

NAVIGATING THE EMOTIONAL WAVES OF PERIMENOPAUSE

Understanding Hormonal Shifts and Their Effects on Women's Mental Health



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Hot flashes may get all the marketing, but there are so many other changes that we as women go through during perimenopause. In addition to physical symptoms, the significant hormone fluctuations that happen during perimenopause have profound effects on mood and mental health.

Feeling down or anxious is common during perimenopause.

Big hormone changes, like those experienced during puberty, pregnancy/fertility treatments, and perimenopause are referred to as "windows of vulnerability" for women's mental health. A staggering **45-70% of women will notice depressive or anxious symptoms during perimenopause**, especially if you noticed this during a prior "window" in your life.

Understanding Hormonal Changes

During perimenopause, the ovaries gradually produce less estrogen and progesterone. This overall decrease in hormone production is not steady, resulting in widely fluctuating hormone levels that your body has trouble adapting to. It's like a dance between many partners that slowly starts to fall out of rhythm.

Key Hormones Involved

- **Estrogen:** This hormone plays a crucial role in regulating mood, maintaining bone density, and influencing the health of skin and blood vessels.
- **Progesterone:** Known for its calming effects, progesterone helps prepare the body for pregnancy and influences mood regulation.

Mood and Mental Health Impacts

The hormonal changes during perimenopause can lead to a variety of mood and mental health issues. Some of the most common effects include:

Mood Swings: Fluctuating hormone levels can lead to unpredictable mood swings. Women may experience sudden shifts from happiness to sadness, irritability, or anxiety without clear triggers.

Anxiety and Depression: Lower levels of estrogen can affect the production of serotonin, a neurotransmitter that helps regulate mood. This can increase the risk of anxiety and depression during perimenopause.

Sleep Disturbances: Hormonal changes can disrupt sleep patterns (frequent night waking, night sweats, waking due to aches and pains), leading to insomnia or fragmented sleep. Poor sleep quality can exacerbate mood disorders and lead to increased irritability and stress.

Cognitive Changes: Some women report experiencing cognitive changes, such as difficulties with memory and concentration, often referred to as "brain fog." These changes can be linked to hormonal fluctuations affecting neurotransmitter activity in the brain.

Managing Mood and Mental Health During Perimenopause

While hormonal changes are a natural part of the perimenopausal transition, there are strategies that can help manage mood and mental health:

- **Healthy Lifestyle:** Regular exercise, a balanced diet, and maintaining a regular sleep schedule can help stabilize mood and improve overall well-being.
- **Stress Management:** Practices such as yoga, meditation, and deep-breathing exercises can reduce stress and improve emotional resilience.
- **Medical/Naturopathic Interventions:** Hormone replacement therapy (HRT), herbal, nutraceutical or other medications may be recommended by healthcare providers to alleviate severe symptoms.
- **Support Systems:** Engaging with support groups or counseling can provide emotional support and coping strategies.

Understanding the connection between hormone changes and mood can empower women to seek appropriate support and make informed decisions about managing their mental health during perimenopause.

