A couple of months ago, Sonsoles Gonzalez, a former Procter & Gamble Co executive, introduced a line of haircare products she had been working on for several years. The upscale collection includes shampoos, hair masks and conditioners.

The company, Better Not Younger, is targeting women with the kind of hair issues, like thinning and dryness, that frequently accompany menopause and perimenopause. It was inspired in part by Gonzalez’s own hair, which, about a decade ago, was noticeably losing volume. Existing products, she felt, didn’t address her demographic or were simply aimed at hiding a perceived problem, like going grey.

At the same time, Gonzalez, now 54, saw that friends around the same age were tackling similar concerns. But, unlike their mothers or grandmothers, they saw themselves, in middle age, as alluring, not matronly.

"It’s a whole different mindset," she says. "They feel sexy. They feel secure."

By next year, more than 50 million women in the United States will be over the age of 51, the average age that menopause hits. Yet in some ways, menopause is the last taboo subject among women, many of whom are hesitant to talk about hot flushes, hormone imbalances and a type of thinning hair that’s different from that of women in their twenties and thirties. But times are changing.

"Women in their fifties, they don’t feel like they’re in their mother’s middle age, and indeed it’s not your mother’s middle age," says Candace Bushnell, whose new novel, Is There Still Sex in the City? will be published in August. It looks at the adventures of middle-aged women with the buoyant frankness that may be expected from the writer who created the character Samantha Jones.

"It might not be that acceptable in society, this idea of women over 50 wanting to have sex and feeling like they should be able to have sex, but women definitely seem interested," Bushnell says.

Better Not Younger is far from the only brand targeting menopausal women in a way that’s frank, a bit luxurious and, sometimes, even sexy. Rory, a recently introduced website, offers a personal lubricant to lessen the vaginal dryness many middle-aged women suffer, along with, among other things, prescription and over-the-counter remedies for hot flushes.

Ristela, a plant-based product aimed at menopausal women that promises to increase sexual pleasure, was introduced on the women’s wellness website Bonafide a few weeks ago. Bonafide said that sales of Ristela in its first 10 days surpassed expectations for three months, and another menopause-focused product is planned for early next year.

The stylish, unmedicinal presentation of these products is unlike that bottle of red clover extract purchased at a health food store. “We designed our packaging to make it feel beautiful and luxe and a part of your everyday life, just like your La Mer skin cream is,” says Rachel Blank, a founder of Rory.
Maria Kalomenidou, a friend of Gonzalez who was one of the people who gave feedback on Better Not Younger, said, “I’m 54, but I really feel very young. ‘I don’t think I’m at the end of my journey.” NYT NEWS SERVICE

LAST TABOO: High-end products for menopausal women are coming up, dealing with everything from hair thinning to sexual pleasure