# ADHD Women and Hormones

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# Hormones and ADHD

In the U.S., the medical field has not prioritized women's unique health needs, leading to poor care, limited support, and misinformation. For women with ADHD, this gap can be harder to deal with. You have to speak up for yourself and help others, including your doctor, understand how your hormones affect your ADHD symptoms.

## The Impact of Hormones on ADHD

Most ADHD research has focused on men, leaving out information about women's hormonal changes. Hormonal fluctuations can impact ADHD symptoms, often intensifying them during certain phases of the menstrual cycle, pregnancy, and menopause. There is now more awareness of the need for ADHD treatments that consider these changes.

## Societal Attitudes and Misconceptions

Many women grow up hearing harmful messages about their bodies and their natural hormonal transitions, or they hear nothing at all about them. For women with ADHD, these messages can be particularly harmful, as they already struggle with self-esteem and emotional regulation. You may have been told that your period is something to hide or that it shouldn't affect your daily life, ignoring how hormonal changes can impact ADHD symptoms.

## Menstrual Cycle and ADHD

The menstrual cycle can impact ADHD symptoms in many women. During the **luteal phase** (the week before menstruation), most women experience worsened ADHD symptoms like concentration issues, forgetfulness, and emotional sensitivity due to

estrogen drop and progesterone rise. Conversely, when estrogen rises, some feel more focused and energetic during the **follicular phase** (the week after menstruation). Understanding these changes can help women with ADHD manage symptoms. Tracking your cycle and symptoms is useful for discussing treatment with your healthcare provider. Some women find adjusting medication dosage or timing throughout the cycle helps.

**Note:** New information shows that on the 14th day, some women are more vulnerable to impulsive behaviors. This is ongoing research. You might spend impulsively or engage in substance abuse at this time.

## Pregnancy and After Birth

Pregnancy and life after giving birth also come with pressure, especially around society's expectations for mothers. For women with ADHD, hormonal changes during pregnancy can sometimes alleviate symptoms, while postpartum hormone shifts may exacerbate them. Postpartum depression can be especially tough for women with ADHD, as social media often paints an unrealistic picture of motherhood that ignores hormonal changes and mental health challenges.

## Perimenopause and Menopause

Perimenopause and menopause bring big emotional and physical changes, often misunderstood or ignored. These phases are especially tough for women with ADHD, as hormonal shifts can worsen symptoms. Without accurate info, navigating these transitions can be daunting. Society's tendency to devalue aging women adds to the difficulties. Understanding and preparing for these changes can ease confusion and isolation. Some women with ADHD notice changes in medication effectiveness, heightened emotional sensitivity, or increased difficulty with focus memory and organization. Talking with healthcare providers and seeking support from those who understand can help manage ADHD symptoms during this stage.



## Reflection Prompt:

**Take a moment to think about how your ADHD symptoms have fluctuated throughout different phases of your life (puberty, pregnancy, menopause). How aware have you been of the influence hormones have on your symptoms? What areas could benefit from more attention or exploration?**

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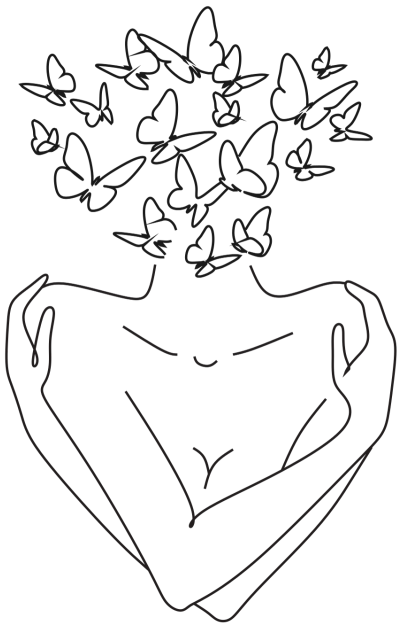
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## This module is about:

- [ ] Understanding the relationship between ADHD symptoms and hormonal fluctuations.
- [ ] Recognizing that your medication needs may change as your hormones shift throughout your life.
- [ ] Practicing self-accommodation to cope with the emotional and executive functioning impacts of hormonal changes.
- [ ] Prioritizing self-care and self-compassion during hormonal fluctuations.
- [ ] Advocating for yourself to ensure others understand.
- [ ] Developing self-awareness to align with your body’s natural processes.

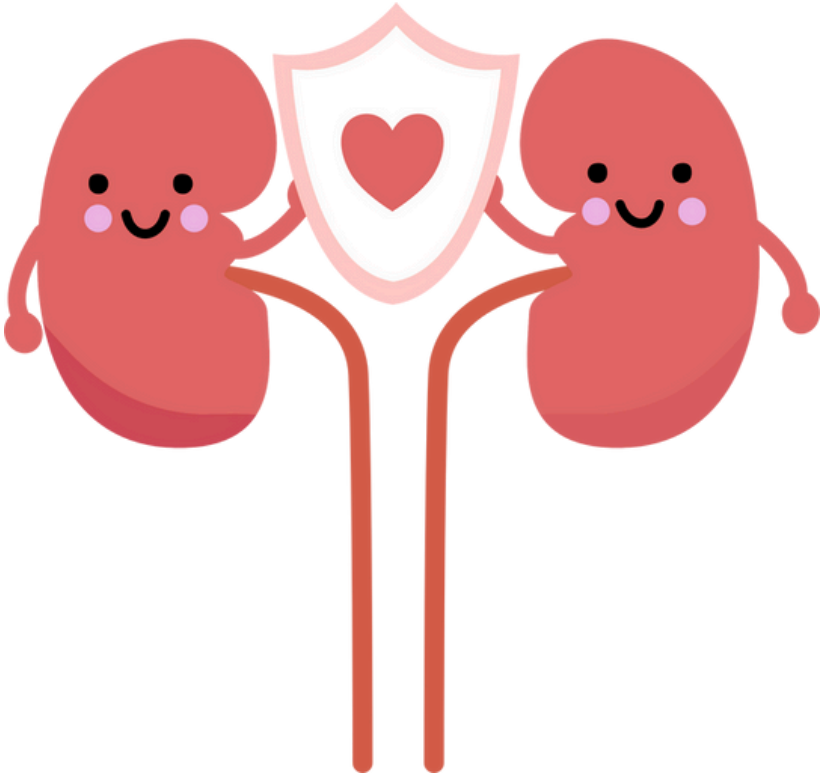
Embracing your body's natural processes can help you navigate life with greater understanding and resilience as a woman with ADHD. This isn't easy when we've been taught to mistrust and dislike our bodies, but with the right tools and mindset, it's possible to reconnect with and care for ourselves.



## Understanding Estrogen's Role in ADHD

Estrogen plays a vital role in how your brain and body function. It influences neurotransmitters, such as acetylcholine, dopamine, and serotonin—three chemicals that are key to managing ADHD. When estrogen levels fluctuate, it affects neurotransmitter function, influencing ADHD symptoms at different points in a woman's life, including puberty, the menstrual cycle, pregnancy, and menopause.

For instance, when estrogen levels are low, you find it more difficult to concentrate, remember things, or regulate your emotions. However, estrogen levels can make you feel more focused and less impulsive.



# ADHD and Your Menstrual Cycle

Your menstrual cycle has two main phases: the **follicular phase** (which starts at the beginning of your cycle) and the **luteal phase** (leading up to your period). Estrogen levels rise during the follicular phase and drop during the luteal phase. By tracking your cycle, you can notice how your mood, concentration, memory, and emotions fluctuate with these hormonal changes.




## ADHD Medication and Your Menstrual Cycle

Studies show that, for women without ADHD, medications may be more effective during the first half of the menstrual cycle. Many women with ADHD report similar experiences, but more research is needed to understand this phenomenon.

## Tips to Support ADHD During your Menstrual Cycle:

- [ ] **Increase body awareness:** Take advantage of the increased energy and focus you might experience early in your cycle to tackle tasks that require full attention.

- [ ] **Be flexible:** Hormonal fluctuations during the luteal phase can worsen symptoms, so adjust your schedule to engage in more manageable tasks. Rest and avoid scheduling high-stress activities during this time.

- [ ] **Practice self-compassion:** Remember that many women experience similar issues, especially those with ADHD. Be gentle with yourself during difficult times.

- [ ] **Consider medication adjustments:** Hormonal changes may affect how well your medications work. If necessary, talk to your healthcare provider about adjusting your medication regimen.

- [ ] **Communicate and set boundaries:** Communicate your needs to others and avoid overcommitting during more stressful periods of your cycle.

- [ ] **Prioritize self-care:** Engage in activities that help you relax and feel nourished, like gentle exercise, eating well, and treating yourself during challenging weeks.



**Reflection Prompt:**

**Reflect on your experience with your menstrual cycle and ADHD. How has your cycle impacted your focus, memory, and emotions? What changes or self-care routines could you implement during the difficult phases?**

## Self-Awareness and Tracking Hormonal Fluctuations

**Reflection Prompt:**

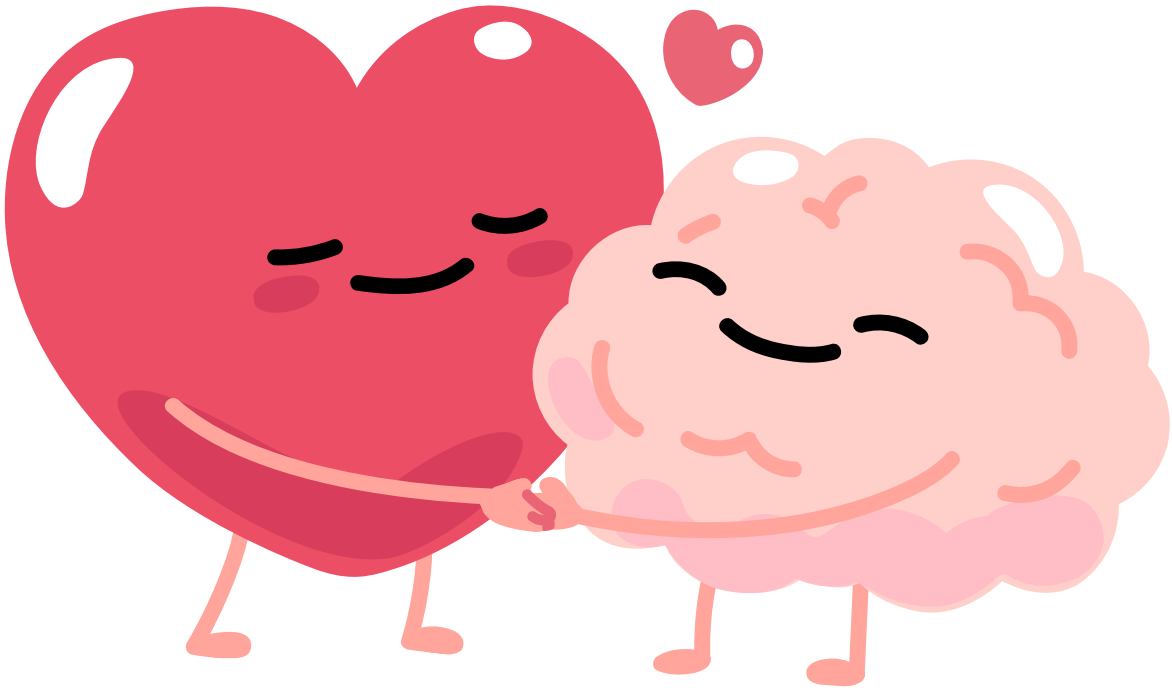
**How do you currently track your mood, focus, or energy levels in relation to your menstrual cycle? Could a more structured tracking method (e.g., journaling, an app) help you better prepare to care for and support yourself during hormonal changes?**

## Mental Health and Hormones

Research shows that hormonal changes during menstrual cycles can worsen mental health symptoms, such as anxiety and depression. After puberty, teenage girls are more likely to experience both. Girls with ADHD often face exacerbated symptoms during their cycles, especially before their periods.

Up to 20% of teenage girls experience significant mood disruptions related to hormonal changes during their cycles. For women with ADHD, these fluctuations present an even greater challenge.

At puberty, pregnancy, and menopause, changes in estrogen levels can worsen or trigger anxiety and depression. Women with ADHD are often more sensitive to these shifts, making them more vulnerable to these mental health challenges.



## Listen to Your Body

As a woman with ADHD, you have been taught to ignore your body's signals, but it's essential to pay attention, especially during your menstrual cycle. Allowing time to rest and care for your needs during the luteal phase can help manage ADHD symptoms and improve your overall health. Your body's needs change during different cycle stages, so adjust your activities accordingly.



## Reconnecting with Your Body's Signals

We've discussed the importance of rethinking what you've been taught about your body's stress signals. You learned to ignore them or push through, but now, using new coping skills, you can begin to listen to and respect your body's needs for rest, relaxation, or pain relief. Learning to hear and honor those signals is crucial to caring for yourself.

# Self-Accommodations During Difficult Weeks

Self-accommodations are changes you make to support yourself by making things easier. Consider adjustments that can make life easier during the harder weeks of your cycle.

- Would you like more help?
- Less noise?
- Less work?
- Less socializing?

Should you consider ordering food instead of cooking, reducing housework, or taking a Lyft instead of driving?

Set realistic expectations for yourself, and remember to be patient with your progress. Supporting ADHD symptoms and hormonal fluctuations is an ongoing process, but you can handle it with the right strategies.

## Reflection Prompt:

> Think about how you can adjust your environment or routine to accommodate your ADHD and hormonal fluctuations better. What small changes could help you manage stress, memory lapses, or emotional dysregulation?

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# What is PMDD?

Premenstrual Dysphoric Disorder (PMDD) is a mood disorder that causes debilitating emotional and physical symptoms. These typically occur in the one or two weeks before menstruation. PMDD can result in extreme mood swings, irritability, depression, anxiety, fatigue, and sleep disturbances, and it has been linked to suicidal ideation and self-harm in some cases.

PMDD is frequently misdiagnosed, as its symptoms can resemble those of bipolar disorder or borderline personality disorder. This is particularly true when it's assessed by a clinician unfamiliar with PMDD or ADHD.

PMDD disproportionately affects those with ADHD and autism. Approximately 92% of autistic women and 46% of women with ADHD experience PMDD, compared to only 5- 10% of women without these conditions. Tracking PMDD symptoms can be difficult, especially for women with ADHD, due to challenges such as time blindness and other executive functioning issues.

## How Do Doctors Treat PMDD?

PMDD is commonly treated with medications, lifestyle changes, and natural remedies.

Many doctors will treat PMDD with Antidepressants prescribed specifically during the luteal phase of your period, increasing antidepressants during that time or increasing antidepressants during that time.

PMDD is also treated with hormonal birth control. Ask your doctor about options

# Managing PMDD as a Woman with ADHD

PMDD (Premenstrual Dysphoric Disorder) causes severe emotional and physical symptoms in the week or two before menstruation. It is especially challenging for women with ADHD, as time blindness and other executive functioning challenges can make it difficult to track and manage symptoms.

## Self-Awareness

The first step in managing PMDD is increasing your self-awareness around your symptoms. Tracking your mood, physical sensations, and ADHD symptoms throughout the month can help you identify patterns. Although this can be challenging, using an app or journal can help you recognize whether certain weeks or phases of your cycle are consistently more difficult.

## Reflection Prompt:

"How do my emotions and ADHD symptoms fluctuate across my cycle? Which symptoms tend to worsen in the days before my period?"

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### Practical Strategies to Manage PMDD

- ☐ **Track Symptoms Regularly**:

  Consider using an app, calendar, or journal to document daily changes in mood, energy, and ADHD symptoms. This tracking will help you establish patterns and allow you to plan ahead for support when needed.

- ☐ **Build a PMDD Support Toolkit**:

  On your better days, prepare for the more challenging times. Set aside low-energy activities for PMDD weeks, and have soothing tools like bubble bath, snacks or fidget toys handy.

- ☐ **Sensory accommodations**: If you're sensitive to noise or light during PMDD, try adjusting your environment by reducing distractions or using calming tools like soft

lighting, aromatherapy, or grounding exercises.

- [ ] **Medication Adjustments**:

  Some women with ADHD and PMDD find that their ADHD medications don't work as effectively during certain phases of their menstrual cycle. Discuss potential adjustments with your doctor—whether it's adjusting the timing or dosage of medications like SSRIs or ADHD stimulants during PMDD weeks.

- [ ] **Delegate and Simplify**:

  When symptoms flare up, reduce your load. Adjust your schedule to avoid high-stress activities, and don't be afraid to say no to new obligations during these weeks.

- [ ] **Reach Out for Support**:

  Isolation during PMDD can make symptoms feel worse. Let your loved ones know when you're struggling and communicate your need for additional emotional or practical support.



## Self-Compassion for PMDD

It's easy to become self-critical during PMDD weeks, especially when ADHD symptoms are also heightened and RSD may be worse. Practicing self-compassion and acknowledging the difficulty of this time is essential.

☐ **Self-compassion strategies:**

- **Use gentle self-talk**: Practice validating your feelings with self-compassionate phrases like, "Of course I feel this way. This is a tough week for me, but I'm doing my best."
- **Third-person technique**: Talk to yourself in the third person to increase self-compassion. For example, "Of course [your name] feels overwhelmed right now. It's a challenging time, but they're managing it as best they can."

**Reflection Prompt:**

- What self-compassionate words or phrases can I say to myself when PMDD feels overwhelming? How can I remind myself that this is temporary and doesn't define me?

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estrogen drop and progesterone rise. Conversely, when estrogen rises, some feel more focused and energetic during the **follicular phase** (the week after menstruation). Understanding these changes can help women with ADHD manage symptoms. Tracking your cycle and symptoms is useful for discussing treatment with your healthcare provider. Some women find adjusting medication dosage or timing throughout the cycle helps.

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Pregnancy and life after giving birth also come with pressure, especially around society's expectations for mothers. For women with ADHD, hormonal changes during pregnancy can sometimes alleviate symptoms, while postpartum hormone shifts may exacerbate them. Postpartum depression can be especially tough for women with ADHD, as social media often paints an unrealistic picture of motherhood that ignores hormonal changes and mental health challenges.

## Perimenopause and Menopause

Perimenopause and menopause bring big emotional and physical changes, often misunderstood or ignored. These phases are especially tough for women with ADHD, as hormonal shifts can worsen symptoms. Without accurate info, navigating these transitions can be daunting. Society's tendency to devalue aging women adds to the difficulties. Understanding and preparing for these changes can ease confusion and isolation. Some women with ADHD notice changes in medication effectiveness, heightened emotional sensitivity, or increased difficulty with focus memory and organization. Talking with healthcare providers and seeking support from those who understand can help manage ADHD symptoms during this stage.

# Pregnancy and ADHD

Pregnancy can have varying effects on ADHD symptoms due to changes in estrogen levels. While some women may experience improvements, others might struggle with increased responsibilities, mood changes, and hormonal shifts.

When deciding whether to stay on medication during pregnancy, it's crucial to consult with a healthcare provider who understands how to treat ADHD in pregnant women. They can help weigh the risks and benefits of continuing medication during pregnancy and breastfeeding. Failing to manage your ADHD during this time can have consequences for both you and your baby. Some women and doctors choose to continue ADHD medication during pregnancy and while breastfeeding.

## Taking Care of Yourself and Reducing Stress

Reducing stress during pregnancy is important for both you and your baby. Too much pressure or worry can negatively impact your health and your child's. You may need help with tasks such as managing medications, attending prenatal appointments, and taking necessary vitamins.



## Self-care is critical. Plan to:

- Ask for help from friends, family, or partners.

- Seek support, whether from a therapist, coach, or support group, to develop coping strategies and manage stress.

- Request accommodations at work or home to reduce stress where possible.

## Postpartum Considerations

**Increased Risk of Postpartum Depression**: Women with ADHD are significantly more likely to experience postpartum depression and anxiety—five times more likely than women without ADHD .After childbirth, lack of sleep, emotional overwhelm, and hormone fluctuations can all worsen ADHD symptoms.as well. Discuss options with your doctor regarding breastfeeding and medication, as taking certain medications in small doses might be safe during this time.

By proactively managing your ADHD during pregnancy and the postpartum period, you can take better care of yourself and create a healthier environment for your baby. Don't hesitate to seek help during this time—you will need it!

## Postpartum Depression (PPD)

Postpartum depression can affect women with ADHD more severely than those without it. Depending on the severity of ADHD, rates of PPD among women with ADHD can range from 30% to 80%, compared to 10% to 35% for women without ADHD.

If you think you may be experiencing PPD, it's important to stay aware of your emotions. The overlap of ADHD and PPD can make both conditions worse, so don't ignore any unusual feelings after childbirth.

## Tips for managing ADHD and postpartum depression:

- **Self-awareness:** Regularly check in with yourself your emotional state, energy levels, and daily functioning.

- **Tell your support network:** Inform close friends, family, and healthcare professionals about your ADHD and the potential risk of postpartum depression. Ask them to monitor for changes in your behavior or mood and offer support when needed.

- **Keep regular appointments:** Continue seeing your healthcare provider during and after pregnancy. Discuss any concerns regarding your mental health, especially changes in mood or behavior.

- **Seek professional help:** If you can afford it, consider therapy during this period. It can provide valuable support and guidance as you navigate postpartum challenges.

- **Take breaks and accept help:** If your family offers to babysit, take the opportunity to rest and focus on yourself.

## Signs of Postpartum Depression (PPD):

Symptoms of postpartum depression may include:

- ☐ Persistent sadness or hopelessness
- ☐ Feelings of guilt or irritability
- ☐ Difficulty bonding with your baby
- ☐ Changes in appetite or sleep patterns (insomnia)
- ☐ Thoughts of harming yourself or your baby

## Treatment for Postpartum Depression and ADHD

Women's medication needs often change throughout their lives. If you are taking ADHD medications, work with your healthcare provider to adjust dosages as needed during and after pregnancy. It's important to remember that changes in medication can also impact your mood.

- **For PPD**: Antidepressants, particularly selective serotonin reuptake inhibitors (SSRIs), are commonly prescribed to manage mood symptoms. Many are safe during breastfeeding, but always consult your provider.
- **For ADHD**: Stimulants (like methylphenidate) or non-stimulants (like atomoxetine) may need adjustments. Breastfeeding mothers should be cautious, as stimulants can pass into breast milk.
- **Combined Consideration**: Your healthcare provider will balance both ADHD and PPD medications, aiming to avoid interactions and ensuring optimal treatment for both.

# Perimenopause and Menopausal Transition



Let’s begin with a clear definition.

**Menopause** is the natural biological process that marks the end of a woman’s menstrual cycles and fertility. It is diagnosed after 12 consecutive months without a period. On average, women in the United States reach menopause around age 51, though this can vary.

**Perimenopause** is the transitional phase leading up to menopause, which can last anywhere from a few months to more than a decade.

When we refer to "menopause," we often mean the entire transition, including perimenopause.

## Other causes of menopause:

- **Surgical menopause** occurs when a woman’s ovaries are surgically removed, leading to a sudden drop in estrogen and other hormones.

- **Chemotherapy and radiation therapy** can damage the ovaries, reducing hormone production. This effect may be temporary or permanent depending on the type of treatment.

- **Primary ovarian insufficiency (POI),** also known as premature ovarian failure, occurs when the ovaries stop functioning before age 40. Symptoms include irregular periods, infertility, and menopausal symptoms such as hot flashes and vaginal dryness.

## What Happens During Menopause and Perimenopause?

For women with ADHD, menopause worsens issues related to memory, concentration, attention, and emotional regulation do to declining dopamine and estrogen. Many women who haven't experienced significant ADHD symptoms before may begin to notice them for the first time during menopause. Often, these issues are described as "brain fog."

Menopause also carries an increased risk of depression and anxiety. Symptoms can include:

- **Sleep disruptions,** hot flashes, pain, and daytime fatigue
- **Early morning waking,** hair loss, increased hunger, cravings, and issues with temperature regulation
- **Withdrawal-like symptoms,** as the body adjusts to declining hormone levels

Additionally, menopause can bring changes in appearance, such as weight gain, which may lead to challenges with libido and pain during sex. In a society that often values women based on physical appearance, this can lead to feelings of inadequacy, shame, or a loss of identity.

Hot flashes, night sweats, and other physical changes can also disrupt sleep and make it harder to control emotions, adding stress to an already challenging time.

Compounding these issues are additional stressors common to midlife, such as caring for aging parents, raising children, and managing increased work pressures. For women with ADHD, these life changes can feel particularly overwhelming.

### What We Know

There is a need for more research into hormones, brain function, and hormone levels in women with ADHD. Tailored treatments are also needed to address the unique challenges faced during this stage of life.

Despite the prevalence of **depression and even suicide in women during perimenopause,** many of us are not adequately prepared for this time. Society does not prioritize women-centered care or research, particularly for those with ADHD.

*In middle-aged women, depression rates can be up to 17 times higher than in younger women and men.*

## Perimenopause, Menopause, and ADHD

**Reflection Prompt:**

- **"As you enter or experience perimenopause and menopause, what changes have you noticed in your ADHD symptoms? How can better understanding and tracking your hormonal shifts empower you to advocate for changes in your treatment or lifestyle?"**

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# How are Women with ADHD Helped During Menopause?

Options for Managing Perimenopausal and Menopausal Symptoms:

1. **Lifestyle Changes**:
   - Regular exercise, a balanced diet, stress management techniques (such as mindfulness or relaxation exercises), and adequate sleep can significantly help manage symptoms like hot flashes, mood swings, and fatigue.
2. **Alternative Therapies**:
   - Some women find relief through acupuncture, herbal supplements (like black cohosh or red clover), yoga, and meditation. While these methods can provide symptom relief for some, the scientific evidence supporting their effectiveness varies. It's important to consult with a healthcare provider before using herbal supplements, as they can interact with medications or have side effects.
3. **Hormonal Treatments**:
   - Hormonal imbalances during menopause, such as low levels of adrenal androgens and DHEA (dehydroepiandrosterone), have been linked to depressive symptoms. DHEA supplementation and other hormonal treatments, like estrogen therapy, have shown positive effects in some cases. However, hormone therapy carries potential risks, such as an increased risk of breast cancer or cardiovascular issues, and should always be carefully managed by a healthcare provider.
4. **Medications**:
   - **Antidepressants (SSRIs/SNRIs)**: These are commonly prescribed to treat depression and mood swings associated with menopause. Additionally, they may help reduce the frequency and severity of hot flashes.
   - **Estradiol**: This form of estrogen is often used in hormone replacement therapy (HRT) to alleviate both mood and physical symptoms of menopause, including hot flashes.
   - **Aricept (donepezil)**: While some healthcare providers suggest using Aricept off-label to address memory and cognitive issues during menopause, its effectiveness in this context is not well-supported by research and is not widely used.

- **SAMe (S-adenosylmethionine)**: This natural compound is sometimes used as an alternative for people who cannot take antidepressants. However, its effectiveness in treating menopausal depression varies, and it should only be used under medical supervision.

5. **ADHD Stimulant Medications**:
   - Hormonal fluctuations during perimenopause and menopause can impact the metabolism of ADHD medications. Some women may require adjustments to their stimulant dosages or medication types as estrogen and progesterone levels change. It's crucial to consult with your doctor to ensure your ADHD symptoms are managed effectively during this time.

Changes to ADHD stimulant medications may also be necessary as your hormone levels fluctuate.

## How to Help Yourself During This Transition

As women with ADHD navigate menopause, the skills of self-awareness, self-accommodation, self-care, self-advocacy, and self-compassion are crucial.

- **Self-awareness**: Pay attention to your mood, concentration, memory, and other mental and physical states. Ask yourself what you need and recognize when you're feeling stressed or overwhelmed. It's important to acknowledge your emotions and know when to prioritize rest over additional responsibilities.

### Caring for Mood: The HALT Technique (Hungry, Angry, Lonely, Tired)

Managing ADHD and hormonal fluctuations can be overwhelming, especially when basic needs are neglected. The HALT technique is a simple tool that encourages you to stop and check in with your body and emotions when you're feeling out of balance. Before reacting to stressful situations or feeling overwhelmed, ask yourself:

- **Am I Hungry?**
  Low blood sugar can lead to irritability, difficulty focusing, and emotional volatility.

- **Am I Angry?**
  Strong emotions like anger can cloud your judgment and make it harder to manage ADHD symptoms. Identify if something has triggered frustration or resentment.

- **Am I Lonely?**
  Feelings of loneliness or isolation can exacerbate emotional dysregulation. Reaching out to a friend or seeking support might help.

- **Am I Tired?**
  Fatigue can significantly impair your ability to focus, regulate emotions, and manage your ADHD. Rest or sleep may be the most important action to take.

By checking in with yourself using HALT, you can address unmet needs before they lead to emotional escalation.

# The Flourish Model ADHD and Menopause

- **Self-advocacy**: Speak up for yourself, especially with healthcare professionals who may dismiss hormone-related symptoms. Keeping track of your symptoms and communicating your needs clearly is essential in receiving proper care.

- **Self-compassion**: Be kind to yourself during times of change. Regularly check in with your feelings by asking, “How am I feeling?” “What do I need right now?” and “What can I do to support myself?” Embrace these changes with kindness and understanding.

- **Self-accommodation**: Adjust your environment or routines to reduce memory and sensory overload, which can be challenging during menopause. Offload tasks or reduce commitments to help ease the burden.

- **Self-care**: Rest, sleep, and engaging in nurturing activities are key components in managing the menopausal transition. By focusing on self-awareness, self-advocacy, self-compassion, and self-care, you can navigate menopause more smoothly.
- Self Awareness

Just be aware that your menopausal symptoms may impact your emotional regulation, making things feel harder for you during this time. Hormonal fluctuations can intensify challenges with mood swings, irritability, or feeling overwhelmed, which can further affect ADHD symptoms. Recognizing this connection can help you be more compassionate with yourself and seek adjustments in your self-care or treatment to manage these changes effectively.

**Self Advocacy Reflection Prompt:**

- **Think about your relationship with your healthcare providers. How well do they understand the connection between ADHD and hormonal changes? What are the key points you'd like to address in your next appointment, and how can you ensure your concerns are heard?**

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# Addtional Issues Common to Menopausal Women

**Vaginal Estrogen Therapy**:

For women experiencing vaginal dryness, discomfort, or urinary symptoms due to menopause, low-dose vaginal estrogen (available in creams, tablets, or rings) can be effective. This localized treatment has fewer risks than systemic hormone therapy and directly addresses issues related to vaginal atrophy.

**Non-Hormonal Prescription Options**:

For women who cannot take hormones, non-hormonal prescription options, such as gabapentin or clonidine, may be prescribed to alleviate hot flashes and night sweats. These are particularly useful for women with a history of breast cancer or other contraindications for hormone therapy.

**Pelvic Floor Exercises**:

Menopause can weaken the pelvic floor muscles, leading to urinary incontinence. Practicing pelvic floor exercises, such as Kegels, can help maintain muscle strength and prevent or reduce incontinence symptoms

**Sleep Hygiene**:

- Insomnia and sleep disturbances are common during menopause. Practicing good sleep hygiene, such as establishing a regular sleep schedule, creating a cool and dark sleeping environment, and avoiding screens before bed, can help improve sleep quality. In some cases, over-the-counter or prescription sleep aids may be considered. SLeep is especially important for adhd women.

# Extra Practices and Reflections

**Reflection Prompt:**

Aging can bring new challenges as ADHD and hormonal fluctuations interact. Take a moment to consider how society's messages about aging affect you. What personal strengths can you focus on to redefine aging as a positive and empowering experience?

**Reflection Prompt:**

How often do you check in with your basic needs (HALT)? Which area—hunger, anger, loneliness, or tiredness—do you tend to neglect, and how can you start prioritizing it?

**Reflection Prompt:**

Based on everything you've learned, create a simple, personalized action plan for managing hormonal fluctuations and ADHD symptoms. What steps will you take to track your symptoms, communicate with healthcare providers, practice self-compassion, and manage self-care?

**Reflection Prompt:**

How do you speak to yourself during moments of emotional overwhelm, particularly when ADHD and hormones are working against you? Take a moment to think about how you can reframe negative self-talk into compassionate encouragement. What would you say to a friend going through a similar situation?

# Group Exercises: Menopause and Perimenopause

During menopause and perimenopause, many women report feeling unsupported. In fact, nearly a third of women say they don't feel supported by anyone. Let's reflect on your own experiences.

**Group Discussion Questions:**

- [ ] What have you learned about menopause and perimenopause?

Who first talked to you about it? Did you learn about it in school? From your mother, friends, doctor, or books?

- [ ] Do you feel that menopause and perimenopause are discussed openly within your family, among friends, or in your workplace?

- [ ] Could better preparation make this transition easier for you?

- [ ] Do you think your doctor or healthcare provider understands how hormonal changes during menopause affect ADHD symptoms and medication needs?

- [ ] If not, do you feel comfortable discussing your concerns or sharing what you've learned with your doctor?

- [ ] Studies show that women who live in cultures where aging women are more highly valued tend to have an easier time with menopause. How do you think our culture treats women as they age?

**Ideal Menopause Talk**

As a woman ages, her eggs decrease in number and quality, which affects hormone production, including estrogen and progesterone. Symptoms of menopause can include changes in periods, hot flashes, vaginal dryness, mood swings, difficulty sleeping, and memory or concentration problems, often described as "brain fog."

Brain fog during menopause is typically temporary and often lifts with time, but these symptoms can last for years. For women with ADHD, menopause can worsen their symptoms.

**Available treatments** for menopause include:

- **Hormone Replacement Therapy (HRT)**: Safe for most women who begin before age 60. Women with a uterus may also need to take progesterone or a progesterone-like hormone to lower cancer risks.
- **Antidepressants and hormonal treatments**: These are also available options, and adjustments to ADHD stimulant medications may be necessary.

It’s important to know that there are treatments that can help. If you’re feeling unwell, don’t give up. Be cautious of untested products that may target menopausal women and do more harm than good.

You deserve support to navigate this transition. Don’t keep your experiences a secret—share what’s happening with those you trust.

Self-care, accommodations, self-compassion, and self-advocacy are crucial. Build a support system, educate yourself, and break the stigma by talking openly. Don’t be afraid to adjust your routine or workload to better manage symptoms. Be kind and patient with yourself—this journey is unique to you.

# Group Exercises: Periods 101

Let's take a moment to think about the messages you received about menstruation and how it was discussed growing up:

**Reflect on the messages about menstruation:**

- ☐ Were you encouraged to rest and care for yourself when you felt sick or uncomfortable?
- ☐ Were you informed about how hormones could impact your mood and emotions?
- ☐ Were there any stigmas or negative messages associated with periods in your upbringing?

**Think about your healthcare experiences:**

- ☐ Has your doctor ever discussed how your menstrual cycle might affect your ADHD symptoms?
- ☐ If yes, was the information helpful, and did they offer guidance on managing these fluctuations?
- ☐ If no, do you feel this is an important topic to bring up in future conversations with your doctor?

**For mothers with ADHD daughters:**

- ☐ Have you discussed how menstruation may impact her ADHD symptoms?
- ☐ What resources or information have you provided to help her navigate this part of her life?

**Ideal Period Talk**

Every month, you experience your period, which indicates that you can potentially have a baby. The menstrual cycle has three phases: the bleeding phase, the follicular phase, and the luteal phase.

During the bleeding phase (which lasts 3-7 days), many people feel tired and uncomfortable. It's essential to listen to your body and take breaks when needed. Rest, take medication if necessary, and allow yourself time to heal.

The follicular phase (days 1-14) is when you may feel more energetic and focused. This is a great time for activities that require concentration, like working on a project or engaging in sports.

**Ovulation** happens around day 14, when a mature egg is released from the ovary. During the luteal phase (between ovulation and menstruation), many people feel tired again. It’s important to care for yourself during this phase by indulging in relaxing activities, like taking a bath or simplifying tasks.

Understanding your menstrual cycle helps you listen to your body and respond appropriately. When you’re tired, rest. When you have energy, use it productively. Prioritize your well-being and be kind to yourself.

**Key Takeaways for Menstrual Health**

As you navigate life with ADHD, it’s essential to:

- **Respect your body’s signals:** Take breaks when you need them and adjust your activities based on your energy levels.

- **Discuss your needs openly:** Whether with healthcare professionals or loved ones, communicate the effects of hormonal fluctuations on your ADHD symptoms.

- **Prioritize self-care:** Use the follicular phase for more demanding tasks and the luteal phase for rest and relaxation. Knowing your cycle can help you plan accordingly.

- **Empower the next generation:** If you have daughters, educate them about how their menstrual cycles can influence their ADHD symptoms and support them in managing it.