a lag from when I ovulate to my cervical fluid thickening up. So it used to happen instantaneously, I could just tell by what my cervical fluid was like if I’d ovulated because it would thicken up, it would dry up, everything about it would change.

But now I’m 40 and it takes a little while for progesterone to get going, it’s like there’s a bit of a lag time. But I know I’ve ovulated because of the sensory side of things and because I don’t want to talk and I don’t want to be spoken to. My preference is not to be touched so I know I’ve ovulated even before I get those changes to my cervical fluid.

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Alexia asked, “How often does it happen to you that you shut off from the world, i.e. like in a past post of yours”, where I was lying down in bed? “And how have you balanced the need for this with your work?” So being very aware of my cycle has made a massive difference here and that is why I am such a fan of cycle tracking. But I would say particularly for people who are prone to burnout, whether that’s to do with autism or not, then paying attention and working with your cycle will make a huge difference as it would for every human.

I like to work from bed as much as possible in the last week of my cycle and just have some resting time. I schedule in walks and I just need time to potter around and not do much. So that really helps and I also reduce sensory input at this point in my cycle. So I love listening to podcasts when I’m walking around. But I will notice that that’s something that can push me over the edge in that week or so before my period is due. So I will just make a conscious choice not to listen to things through headphones or to have music playing whilst I’m at home, those kinds of things.

Tuesdays and Wednesdays of my week, they tend to be my long days because that’s when I have Flow Collective calls or ones with clients who are in other countries. So I usually finish work on Tuesdays and Wednesdays around 8 or 9 o’clock in the evening. So I just make sure that I have downtime in the morning or take a significant lunch break. I actually recently bought a sofa so I’m looking forward to having that delivered because that means that I can spend some time lying down.

And this is key, I can still be working, I can still be thinking about my work, a lot of my work does involve deep thinking rather than necessarily doing things. So if I can lie down whilst I’m doing that, that is very helpful to me. So I cannot wait for this sofa to arrive, it’s going to take a while because deliveries are a bit slower at the moment. But what I find is that the more I rest the better my work is, the better my relationships are, the more regulated I am. So I am doing this more and more.

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Danni asked, “How do you manage sensory difficulties around menstruation and go about your regular day despite potential extrasensory discomfort? Any tips welcome.” Yeah, this is a huge thing in people who are autistic with periods because often there’s a lot of sensory challenges there. But I actually don’t have any. I used to in that I think a large part of why my period pain was so horrific is that I can feel so much internally.

And we’re actually taught that we have five senses but we have eight. So we’ve got sight, smell, taste, hearing and touch, they’re the five that we all know about. But there’s also vestibular, which is your balance and your sense of body in space. And there’s proprioception which is a bit similar to vestibular but it’s your body in space, but also the relationship between your body parts and what they’re up to. And then the eighth one is interoception which is all about awareness of your body’s physiology. And so that can be awareness of hunger, thirst, need to go to the toilet.

So some people might have not a lot of awareness there but for me I’m very aware of these things and so aware that I think it made my period pain horrific. And even in pregnancy, I could feel my son moving at nine weeks. We went and had an ultrasound done then because I could feel this thing happening on the right side of my abdomen and we were about to go on holiday and I was just concerned that it could be an ectopic pregnancy or something like that. So we went to have a scan and everything was fine.

And actually that sensation just stayed the whole time and grew and then I finally realised a few weeks later, it’s my baby moving around which most professionals would tell you, you wouldn’t be able to feel that kind of thing, but I was very aware of it. And I think because of that strong interoception I also feel quite turned on when I’m bleeding because I feel all the extra blood flow and I feel the impact of oestrogen very significantly. So it can actually be a process that I enjoy.

India asked, “How do you think being autistic impacts your experience of the menstrual cycle? And do you think there’s a link between autism and PMDD?” Yes is the quick answer to this, I do think there’s a link, so many

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people in the autistic communities that I'm a part of have PMDD. For me I definitely have a question mark for myself and generally on a professional level as to is it PMDD which is premenstrual dysphoric disorder or is it PME, which is premenstrual exacerbation, or sometimes it's called premenstrual magnification, or is it both?

And I am going to be doing an episode about PMDD. So I'm going to get into that more than. But I definitely have strong sensory needs/challenges in the second half of my cycle, as I said, that for me starts at ovulation basically and lasts until my period starts. I find eye contact harder often in the second half of my cycle. I don't like to be looked at sometimes. That can be very strong.

And another thing is that I feel – my joints feel different. It's harder for me to hold my son's hand when we're walking around because my joints feel jangly. It's a very odd sensation and it's very specific and I'm having a bit of a hard time explaining it properly to you. But it just feels different and it feels weird. So yes, there's definite links here and I'm going to talk about them more in another episode.

Lollie asked, "I work in a perinatal service would love to hear about your experience of pregnancy and birth, challenges, things that helped and ways that professionals did or could have supported you." So this is a tough one for me to answer because I worked with independent private midwives. So I had a very different experience to what most people would have. But I would say what was big for me was that I always knew that I wanted to be left alone in labour. I didn't want people hovering around. I didn't want people looking at me. I didn't want people touching me.

I just knew very strongly I wanted to be left alone. And part of that is being autistic, part of that is seeing how efficiently we tend to labour when we're left alone and we're not observed. And I know that through my work as a birth doula.

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So I spent most of my labour on my own on purpose and that's what I wanted. And working with midwives who knew that, and encouraged that, and respected that, that made a big difference to me, I imagine had I had more NHS involvement then I would have needed to be more vocal about that. That's a generalisation for sure, but that would be my suspicion. Great question though.

Another one to do with childbirth, Mel asked this, Mel said, "I'm wondering how autism could affect you during childbirth. I'm a birth doula," welcome to the team, "And would love a greater understanding of this so I can support people better." Well, as I said last week, my experience could be very different to other people's experience so I wouldn't like to speak on behalf of all autistic people. This is very much all about me but I don't like people touching me when it's not initiated by me. So this can be for hugging someone, my partner touching me, a medical.

I need, and I think most of us actually want to be in control of that especially in medical situations. And consent around touching, consent around medical procedures. That is just so important. But when someone touches me and I'm kind of caught unawares, it takes my nervous system a while to regulate. It can really throw me off so I can see how that could be something really big for someone.

But often people who are autistic, when they're in medical settings will become non-verbal. There can be all sorts of ways that that could show up. So I would say the main thing is just to be aware of this and to ask your clients for guidance on what they would find useful.

Moving on now to the diagnosis side of things. So, Nick Thrix said, "What are the benefits to being officially diagnosed as an adult?" For me it's being able to name my experience. And at this stage in my life, there was a while, well, it was starting to feel like the wheels were coming off. And I was just experiencing a whole range of things. And so being able to see those things through the lens of autism has made it all make sense.

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It's like when you go to get your eyes tested and the ophthalmologist just puts that lens in front of you and then you just see things like the way that the stuff's always been there but you suddenly have that focus and ability to see things for what they are, that's been huge.

Hannah asked, "Do you look back on times in your life where you struggled or not made sense of things and now with your diagnosis think if I'd have only known then it would have been easier? Do you think you now look at things differently knowing you have autism?" So with this I just want to give you all a heads up. I'm going to talk very briefly about self-harm and about abuse but not in an in-depth way and I think in a positive way I would say. But I just wanted to give you a heads up in case you don't want to listen to that.

So for a long time I assumed that my history of self-harm throughout my teens and 20s, and having a very strong reaction to other people touching me, I made that mean that I had experienced boundary transgressions and possibly been abused. And as soon as I read about sensory processing disorder it all made sense to me.

And it was a huge relief as well, so it's been very positive because there's been occasions where I've just reacted and I've bitten partners when they've been kissing me with their tongues. And I don't mean that in a kinky enjoyable way, I've just bitten them like stop, get off me kind of way. And now I know that I'm just not into kissing.

Sometimes I am like around ovulation and when I'm in a new relationship when hormones are just really going for it. So that's been really interesting to realise. But that's quite common in people who are autistic that kissing isn't the most enjoyable thing I would say.

Another question that Hannah asked was, "Do I wish I'd known this sooner or am I glad that I only found out about it when I did?" So I started suspecting this around the time that we found out that my mum was terminally ill. And I wasn't in a position to get a formal diagnosis. And I do

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wish I'd have found a way to make that happen financially at the time so that I could have done that because even the process of being assessed has helped me to understand more.

And after going through that assessment I would have been in a great position to have a conversation with my mum about things. My dad is still alive so I could ask him but I feel like my mum has a more accurate way of recalling our childhoods than perhaps my dad does. Maybe that's a bit unfair of me but that's just my thoughts on it. But yes, I would have liked to have known this sooner so I could have had those conversations with my mum.

Pria says, "I'd be really interested to hear about aspects of your life, behaviour patterns that looking back with your diagnosis now maybe make more sense for you and that you can relate to differently now." So I put together a bit of a list here because I thought you'd all be interested in this. I have a lot of techniques for all sorts of weird and wonderful things. And it's a bit of a running joke in our household how I have techniques, very specific ones for lots of different things. And I find great joy in finding the best, most efficient way to do things.

So I think that's great but it also can be an issue because it really confuses me that other people don't follow these techniques or that they don't have them. And sometimes it really excites me that someone else has a technique that's more efficient than mine. But I can be quite rigid in my thinking. So there's that. I have an excellent long term memory; short term is more challenging for me. So I'm working out techniques to improve that at the moment. I'm going to talk about the work side of things in a bit.

Social settings can really exhaust me even if I'm having a great time and if I'm with people that I love, and I'm really relishing it, I know after that I need some downtime even if it's been fantastic. It's been very easy for me to leave relationships, I can just kind of pack up and go or not even pack up sometimes, I can just go. And things like boundaries, confrontation, they

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are things that I have in the past gone to great lengths to avoid. And I've done a lot of work and come so far in these areas.

One of my clients last year called me the boundary queen and it was amazing to have that reflected back to me because it just signified how far I've come when it comes to that side of things. I'm greatly affected by the emotions of others. That has been hard before I knew how to deal with emotions. So now that's not a problem for me. And I'm able to differentiate between what other people are going through and what I'm going through. But before that it used to just kind of get all jumbled up together and I didn't know what to do with it.

I am also prone to perfectionist tendencies. Well, I'm a recovering perfectionist I would say. I again feel like I'm leaving this behind as well as being in the past highly sensitive to – I was going to say criticism and rejection but it's really perceived criticism and rejection because the only way that I would be criticised or feel rejected is because of my thoughts. It actually has nothing to do with what other people do or say. So there's that side of things.

I also have a very strong response to movies and books where I can really take on what the character is experiencing. And in the past, especially as a teenager and in my 20s I would really experience what other people were going through, that strong ability to empathise and really recognise and experience what others are going through as if they are my own. That was messy, and challenging, and all of the things for a long time. I think that's what made my teen years so hard. If I'm hungry or thirsty I can't listen to anything my boyfriend is saying.

I have some close friends, I'm thinking particularly of Nat and Mars, this is very unhelpful, of course at the moment, this is just a side note. As I'm recording my podcast there's a bin collection going on outside. So anyway to return to this, I have some close friends. Well, actually I consider myself to have a lot of close friends but they might not realise they are my close friends. This is interesting because I will think of them as close friends but I

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only speak to them once a year which is really weird for a lot of people but that's really normal for me.

And I have close friends like Nat and Mars, Natalie and Mars and I speak to them most days in some form. And that's very new for me. It's very new. So this is something that I'm just exploring. And thankfully both of them are very understanding when I just drop off and don't come back to them about things. And they realise that that's me being me and they let me be me which is a beautiful thing to receive as a friend.

I also hyper focus a lot. So this is something that is common in autistic folks and people who have ADHD is that we can just hyper focus and get lost in something. And that's fantastic when you're writing a book for example. But if I can't focus on my work when that hyper focus kicks in then it will really bother me.

And this is what would happen when I was writing *Period Power* is my son would wake-up 5:30 in the morning and I'd be up with him and go into hyper focus but I wouldn't be able to do any work until I dropped him off at nursery at 8 o'clock. So I'd have all that time of being bothered that I couldn't really go in and make the most of that hyper focus.

I would also say I'm really great at teaching myself anything. I can figure a lot of things out especially running a business and having an online business. I'm very adept at teaching myself things.

But I'm trying more and more to stop myself from doing things and think well, just because I can do something does that mean I should be doing something, particularly when I hire and pay other people to do jobs? Now, I have to stop myself from doing things just because I can and because I enjoy it. It's not necessarily the most effective way of running a business. That was a long one but a great question.

I also had a private question that someone sent me saying, "How did I experience the world around me as a young person?" So as I mentioned, I really felt a lot and I had no idea how to separate out my emotions from the

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emotions of others. That's not necessarily just due to autism. There can be other reasons why someone might struggle with that. And I think that applies to me. But I had really no idea how to separate out my emotions from those of others. I didn't know how to process emotion.

And training as a life coach has shifted all of this for me, learning how to do this and realising that my thoughts create my emotions. This has just shifted so much. As a young person I loved reading books and I still do. I can just get lost in books. And when I was in primary school they ran out of books for me to read, they had to order extra books in. And I mean talk about an early sign of autism.

When I was in secondary school, so I'd be about 12 years old I suppose, if we would have a day off school I would go back to my junior school and help out for the day. And I would do things like organise the library books in the school in the order. You know how library books have those numbers on the side? I would put those in order and find deep pleasure in doing that. And I can remember alphabetising an ex partner's record collection, thousands of records and I loved putting them in alphabetical order, that just filled me with joy. So things like that really regulate me and I really enjoy.

I cared very deeply about the environment as a child and I used to volunteer in junior school to spend my breaks and lunch breaks cleaning up litter. I just said to the school, "If you give me rubber gloves and bags and things I will go round and clean up." I think that's quite a unique thing to do as a child. I also struggled in groups. I still can struggle in groups now. I love one-on-one. I love speaking to large numbers of people but anything in between. I kind of need to support myself to do.

Another thing, one of the ways that I stim, so stimming is physical movements usually that autistic people do to regulate ourselves. So this can be hand flapping, clapping, there's lots of ways it can show up. And one of the main ways that I do it is by rubbing fabric between my fingers. And I felt deep shame about this because I suppose it can look like what

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kids do or what babies do, when they have a blankie and they rub it and hang on to it. So I felt a lot of shame that now as a 40 year old this is something that I do.

And I can even remember trying to stop and speaking to the psychotherapist that I was working with and he just said to me, which was fantastic to hear, he just said, "This is something that helps you and makes you feel better and it's not harming anyone so why do you have to stop doing it?" And I was like, "Okay, great, thank you." And now I know that I'm just stimming and there's other ways that I do that as well. But yeah, I felt a lot of shame about that for most of my life.

Now let's move on to the unmasking side of things. And someone said, well, they shared actually, Amy shared that she was formally diagnosed a couple of weeks ago and Amy asked, "What does unmasking mean to you, what does it include? For me it's been telling my husband when I don't understand jokes on TV. It's also included admitting when I'm having trouble understanding conversations with the bank. I asked them to put a note on my account for needing specialist support but there's no option on their dropdown menu for neurodiversity." Yeah, what a surprise.

Well, first of all just for everyone to know, unmasking is when you just stop pretending and just be yourself as someone who's autistic. And for me it's the same with jokes. I get a lot of jokes, sometimes it can take me a while but often my partner will say things to me and I'm just lost as to how to respond. So I will just say, "I don't know how to respond to that." And that's helped a lot.

But I do think yeah, there's definitely, since I received the formal diagnosis then it's like my autism's been ramped up because that's just a common thing, a common experience that happens. And it has been a massive change for our household. And I'm just learning how to embrace it more and more.

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Real Flow Yoga, sorry, I don't know your name, I'm going by all the Instagram handles here said, "Do you find the company of none or other autistic people most enjoyable/compatible?" So this is interesting because as I've been going through this process myself, a number of close friends have also realised that they are autistic or have ADHD. And it does seem to be true that neurodiverse folks tend to clique together. I mean ultimately I enjoy my own company the most. And as I said, even my close friends I might only speak to once a year.

And I was speaking to a friend of mine recently who thinks that she has ADHD. And we were just speaking about how this is also true for her. And then as we were getting off the phone we were just like, "It's so great when we talk. I always love it when we talk." But we also know that we just only speak once a year and she was just like, "Talk to you in a year." And we were just cracking up about that. So yes, I think there is some truth to this but I like being on my own. And I just think your people are your people whoever they are.

Jen asked, "I recently got the confirmation that I'm autistic at 30 years old." Hey, welcome to the club, Jen. "How do you deal with masking and coming to terms with the idea that your entire adult personality was based on traits from other people if you've dealt with this?"

And Mare de 7 also said, "I've been masking for 42 years, my voice will be different. My actions will be different. Living to other people's standards, it's exhausting. I see diagnosis as total liberation." So my experiences of course are going to be different to yours. But I don't find this line of thinking particularly helpful. So I will just kind of limit myself and there may be a process of realisation and grief for you and it's important to actually process that.

But I would look for examples of where you have been you even if it's just when you're on your own or with certain people or in certain environments and situations because it doesn't sound helpful to me to be thinking that

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your entire adult personality is based on the traits of other people. So I would find the evidence of how that is not true.

Personally I actually find enjoyment in my chameleon like ability to shift. So like you have said, my accent will change, my mannerisms will change, my language will change but I just choose to be amused by that and interested in it. But I agree, Mare de 7, it has been a very liberating process for me.

And we've had some questions about the positives of being autistic, so let's get onto those. Abigail asked, "Tell us more about the positive things you've found about being autistic. This could be about the way you see and view things differently, your approach to work or life in general."

And Jo Robot said, "You are awesome for doing this." I am going to agree with you there and fully receive that Jo, thank you. But Jo says, "What are your personal positives? I read the list of traits but we're struggling over here, daughter diagnosed at nine, now 11 and me 44 and undiagnosed."

So I am very passionate of course about my specialist subjects being the menstrual cycle and hormones, reproductive health and being an entrepreneur, running an online business. So I can be quite bloody minded and determined there which I think is a fantastic trait. I have very strong morals. There's this misconception I would say that autistic people can't lie. And we can, I mean I'm speaking generally, maybe some can't but I think a lot of people actually can. We just choose not to and that's important for me as well.

I have these very strong morals, so basically just don't go asking me something if you don't want an honest answer to your question. I'm also very fascinated by human behaviour and the psychiatrist I saw mentioned how my drive and need to understand human behaviour. Because I'm autistic has probably really influenced my work and my niche, because I've become expert at making sense of other people because I'm so fascinated by humans. So I think being autistic, that's why I'm doing the work that I'm doing basically. So I think that's very positive.

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I can also read other people very well which made me an incredible doula. And when I was working as a practitioner and now as a coach I think I can read people very well. I could really see what my clients needed whilst they were in labour without them needing to ask and so many of my clients and their partners and medical professionals were just amazed by that, it's very easy for me to see these things on the whole.

It can take me a while to process auditory information. And sometimes that's frustrating but I think when it comes to coaching people and working as a practitioner in the past and just generally holding space for others, that slowing down, which is just something that I've always done. It creates a nice space in conversation. I don't jump in. I allow people time to answer and to reflect on things, which works fantastically when I'm coaching people.

And I remember my friend Natalie, when we first met found it a bit weird with how long it takes me to reply and things. But then once she trained as a doula she got it. But now I kind of see that as an autistic auditory thing. But I'm also very specific about the language that I use. So I like to really understand a question before I answer it. So often someone will ask me something and I will need to ask them for some clarification before I answer. And I also pick my words very carefully.

I'm very aware of my body which is great; it can have its downsides too. But my coach was actually pointing out the other day in a session with her that I do a lot of the body somatic stuff that really regulates the nervous system. I do a lot of that automatically and she was saying how a lot of neurodiverse folks do that, whereas she has to teach that to other people. But I already do it. In fact I'm doing it now. I like clasping my hands together and often when I'm on a Zoom call I will regulate myself by gripping my hands together. So I think that body awareness is ultimately very positive.

And now let's move on to the work side of things. So we had some interesting questions here. Okay, first one, "How do you run a successful business and successfully connect with people to the point where they

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want to engage with you and not come up against what they struggle with which is finding me odd, nerdy, too honest, or intense, or quirky to the point that they find it off-putting or I just feel serious, fuck off vibes?”

So I'm very fortunate in that people want my geeky-ness and my quiriness. But I also just decided a long time ago to just be me. This was before I realised I'm autistic and to just embrace being a geek. There are other people who really get into that. And I also think all my training as a coach as well, and experience there just knowing that other people aren't responsible for my emotions. I am. And the other way around as well, the things that I say and do can't make people feel a certain way. They will only feel a certain way if they have thoughts about the things that I say and do.

So this has been very liberating to me and just allowed me to show up more and more as me. Or when it comes to running a successful business my assistant, Beck, makes my life a lot easier. And in Perimenopause Power I started off the acknowledgement section with just acknowledging her because she has made a massive difference to me. She's actually going to be going on maternity leave soon so I'm going through all the feels and I'm going to be hiring someone new.

But Beck has made things a lot easier because there's kind of some fail-safes that we've had to build in because I'm going to kind of talk about this more in a moment. But I can avoid things that I perceive as demands. So, on a practical level we've had to look at how to stop that from happening. So she just gets CC'd into pretty much everything in the inboxes.

And she's also great at not crowding my diary with things, especially in my luteal phase because we have my diary, we always have the cycle days in there so that I can see what's coming up or where to book things in, or where to slow down, where to not crowd my days. And she is really great at respecting that and just checking in with me when things are getting a bit busier. So she is basically incredible and I'm thrilled for her that she's leaving for good reason but I'm also very gutted.

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Philsie asked, “How challenging is it for you to record the podcast, doing coaching calls in The Flow Collective etc? Thank you for sharing everything, you’re so inspiring.” Thank you. So I have to give a shout out to my podcast team here, Pavel and Angela and their team because they are amazing. So I actually don’t do much beyond writing and recording, and uploading it for them to then produce and deal with.

What I struggle with is that I can sometimes see it if I’m not on top of my thought work. I can perceive it as a demand, something that I need to do. So this is definitely a perceived demand, let’s be clear. This is something I want to do but I’m going to explain why this is a particular problem I would say. So there is – I’m going to call it a subset of autism, this is debated. I’m not going to go down that rabbit hole here.

Some people think there’s a subset of autism called pathological demand avoidance, PDA. And I suspect that this applies to me because as soon as anything is a demand I find it hard to do. So I can do some thought work and coach myself and change that experience.

But I would say probably what a lot of you are thinking, well, there’s lots of things that I don’t want to do and that’s true of all humans because that’s just how human brains work. When there’s something that we have to do and it requires energy your brain’s going to go, “Do we really have to do that? Maybe we shouldn’t do that.” But what’s notable about pathological demand avoidance, PDA is that it doesn’t just apply to the things that we don’t want to do. It applies to the things that we really want to do as well.

And even bodily functions, knowing that you need a wee, that’s a demand so you might then not go for a wee, that’s just one example of it. But I’m going to give you another example is that when my son was offered a place at his school; all I needed to was click a button basically and accept that place. But I perceived that as a demand and then didn’t do it. And then I had started to really see how my experience of autism can impact others and started to think about how it can impact him and his life.

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Yeah, all I had to do was just let them know, yes, we'll take this space. But they ended up having to chase me several times and even though it was a place that we wanted to accept. So that's just one example, there are multiple ways that that can show up.

So this podcast, to get back to the question, I love doing. I wanted to do it for so long. I love doing it. I love preparing for it. I love the experience of recording it. But if I perceive it as a demand I often submit it later than I want to or I'm meant to. So that's something I'm working on and thank you Pavel and Angela for all of your patience.

When it comes to the coaching side of things and The Flow Collective, again I love coaching my clients. And most of them I now do as audio only calls. I started off doing them as video ones but now most of them are audio which means that I can just stare out of the window, or I can close my eyes, or I can move my body in the way that it needs to without feeling self-conscious and without having to mask.

In The Flow Collective we do have video calls but the great thing about the coaching process that I use and that I teach all of my clients and everyone in The Flow Collective is that you can do things even when you're having a shit day. So I will also sometimes choose to intentionally rest as well. It's not about battling through, 100% not that.

But when you develop the skill of coaching yourself there's less that you need to reschedule and cancel, partly because you can just decide how you want to think and feel about things, but also it's because you get very good at saying no to things and resting without feeling guilty too.

Someone else asked if I have any strategies on how to identify what you need. "I struggle so much to feel what I need at any given point and then I go over my own limits and break down." I think this is such a common experience whether you're autistic or not. I see it time and time again in all of my clients. So I love this question. And I think the more we all slow down, the more we stop rushing, the more we notice what we need.

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So if you're just essentially on a hamster wheel all day long and rushing around and never pausing, or stopping then how are you going to notice what you need? For sure when I'm in hyper focus I can become a bit detached from bodily needs like food and drink for example. But the more I bring in regularity to my day which can be challenging because I can perceive it as a demand and resist it but it can work for me.

Sometimes there is a lag between something affecting me and me realising that it's affected me but that's something that the longer I know myself as someone who's autistic the easier that that gets. But my recommendation for all of you, my top tip is that if you're prone to doing too much, if you're prone to burnout, if you're prone to going over your own limits then to start limiting yourself to 60% of what you can do and see how it feels, or 40%, or 80%, whatever. Just do less than you think you can and see how that improves things.

And this is again the huge benefit of working with my cycle is it makes this infinitely easier. Final few questions, this has been a long episode.

Jenny Gladdish says, "I'm curious about the terminology you use specifically around referring to yourself as autistic. Many prefer person first language such as individual with autism versus autistic individual. Is this a conscious distinction for you?" And I love this question because I'm very particular about language, so I love that you've asked it. And I also just want to say, shout out to Jenny and Sarah because the two of you had what I saw as a very thoughtful and considered exchange on my Instagram post about this. And I just think it's so rare for that to happen on social media.

Usually people get very defensive and go on the attack and I just wanted to give you both a shout out for what I saw as a very thoughtful exchange. So in answer to your question, Jenny, yes, it is conscious. It feels very natural to me to describe myself this way, very positive, it's part of my identity, it's who I am. And it's also not an illness, so I don't have autism. I just am.

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And it's also why I don't really like saying that my friend has ADHD, because it's not something that you can catch. It's just the way that your brain is wired. It's like the operating system that you arrived on the planet with. So that's why I like to say that I'm autistic.

Nadia asked, "What do you wish the general public understood more about autism?" So much here but I would say generally that autism presents in all sorts of ways. And that you don't have to be someone who's obsessed with facts and great at numbers in order to be autistic. You can be someone who feels things greatly, who cares a lot about the environment. It's not what we've been led to believe it is. But I do love a good factoid though.

Last question from Lucy who says, "As a self-diagnosed autistic, the easing of Covid restrictions actually brings me some anxiety around socialising again. How are you feeling about this and what are your thoughts, struggles, coping skills with socialising and masking?" Lucy, how I'd love to jump in and coach you, I think probably lots of people would like coaching around this right now because again, you don't have to be autistic to be experiencing this kind of anxiety.

But the pandemic hasn't really affected me much because it's rare for me to socialise, it just doesn't occur to me a lot of the time. It's only really if Paul my partner does it and I think yeah, I could do that too. My work is online. A lot of my colleagues who are my friends live in other countries, so we socialise online or through phone calls.

And I was actually cracking up with my friend, Claudia the other day who lives in Ireland because I had mentioned another friend and colleague of ours, Vicky to her who Vicky lives in France. And Claudia was asking how Vicky was and I was saying that we speak quite a lot and how I'm practicing having a friendship with Vicky. And we were laughing at that together and she was just like, "That's so adorable." But it's true.

I feel like friendship is something that I want to cultivate more in my life and very consciously because I get a lot of pleasure through work. I love my

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work and I want to find ways of experiencing pleasure outside of my work through friendships. But I think also what's really helped me here is that I have just decided to be upfront with people. I'm okay with most people that I would see to just say that, "I'm struggling to make eye contact with you." Or, "Okay, it's time for me to go home now. The noise has got too loud for me here."

So I can just be upfront about things and you might not feel you can but that's just where I am with things.

That's it everyone, 55 or 56 minutes we're at. But I hope you found it helpful. I have loved going through these questions. I will catch you next time. Have a good one.

Thanks for listening to this week's episode of the *Period Power* podcast. If you enjoyed learning how to make your cycle work for you, head over to maisiehill.com for more.