

Menopause and mind health

Many women experience mood changes, anxiety, depression and trouble concentrating around the time of menopause. Changes in hormone levels and other midlife pressures can affect your mind health. It's good to know there are many practical things you can do to feel mentally well during this time.

What is menopause?

Menopause is your final period. You know you've reached menopause if you have not had your period for 12 months. Most women reach menopause between the ages of 45 and 55. Women can experience menopausal symptoms a few years before menopause (perimenopause) and after menopause (postmenopause).

Anxiety and depression

Midlife is a common time for women to experience anxiety or depression.

You might experience anxiety or depression due to hormonal changes associated with menopause or other work and life pressures.

If you had anxiety before reaching menopause, some menopausal symptoms (e.g. hot flashes) could increase your anxiety.

Some research suggests that women who have a history of depression or premenstrual syndrome (PMS) are more likely to develop depression around the time of menopause.

Women who go through premature or early menopause can be at greater risk of mood changes, anxiety and depression.



Brain fog

About two-thirds of women going through menopause experience brain fog.

Brain fog describes a group of symptoms that happen around the time of menopause, including:

- trouble concentrating (e.g. losing your train of thought)
- being easily distracted
- misplacing things (e.g. keys)
- difficulty remembering things (e.g. words)
- forgetting why you are doing something (e.g. why you came into a room)
- forgetting appointments and events.

These symptoms can impact your quality of life, self-esteem and work. But they are usually quite mild and will improve after menopause.

Symptoms of brain fog are similar to early signs of dementia. It's uncommon to have dementia in midlife, but if you are worried about these symptoms, talk to your doctor.

Mood changes

It's normal to experience mood changes around the time of menopause. You may feel more angry or irritable than usual. You might also feel sad or teary.

Symptoms of menopause can affect your mood. For example, night sweats can affect your sleep, causing you to feel tired and emotional.

What you can do

There are many practical things you can do to look after your mind health around the time of menopause. For example:

- get help to manage your menopause symptoms, which may improve the way you feel
- eat a healthy diet and watch your weight
- learn new skills to challenge and exercise your brain
- get enough sleep
- avoid drinking alcohol or drink in moderation
- avoid smoking and other drugs.

You can also:

- take time for yourself and do things you love
- practise relaxation, mindfulness and meditation to relieve anxiety and stress
- talk to someone you trust about your feelings (e.g. a friend, family member, doctor or psychologist)
- use a diary or write lists to help you remember important things
- keep a record of your symptoms to discuss with your doctor if needed.

Some women who use menopausal hormone therapy (MHT) to manage menopausal symptoms find it also helps with their mind health (e.g. brain fog, mood or anxiety). Talk to your doctor about the best treatment options for you.

When to see your doctor

Everyone experiences menopause differently. Talk to your doctor if:

- you are experiencing strong emotions
- you think you have anxiety or depression
- menopausal symptoms are impacting your quality of life
- your brain fog is long lasting or stopping you from doing daily activities.

For more information, visit jeanhailes.org.au/health-a-z/menopause

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This fact sheet is designed to be informative and educational. It is not intended to provide specific medical advice or replace advice from your medical practitioner.

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Jean Hailes takes a broad and inclusive approach to the topic of women's health. The terms 'women' and 'girls' are used throughout this resource to refer to all women, girls, and gender-diverse people.



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