

Connecting through change: Finding support during perimenopause and menopause



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Abstract

A woman's perimenopause and menopause are life-changing stages. Hormonal changes during the multi-year transition known as perimenopause affect mood, sleep patterns, bone health, and other aspects of life. A change in the body's cycle is indicated by menopause, which is defined as a 12-month period-free period. Hot flashes, nocturnal sweats, mood swings, sleep issues, and cognitive problems are typical symptoms. A healthy diet, consistent exercise, stress reduction, and strong social support are all essential for managing this stage holistically. Strength training, mindfulness, plant-based diets, and expert advice can all help reduce symptoms and enhance well-being. Developing relationship with those going through this process promotes emotional fortitude. Menopause and perimenopause should be confidently accepted as periods to focus on self-discovery and wellness. Women can be empowered to flourish rather than just get through this stage of life by comprehending and assisting this shift.

Keywords: Perimenopause, menopause, hormonal changes, mindfulness, mood swings.

1. Introduction

A significant and often misunderstood chapter in women's life is perimenopause and menopause. We're not calling it "the change" as if it's an ending, but rather "the change" as in a powerful transition, an opportunity for growth, and a time to prioritize well-being. The article equips and also shares the valuable knowledge, understanding, support, and resources needed to deal this journey with strength, grace, and a deep understanding of body. This isn't just about surviving this phase; it's about thriving through it (1).

2. Understanding the symphony of change

Perimenopause is like a symphony of hormonal fluctuations (figure 1), a prelude to menopause. It's a transitional phase that can last several years, as ovaries gradually produce less estrogen and progesterone levels. These mentioned hormones play vital & important roles in various bodily functions, from regulating menstrual cycle to influencing mood, sleep, bone health, and more (1). As their levels fluctuate and decline, women may experience a range of physical and emotional changes. Menopause itself is a single point in time marked by 12 consecutive months without a menstrual period signalling the natural end of reproductive years.

3. The body's whispers: Recognizing the signs

Every woman's experience is unique, but some common "whispers" from the body during this time include:

- **The inner radiator:** Hot feel, those undefined sensations of intense heat, associated with sweats, a flushed face & sometimes even chills. They can range in intensity and frequency, and their duration can vary from a few seconds to several minutes (2).
- **Night sweats:** Hot flashes that occur during sleep drench and disrupt rest. These can significantly impact sleep quality and lead to daytime fatigue.
- **The mood rollercoaster:** Emotional ups and downs, including irritability, anxiety, depression, or difficulty concentrating. Remember, these feelings are valid and often linked to hormonal shifts. Don't dismiss them as "just part of getting older."
- **The sleep thief:** Difficulty in sleeping due to disturbance in the sleep cycle, conscious sleep, or restless and inappropriate sleep. Hormonal changes, night sweats, and anxiety can all contribute to sleep problems (3).
- **The dry spell:** Vaginal dryness, which can cause discomfort during intercourse, itching, burning, or increased susceptibility to infections.
- **The libido lull:** Changes in sexual desire, which can be influenced by hormonal fluctuations, vaginal dryness, and emotional factors.
- **The mental fog:** Cognitive changes like memory lapses, difficulty focusing, or feeling "fuzzy-headed." These can be frustrating, but they are often temporary.
- **Aches and pains:** Joint and muscle aches and pains can become more common due to hormonal changes and the natural aging process.
- **Changes in body composition:** Some women may notice changes in their body shape, including weight gain or a redistribution of fat.
- **Changes in hair and skin:** Thinning hair, dry skin, or changes in skin elasticity may occur (4).

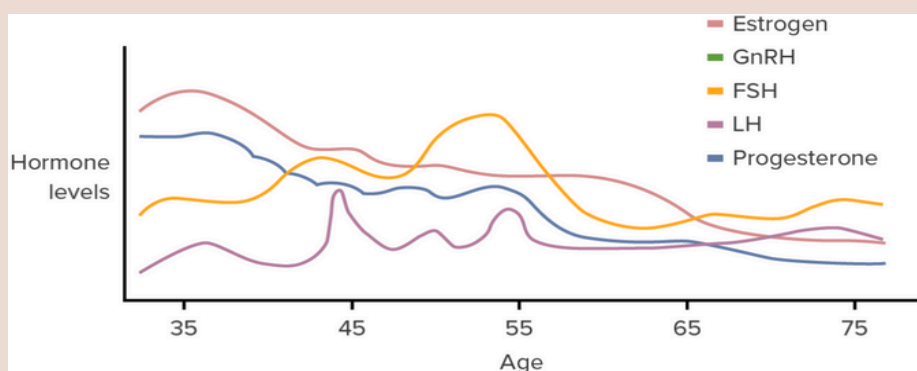


Figure 1. Level of hormones at different stages: The primary hormonal changes seen in perimenopause/menopause are a decrease in estrogen and progesterone and an increase in FSH (follicle-stimulating hormone), LH (luteinizing hormone), and GnRH (gonadotropin-releasing hormone)

4. Easing the transition: A holistic toolkit

Managing perimenopause and menopause isn't about fighting the change, but about working with body. Here's a holistic toolkit to help women navigate this phase:

4.1. Nourishing the body: Food as medicine

- **The power of plants:** Embrace a diet rich in fruits, vegetables, whole grains, and legumes. These provide essential vitamins, minerals, antioxidants, and fiber, which are crucial for overall health and can help manage symptoms. Aim for a colorful array of fruits and vegetables to maximize nutrient intake (5).

- **Healthy fats:** Don't fear fats! The right kinds of fats are essential for hormone production and overall health. Choose healthy options like avocados, nuts, seeds, olive oil, and fatty fish (salmon, tuna). These can help improve mood, reduce inflammation, and support brain function (6).
- **Hydration is key:** Drink plenty of water throughout the day. Dehydration can worsen symptoms like hot flashes, vaginal dryness, and fatigue. Carry a water bottle and sip throughout the day.
- **Limit the triggers:** Reduce or eliminate processed foods, sugary drinks, excessive caffeine, and alcohol, as these can exacerbate symptoms like hot flashes, mood swings, and sleep disturbances. Pay attention to how the body reacts to different foods and make adjustments accordingly.
- **Gut health matters:** A healthy gut microbiome is essential for overall well-being, including hormone balance. Include probiotic-rich foods like yogurt (with live cultures), kefir, sauerkraut, and kimchi in diet (7).

4.2. Moving with intention: Exercise as your ally

- **Find joy:** Engage in regular physical activity that you enjoy, whether it's walking, dancing, yoga, swimming, cycling, hiking, or gardening. The key is to find something you love and stick with it. Aim for at least 30 minutes of moderate-intensity exercise most days of the week (8).
- **Strength training:** Incorporate strength training exercises at least two to three times per week. This is crucial for maintaining bone density, muscle mass, and preventing osteoporosis, which is a concern for women during and after menopause. Use weights, resistance bands, or your own body weight for exercises like squats, lunges, push-ups, and planks.
- **Mindful movement:** Practices like yoga and tai chi can improve balance, flexibility, and mental well-being. These practices often combine physical postures with deep breathing and meditation, which can be particularly beneficial for managing stress and anxiety (9).

4.3. Taming the stress beast: Prioritizing mental and emotional health

- **Deep breathing:** Practice deep, diaphragmatic breathing to calm nervous system and reduce stress. Even a few minutes of deep breathing throughout the day can make a difference.
- **Mindfulness meditation:** Even a few minutes of daily meditation can help quiet the mind, reduce anxiety, and improve focus. There are many guided meditation apps and resources available online (10).
- **Creative outlets:** Engage in activities that bring you joy, like painting, writing, playing music, or spending time with loved ones. These activities can help you relax, express yourself, and boost your mood (11).
- **Healthy Boundaries:** To minimize the stress level, you have to be ready for saying 'No'. Prioritize your needs, moods, requirements & well-being.
- **Seek Professional Support:** If you're struggling with significant mood changes, anxiety, or depression, don't hesitate to seek help from a therapist or counsellor. Therapy can provide you with valuable tools and strategies for managing your emotions and coping with the changes you're experiencing (12).

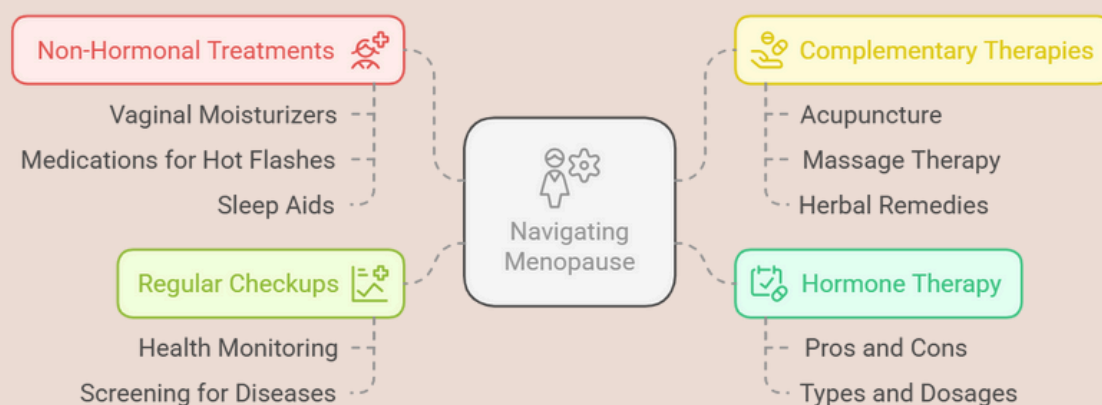


Figure 2. Navigating menopause: Treatment and management options

4.4. The power of connection: Identifying your tribe and creating your support network (13,14)

- **Share story:** Discussing about your experiences can be incredibly helpful and can help reduce the stigma surrounding menopause. *Specific Tip:* Share your story with a trusted friend, family member, or partner. You can also consider writing about your experiences in a journal or blog (15).
- **Find tribe:** Connecting with other women who understand what you're going through can be incredibly validating and supportive. *Specific Tip:* Search for online forums or support groups specifically for women in perimenopause and menopause. Attend local events related to women's health (16).
- **Professional support:** Don't hesitate to seek professional help if you're struggling with emotional or relationship challenges (17). *Specific Tip:* A therapist or counselor can provide a safe and supportive space for you to explore your feelings and develop coping strategies (18).

5. Word of encouragement: Embracing this new chapter with confidence

Remember, you are not alone in this journey. Perimenopause and menopause are a natural and inevitable part of life, a transition, not a destination. Embrace this new chapter with self-compassion, resilience, and a focus on your overall well-being. This is a time to prioritize your needs, to rediscover yourself, and to celebrate your strength and wisdom (19).

6. Conclusion

Menopause and perimenopause are significant life transitions for women, but they should not mean the end of vitality or well-being. Women should welcome this stage as an opportunity for personal development, rejuvenation, and self-care rather than just surviving it. Women may traverse this shift with strength and confidence if they are aware of the indications, understand the physiological changes, and take a holistic approach that includes regular exercise, healthy eating, stress management, and strong social support. This is a path of empowerment rather than constraint. Women may reframe menopause as a time of knowledge, self-discovery, and rejuvenated purpose by placing a higher priority on their physical, emotional, and mental health. Although each woman's experience is different, no one must go through this change alone. Perimenopause and menopause may be transformed from uncertain times into opportunities for flourishing with the help of support, education, and self-care. Knowing that this new chapter is a discovery to a life full of power, equilibrium and revitalized energy, embrace it with bravery.

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Management options

W	C	T	N	U	I	C	S	C	O	Y	V	L	X	J	B	S	R	X	Q
M	O	A	R	U	P	L	N	G	Q	L	H	L	Q	M	B	E	A	C	B
N	B	D	U	O	Z	O	P	U	K	X	K	N	B	B	L	T	F	W	X
X	T	N	A	T	E	N	I	L	O	Z	E	F	A	G	C	G	O	H	O
S	T	Z	E	V	S	I	V	C	Y	M	M	I	N	A	K	E	X	I	H
D	F	T	K	T	T	D	G	G	T	K	U	Y	T	G	R	T	Y	E	C
T	X	Y	J	J	R	I	M	U	F	C	S	C	I	K	S	R	B	Q	Y
X	W	E	Y	A	O	N	J	O	L	J	C	J	D	D	I	C	U	V	B
V	I	O	V	B	G	E	D	D	K	O	E	X	E	G	F	X	T	R	H
X	Z	K	Z	E	E	Z	Y	S	P	X	S	P	P	Y	Z	H	Y	P	Z
H	I	I	T	J	N	Q	X	Y	B	V	K	P	R	H	Q	Q	N	Q	S
D	N	I	M	A	T	I	V	D	R	L	W	Q	E	J	X	U	I	C	B
K	I	Z	C	S	H	R	A	P	A	B	G	X	S	M	A	C	N	A	L
R	F	A	I	D	E	S	C	K	E	H	P	N	S	C	I	R	V	M	M
H	M	N	I	M	R	A	R	M	Y	L	J	X	A	G	X	F	M	K	G
K	Q	I	F	S	A	Z	G	A	B	A	P	E	N	T	I	N	E	C	L
D	V	H	I	H	P	R	O	F	Z	Q	F	C	T	V	N	N	F	N	H
W	H	I	V	J	Y	D	V	V	U	B	K	N	I	R	W	T	M	D	E
N	U	C	C	M	T	V	P		F	W	C	X	L	V	F	R	U	D	C
T	V	Y	B	G	B	S	K		V	X	W	X	T	V	X	A	L	W	F

ESTROGEN THERAPY
CLONIDINE
VITAMIN D

GABAPENTIN
FEZOLINETANT
OSPEMIFENE

ANTIDEPRESSANT
OXYBUTYNIN

Answers are on page no: 82