



Navigating Peri-menopause and Menopause

Peri-menopause and Menopause are natural stages of life that all women experience, yet it can bring real and sometimes challenging physical and emotional changes that affect day-to-day, including at work. Many women manage symptoms quietly, often without understanding or support. By acknowledging menopause with empathy, openness, and flexibility, workplaces can help women feel seen, valued, and supported, while retaining experience, confidence, and wellbeing across their workforce.

What is Menopause?

Menopause is the stage that marks the end of a woman's menstrual cycle and reproductive years. It usually happens between the ages of about 45 and 55. Peri-menopause refers to the years of hormonal fluctuation leading up to menopause, while menopause is confirmed after 12 consecutive months without a menstrual period.

During menopause, the body's production of hormones - particularly estrogen and progesterone - declines. This hormonal change can cause a range of physical and emotional symptoms, such as hot flushes, sleep problems, mood changes, fatigue and brain fog. Experiencing these symptoms can impact confidence and wellbeing. Everyone's experience is different: some women have mild symptoms, while others find the transition more challenging.

Menopause isn't an illness - it's a normal life transition - but understanding it and having the right support can make a big difference to quality of life, at work and at home.

Peri-menopause/Menopause – How it impacts mental health

Peri-menopause and menopause are not only physical transitions; they can be major mental health turning points. During peri-menopause, fluctuating estrogen levels directly affect brain systems that regulate mood, stress response, and emotional processing.

Estrogen interacts with serotonin, dopamine, and GABA - the chemicals that influence feelings of depression and anxiety, and levels motivation and sleep. As levels shift unpredictably, some women experience new or worsening mood disorders.

Rates of depressive symptoms increase during the peri-menopausal years, even among women with no prior history of mental illness. Anxiety, panic attacks, irritability, tearfulness, and feelings of loss of control are common. Cognitive changes - often described as "brain fog" - can also affect confidence and self-esteem.

Sleep disruption can further impact emotional resilience and self-esteem. Recognising that these symptoms are hormonally influenced, not personal failings, is crucial.



Therapy, medication, hormone treatment, and social support can all play important roles in protecting mental wellbeing.

The Good News

While hormonal shifts can bring changes like hot flashes, sleep disruption, or mood swings, this transition is temporary and manageable for most women. Many find that once they reach post menopause, symptoms stabilise and life feels balanced again.

There are also more evidence-based options than ever to support well-being, including lifestyle strategies such as strength training, regular cardiovascular movement, prioritising sleep, and eating protein and fibre-rich meals to support metabolism and bone health.

Stress-reduction practices like yoga, meditation, and time outdoors can ease mood fluctuations, while limiting alcohol and caffeine may reduce hot flashes. For some, medical treatments such as hormone therapy - when appropriate and guided by a healthcare professional - can be highly effective and safe.

This stage is also an opportunity to refocus on long-term health by protecting heart health, maintaining strong bones, and nurturing mental well-being. With the right support, menopause can be less about loss and more about stepping into a resilient, informed, and empowered chapter of life.

Looking after yourself

- ▶ Prioritise your sleep and exercise
- ▶ Practice stress management
- ▶ Be compassionate with yourself
- ▶ Make time for social connection and joy
- ▶ Working with a clinician

If you would like to speak to a clinician with an interest in Women's Health, please call 1800 30 30 90 or contact us via webchat or by emailing appt@bsspsych.com.au