



A GUIDE FOR PERIMENOPAUSE

stress management



BY PERINAVIGATHER

INTRODUCTION

Perimenopause is a natural and inevitable part of a woman's life and increased stress and anxiety can be a natural (and in some cases inevitable) part of perimenopause.

Unfortunately, letting either go unchecked can make our perimenopause symptoms worse and can increase the risk of certain chronic diseases in the long run, like, heart disease, diabetes, and immune system disorders. Therefore, understanding and managing stress is not only a foundational step in improving perimenopause symptoms, but it is critical to optimizing long-term health.

This guide is intended to provide a brief overview of stress's impact on health and some tools that may be helpful as you address stress during perimenopause.



Please note: this guide uses the term “stress” to mean both stress and “anxiety”, it is important to note there is a difference between the two.

Both are emotional responses, but stress is typically caused by an external trigger and can be short term (e.g., an argument, a deadline, etc.).

Anxiety is defined by persistent, excessive worries (or stress) that don't go away even in the absence of a stressor.

While they are defined differently, they are experienced very similarly (e.g., they lead to the same set of symptoms) and, importantly, can have the same long-term negative outcomes if left unaddressed.

This guide is divided into 2 parts:

Part 1: An Overview of Perimenopause-Related Stress

- How is Stress Different During Perimenopause?
- Principles for Managing Perimenopause-Related Stress
- Overview of Steps To Less Stress During Perimenopause

Part 2: Tools and Resources for Managing Stress

- Simple Mindfulness Tools
- PeriMenopause-Specific Nutrition Choices Benefiting Stress
- Self-Compassion Tools



PART ONE

PERIMENOPAUSE- RELATED STRESS

How is stress different during perimenopause?

1) Feeling more stress during perimenopause can result from several factors, including situational stress over the transition and related symptoms and stress related to the various pressures that tend to exist during midlife.

2) Feeling more stress during perimenopause can also result from changes taking place in our body's biochemistry. For example, the fluctuation (and ultimate decrease) of estrogen is one of the hallmarks of perimenopause, and because estrogen plays a significant role in our neurological and immune systems, its decrease causes changes to our brain, nervous system, and immune system in ways that can increase feelings of stress.

3) Feeling increased stress during perimenopause can become a vicious cycle because stress can increase the intensity of hot flashes/night sweats, and affect sleep, weight gain, joint pain, and memory (to name a few). In turn, the lack of quality sleep as well as many of these symptoms themselves often result in our feeling more stress.

Principles Managing Perimenopause-related stress

The key to managing stress during perimenopause lies in part in our ability to *reframe*, *retrain*, and *refrain*.

Reframe

Studies have shown that people who reframe their belief about stress from “stress is bad for my health” to “stress is *not* bad for my health” have better outcomes than those who believe stress has a negative impact on their health. Also, the belief that “stress is bad” to “stress is helpful” (for example, when giving a speech) showed a biological response similar to joy or courage.

From a framing perspective, it is important to note here that research also shows that *some* stress is healthy and important in building resilience – the stress to which I am referring is the kind that is long-term or chronic.

Retrain

A large part of our ability to manage stress is related to how we respond when we feel or expect to feel stress. We are able to actively change the brain's response to stressful situations, essentially teaching the brain over time to react more calmly and resiliently. This process involves techniques that create new neural pathways in the brain that can alter the brain's (and thus the body's) response to stress.

Principles Managing Perimenopause-related stress

Refrain

The refrain component of stress management is simply (in principle not practice!) dial down the stressors by doing a bit less, practicing self-compassion, and avoiding known triggers (e.g., poor nutrition, poor quality sleep, (avoidable) situations or environments that increase stress levels).

Because estrogen plays a role in nervous system regulation and immune response, the decrease in estrogen during perimenopause can result in over-activation of the “fight or flight” (sympathetic) response and low-grade inflammation throughout the body – both of which can increase (or worsen) feelings of stress. Therefore, techniques that increase activation of the “rest and digest” (parasympathetic) response and reduce inflammation have been found to have positive effects on perimenopause-related stress (and symptoms overall).

Overview of Steps To Less Stress During Perimenopause

There are several evidence-based strategies that can help us manage our stress during perimenopause – so we feel better in the short term and optimize our long-term health.

Many of the techniques impact the reframe, retrain, and refrain components of stress management.

Below are 2 tools that are considered to be effective in managing stress associated with perimenopause. I have included sample resources for each tool in Part 2.

Mindfulness (including meditation).

Mindfulness is a nonjudgmental sense of awareness that helps increase coping and self-acceptance by actively regulating the nervous system. Mindfulness has been shown to improve anxiety (and other) symptoms during perimenopause. It works in part by dialing down the body's response to stress, decreasing cortisol levels and sympathetic activation and increasing parasympathetic activity and endorphins (“feel good” chemicals).

Self-Care.

The term “self-care” covers many practices that have been shown to improve our experience with stress during perimenopause.

“Self-care” is thought to benefit us in part by helping us slow down, intentionally care for ourselves, and cultivate joy which, like mindfulness, decreases cortisol levels and sympathetic activity and increases parasympathetic activity and endorphins.

Overview of Steps To Less Stress During Perimenopause

Some self-care practices included (but are not limited to):

- perimenopause-specific nutrition
- perimenopause-specific movement
- quality sleep
- proper hydration
- social connection
- doing less/establishing boundaries/prioritizing
- practicing self-compassion
- practicing self-calming (and mindfulness!) techniques
- relaxing activities (build a menu)
- enjoyable activities (build a menu)

Strategies outside the scope of this document may include focusing on some of the following:

- Heart Rate Variability
- Body Budget
- Dietary/Herbal Supplements
- Hormone Replacement Therapy (HRT)
- Cognitive Behavior Therapy (CBT)
- Dialectical Behavior Therapy (DBT)/Radical Acceptance
- Gut Health
- Gratitude
- Spirituality



PART TWO

TOOLS & RESOURCES

Simple, quick Mindfulness Tools

Fun Mindful Eating ([Link](#))

Slowing down, noticing, and enjoying our food has several benefits including, redirecting our thoughts. Practice: pay attention to what you smell, taste, feel, hear, and see when you eat.

3-Step Mindfulness

This helps to bring your awareness to the present moment.

Practice: 1) step out of autopilot and bring your full awareness to what you are doing, thinking, and seeing, 2) become aware of your breath, 3) Expand your awareness outward to your body, then your surroundings.

The Five Senses ([Link](#))

This brings your awareness to the present moment. Practice: notice 5 things you can see, 4 that you can feel, 3 that you can hear, 2 that you can smell, and one that you can taste.

Leaves on a Stream ([Link](#))

This tool is helpful with audio and a quiet space.

Simple, quick Mindfulness Tools

The tools below are helpful if you find yourself in a moment of feeling overwhelmed or stressed.

Observe a Leaf for Five Minutes

- This exercise calls for nothing but a leaf and your attention.
- Pick up a leaf, hold it in your hand or look outside at a leaf on a tree, and give it your full attention for five minutes.
- Notice the colors, the shape, the texture, and the patterns.
- This will bring you into the present and align your thoughts with your current experience.

Box breathing

- Breathe in, counting to four slowly. Feel the air enter your lungs.
- Hold your breath for 4 seconds.
- Slowly exhale through your mouth for 4 seconds.
- Repeat steps 1 to 3 until you feel re-centered.

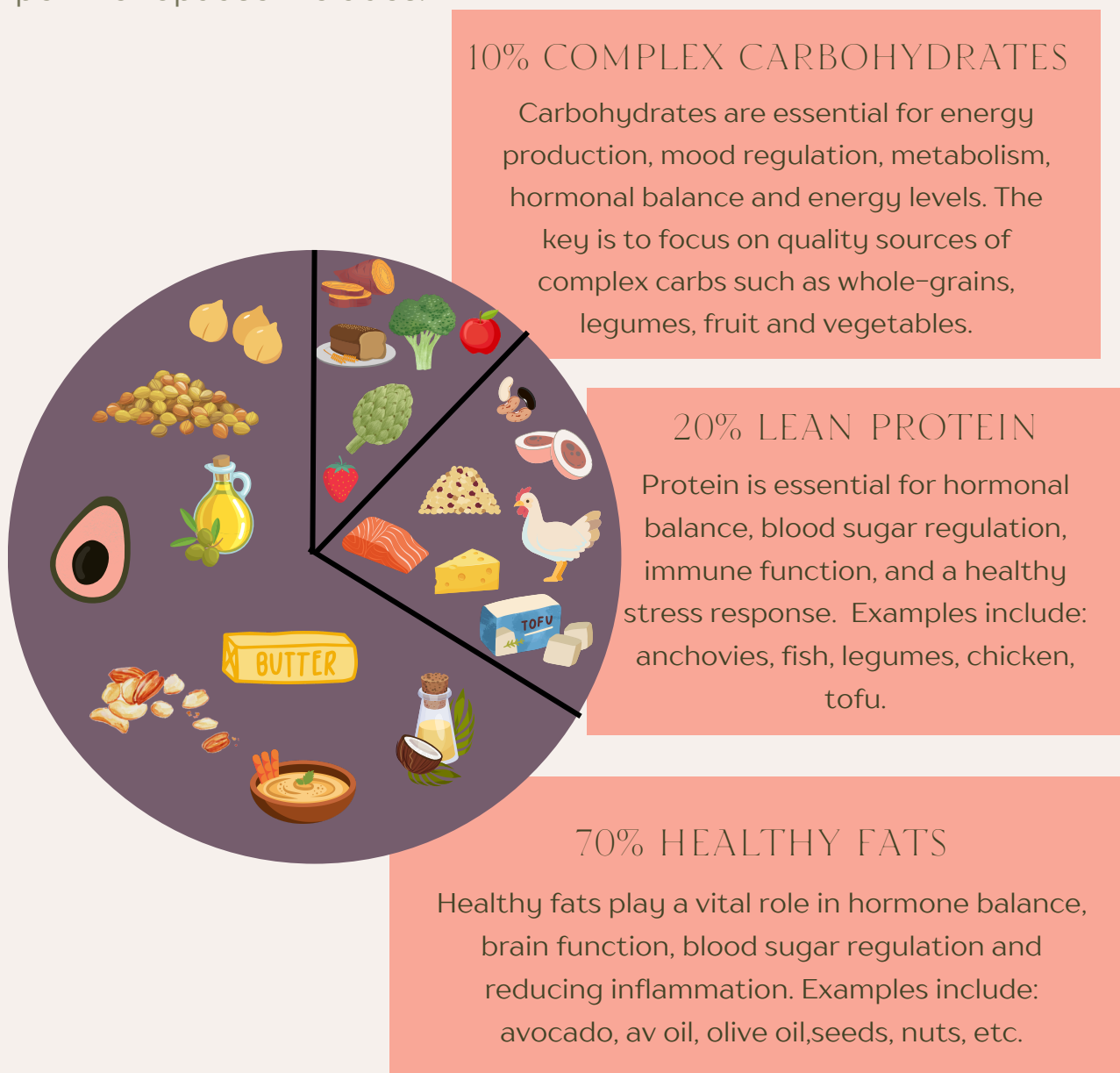
Go for a 10-minute walk and make note of 5 things you see and hear around you.

Take a cold shower or splash ice-cold water on your face 4-5 times.

Practicing a specific kind of mindfulness, meditation, consistently has been shown to change the structure and function of the brain, improving memory, attention, mood, and sleep, and reducing anxiety, stress and pain.

PeriMenopause-Specific Nutrition Choices Benefiting Stress

Optimizing perimenopause-specific nutrition can impact our stress by reducing inflammation, improving sleep, reducing hot flashes, and addressing weight gain. A Mediterranean-influenced diet has been shown to improve perimenopause symptoms in some women. One example of recommended ratios in perimenopause includes:



Source: Haver, Mary Claire. "The Galveston Diet: Your Ultimate Menopause Health Plan". Avery, 2023

EAT MORE

- **Fruit & veg:** leafy greens, cruciferous veg, fresh herbs, berries
- **High-quality protein:** fish, eggs, organic poultry, natural yogurt, legumes
- **Soy:** tofu, tempeh, miso
- **Healthy fats:** extra-virgin olive oil, avocado, coconut, nuts, seeds, fatty fish like salmon & sardines (2-3 servings a week).
- **High-fiber foods:** whole-grains like quinoa, buckwheat & brown rice
- **Filtered water:** aim for 2L of filtered water daily

EAT LESS OR AVOID

- **Caffeine & alcohol**
- **Refined grains:** white bread, flour, pasta, white rice
- **Added sugars:** soft drinks, baked goods, ice cream, breakfast cereals, flavoured yoghurt, sauces
- **Processed meats:** sausages, deli meats, bacon.
- **Trans fats:** margarine, fried foods, pastries.
- **Excess sodium:** limit high salt foods like table salt and processed foods. Choose foods that have less than 400mg / 100g

Self-compassion Tools

Practicing self-compassion is crucial for women's overall well-being and mental health during perimenopause.

Self-compassion helps us cope better with the physical and emotional challenges of this transformative life stage – which can significantly improve our quality of life.

Self-compassion becomes increasingly relevant to mental health in midlife and by adopting a kinder attitude towards ourselves, we can navigate the complexities of perimenopause more effectively, leading to better sleep quality, reduced anxiety, and an overall more positive experience during this transitional period.



SELF-COMPASSION

It's important to treat yourself with the same care that you would treat a good friend. However, often when facing a challenging situation, we get down on ourselves and speak to ourselves negatively. This exercise is designed to help you develop a more compassionate way of talking to yourself when the things get difficult.

Describe a time when a close friend faced a challenging situation.

What would you say to your friend?

What would you do for your friend?

Now describe a time when you faced a challenging situation.

What did you say to yourself?

What did you do?

Are there any differences in your responses?

What has this helped you to learn?

EXAMPLE AFFIRMATIONS

My body is going through a natural change, and I will embrace this new chapter of my life with grace and patience.

I trust that my body knows how to heal and adjust to the changes that are happening during menopause.

I am strong and resilient, and I will navigate through this transition with ease.

I am allowed to prioritize my own needs and take time for self-care during this time.

I choose to focus on the positive aspects of perimenopause and the opportunities it brings, rather than the challenges.

I am grateful for the wisdom that comes with age and experience.

I accept that every woman's perimenopause journey is unique, and I will embrace my own path.

I trust my intuition and will make choices that are best for my body and mind during this transition.

I am worthy of love and care from myself and others, and I will prioritize my own well-being during this time.

I am excited for the next phase of my life and all the possibilities that come with it.

PROFESSIONAL SUPPORT

Amanda Michelle Wellness, LLC is not licensed or qualified to practice psychotherapy. If your stress and anxiety are stopping you from functioning well or feeling good, professional help can make a big difference.

If you are struggling or are concerned about your mental health or that of someone you know, please seek out a licensed mental health practitioner. You can do this through your doctor, health insurance website, or below are some links to directories.

<https://www.psychologytoday.com/us/therapists>

<https://locator.apa.org/> (American Psychological Association)

<https://abpp.org/directory/> (American Board of Professional Psychology)

<https://findyourtherapist.adaa.org/> (Anxiety and Depression Association of America)

<https://internationaltherapistdirectory.com/>

<https://www.moodtreatmentcenter.com>



THANK YOU!

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