

**ECHO IDAHO**

Behavioral Health in Primary Care

# Hormonal Impacts on Mental Health During Perimenopause and Menopause

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Rebekah G Fayette

CNM-BC, PMHNP-BC

Illumination Women's Health

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University of Idaho  
School of Health and Medical  
Professions



# Learning Objectives

- What is perimenopause/menopause
- Impacts of hormones on mental health
- Potential treatment options and factors to consider

# Understanding Perimenopause and Menopause

## Perimenopause

- 5-10 years before the last menstrual cycle.
  - Hormone levels fluctuate, causing various symptoms ( hot flashes/night sweats, skin and hair changes, pain and stiffness,mood disturbances, sleep issues, weight changes)
  - Lab work does not confirm this phase . Symptom management is recommended

## Menopause

- Menstrual period has ceased for 12 consecutive months
  - Average age in the United States 51.5 years
  - Signifies the end of a woman's reproductive years, accompanied by reduced hormone production from the ovaries. (Wieczorek et al., 2023)

# Special Considerations

- Symptoms vary significantly from one individual to the next ( number of symptoms as well as severity)
- The combination of these symptoms impact daily functioning, interpersonal relationships and quality of life .
- Life expectancy for women today is around 82 years, most women will spend one third of their lives in the postmenopausal stage (Welsh et al., 2021).
- As estimated by the World Health Organization (WHO, 2022), the number of postmenopausal women will reach 1.2 billion by 2030 globally, with 47 million women entering menopause every year. (Spector et al., 2024)
- Some groups of women appear to be at much higher risks for developing mood disturbances
  - History of mood disturbances
  - Perinatal or postpartum mood disturbances
  - Endocrine disorders ( PCOS, Primary Ovarian Insufficiency, Hypothyroidism, HPA axis dysfunction)

# Hormonal Changes and Impact of Mental Health

- The psychogenic symptoms of perimenopause are particularly concerning, with up to 70% of women experiencing mood disturbances (Okpete & Byeon, 2025)
- Rather than overt sadness, women may report fatigue, irritability, or anhedonia, symptoms easily mistaken for “normal” aging or stress.

**Estrogen ( think of it as the flexibility hormone)** helps to regulate mood and emotional well-being.

As estrogen levels decline many women experience:

- **Mood swings:** Fluctuating estrogen levels can lead to irritability, anxiety, and sudden emotional shifts
- **Increased risk of depression:** Studies indicate that women may be at a higher risk for depressive episodes during perimenopause and immediately following menopause, particularly if they have a history of depression or anxiety. (*Mental Health | the Menopause Society, 2024*)

**Progesterone ( our mental health hormone)**, helps regulate mood and promote sleep, Decreased progesterone can contribute to:

- **Sleep disturbances:** issues falling asleep, staying asleep, which can exacerbate feelings of fatigue, irritability, and anxiety.
- **Heightened anxiety:** The drop in progesterone can lead to an increase in anxiety symptoms, affecting overall mental health.

# Cognitive Changes

Many women report experiencing "brain fog" during perimenopause and menopause, including difficulties with concentration, memory, and cognitive processing. This can be attributed to hormonal changes affecting brain function, leading to:

- **Increased frustration and stress:** Challenges with cognitive function can lead to feelings of inadequacy, which may heighten anxiety and depressive symptoms.
- **Worsened mental clarity:** Women may find it hard to focus or remember details, which can impact daily tasks and overall quality of life.

# Physical Symptoms and Self-Perception

Hormonal changes can lead to various physical symptoms, such as hot flashes, night sweats, and weight gain. These physical changes can influence self-esteem and body image, leading to:

- **Lowered self-esteem:** Many women struggle with body image concerns due to weight gain or physical changes, fostering negative self-perception and contributing to feelings of depression.
- **Isolation:** The discomfort of physical symptoms may lead to withdrawal from social activities, exacerbating feelings of loneliness and sadness.

# Managing Mental Health During Perimenopause and Menopause

Several strategies can help manage symptoms and improve emotional well-being:

## 1. Seek Professional Support

- Consulting with a mental health professional
- Therapy or counseling can help women navigate emotional challenges, develop coping strategies, and address any underlying mental health issues ( CBT)
  - Common mental health exacerbations: PMDD, GAD, MDD,ADD/ADHD, OCD and PTSD

## 2. Consider Hormone Replacement Therapy (HRT)

- HRT can alleviate symptoms by optimizing hormone levels on an individual basis. The risks and benefits of HRT are essential for making informed choices.
- Options for management include :
  - estrogen replacement ( patch, pill) based on concerns and risk factors
  - micronized oral progesterone- Progesterone has anxiolytic properties via its metabolite allopregnanolone, which enhances GABA ( like the brake system of the brain) receptor activity.
  - vaginal estrogen for localized concerns

- **Testosterone** is currently only recommended for menopausal women with low sexual desire, if HRT alone is not effective
  - Testosterone therapy has been shown to have mood and cognition benefits
  - May be a useful adjunct to estrogen and progestogen therapy for peri- and postmenopausal women with neuro-psychiatric symptoms or for women who are not candidates for estrogen based therapies
    - Transdermal testosterone can have a similarly transformative effect on psychological wellbeing, with some describing resolution of anxiety and episodic low mood (Crockett et al., 2025)

### **3. Engage in Regular Physical Activity**

- Exercise has been shown to have numerous benefits for mental health.
- Boost mood by promoting the release of endorphins, reducing anxiety, and improving overall well-being.
- Yoga, walking, or swimming can be particularly helpful. (Garg & Munshi, 2025)

### **4. Adopt a Balanced Diet**

- A healthy diet rich in whole foods, including fruits, vegetables, whole grains, and omega-3 fatty acids, can support hormonal balance and improve mood. Certain foods, such as fatty fish, flaxseeds, and nuts, are known to have mood-stabilizing properties.

## 5. Practice Mindfulness and Relaxation Techniques

- Mindfulness practices, such as meditation or deep-breathing exercises, can reduce anxiety and improve emotional regulation.
- Helps manage stress and cultivate a greater sense of calm

## 6. Build a Support Network

- Connecting with friends, family, or support groups can provide emotional support and foster a sense of belonging.
- Sharing experiences with other women navigating similar challenges can alleviate feelings of isolation

# Key Points

- Mental health challenges during perimenopause and menopause are real with over 70% of women experiencing one or more mental health concerns during this time
- Hormonal fluctuations pose a real concern to diagnosing and treating mental health concerns in this transitional period
- Women who have had mental health concerns previously (depression, anxiety, postpartum depression) are at a higher risk of developing concerns again during the perimenopause and menopausal period
- HRT is a viable option to reduce mental health concerns for women in the perimenopause and menopausal transition

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