

TOTM

Perimenopause At Work

Let's talk about perimenopause and break the stigma. Created with support from The Natural Balance.



Perimenopause vs. Menopause: What's the difference?

Perimenopause

Perimenopause refers to the transitional phase leading up to menopause. It typically begins several years before menopause as the body gradually starts producing less oestrogen. During perimenopause, individuals may experience symptoms such as irregular periods, hot flashes, mood swings, sleep disturbances, and changes in libido, as hormone levels fluctuate.

Menopause

Menopause is the point in time when individuals have not had a menstrual period for 12 consecutive months. During this stage, the ovaries stop releasing eggs and producing oestrogen, signaling the end of the reproductive years.

How do hormone levels change during *perimenopause*, and how does this affect your health and mood?

During perimenopause oestrogen levels fluctuate quite dramatically and can be extremely unpredictable. Production of a hormone called progesterone also declines, which can disrupt ovulation and make cycles increasingly irregular. At the start of perimenopause this shift in hormones can make cycles more frequent and heavier. This will reduce as oestrogen levels decline over time and cycles become spaced out and lighter. Follicle stimulating hormone will also typically rise in the body, as the ovaries attempt to stimulate more eggs.



The most common *perimenopause* symptoms

Bone Density

Decreasing oestrogen levels can affect bone density, increasing the risk of osteoporosis over time.

Irregular Menstrual Cycles

Periods may become longer, shorter, heavier, or lighter.

Sleep Disturbances

Hormonal changes can disrupt sleep patterns, leading to insomnia or night sweats.

Hot Flashes & Night Sweats

Fluctuating oestrogen levels, many cause sudden feelings of heat, often accompanied by sweating.

Mood Swings

Fluctuating hormone levels can lead to irritability, anxiety, and mood swings.

Vaginal Dryness

Lower oestrogen can lead to vaginal dryness and discomfort during intercourse.

Libido Changes

Some may notice a decrease in sexual desire, while others may experience heightened sensitivity.

Depression & Anxiety

Some may experience increased feelings of anxiety or depression during this phase.

Cognitive Changes

Memory lapses, difficulty concentrating, and "brain fog" are common complaints linked to hormonal fluctuations.

Heart Health

Changes in hormone levels can also influence cardiovascular health, potentially increasing heart disease risk.

Weight Changes

Metabolism may slow, and which may lead to may experience weight changes, particularly around the abdomen.

Debunking Common Myths



MYTH

Perimenopause only has physical symptoms

FACT

Perimenopause can significantly impact mental health, with many women experiencing mood swings, anxiety, or depression. Addressing emotional wellbeing is just as important as managing physical symptoms.



MYTH

You can't get pregnant in perimenopause

FACT

Whilst your reproductive capacity does decline with age, it is still possible to fall pregnant if you are ovulating.

Debunking Common Myths



MYTH

Perimenopause symptoms are the same for everyone

FACT

Everyone experiences perimenopause differently and not all symptoms will manifest in the same way. Some will have little to no symptoms and others will go through a significant change.



MYTH

Perimenopause means the end of your sex life

FACT

A drop in testosterone and vaginal dryness can mean the sex drive can take a dip, but this doesn't happen for everyone.

Are there any dietary changes that can be made that make a difference during *perimenopause*?

Dietary changes can make a significant difference to symptoms and can be an effective way of managing these. It's recommended to focus on:

Phytoestrogens – These plant-based compounds have a similar structure to oestrogen and can help with overall hormone balance. Sources: Soy products (tofu, tempeh, edamame), flaxseeds, lentils, chickpeas, and whole grains.

Increase protein consumption – Protein keeps you feeling fuller for longer so it can help maintain energy levels and help with weight management as the metabolism slows down in this life stage.

Increase calcium & vitamin D intake – As oestrogen declines calcium will leech from our bones, increasing the risk of osteoporosis and arthritis. Good sources include dairy products (yoghurt, cheese, milk), leafy greens (kale, broccoli), fortified plant-based milks, and fatty fish. Also, ensure adequate sun exposure for vitamin D.

Reduce inflammatory foods – Added sugars, ultra-processed foods, excessive caffeine and alcohol consumption can all exacerbate symptoms in perimenopause. It can also drive inflammation in the body and have detrimental effects on blood sugar control.

Opt for more anti-inflammatory foods – Such as oily fish, nuts, seeds, olive oil etc. These can help to lower inflammation and protect brain function and cognition.

Optimise gut health – Having a healthy gut will help with nutrient absorption, energy levels, hormone balance and mindset. You can improve digestive function by increasing the diversity of foods, eating the rainbow via fresh fruits and vegetables, increasing fibre intake and including pre & probiotic foods.

Managing symptoms of *perimenopause*:

Managing the common symptoms of perimenopause can involve a combination of lifestyle changes, dietary adjustments, and, in some cases, medical interventions.

Here are a few tips to help with specific symptoms:



Hot Flashes and Night Sweats

Dress in Layers: Wear lightweight, breathable fabrics that can be easily removed.

Cool Your Environment: Use fans, air conditioning, or cool baths/showers to help manage body temperature.

Limit Triggers: Identify and reduce intake of triggers such as spicy foods, caffeine, and alcohol.

Irregular Periods

Track Your Cycle: Keep a journal or use an app to monitor your menstrual cycle, which can help you anticipate changes.

Manage Stress: Stress can exacerbate irregular periods, so practice stress-reducing techniques like yoga, meditation, or deep breathing exercises.

Mood Swings & Anxiety

Exercise Regularly: Physical activity can boost mood and reduce anxiety. Aim for at least 30 minutes of moderate exercise most days.

Mindfulness and Relaxation Techniques: Practice mindfulness, meditation, or yoga to help manage stress and improve emotional wellbeing.

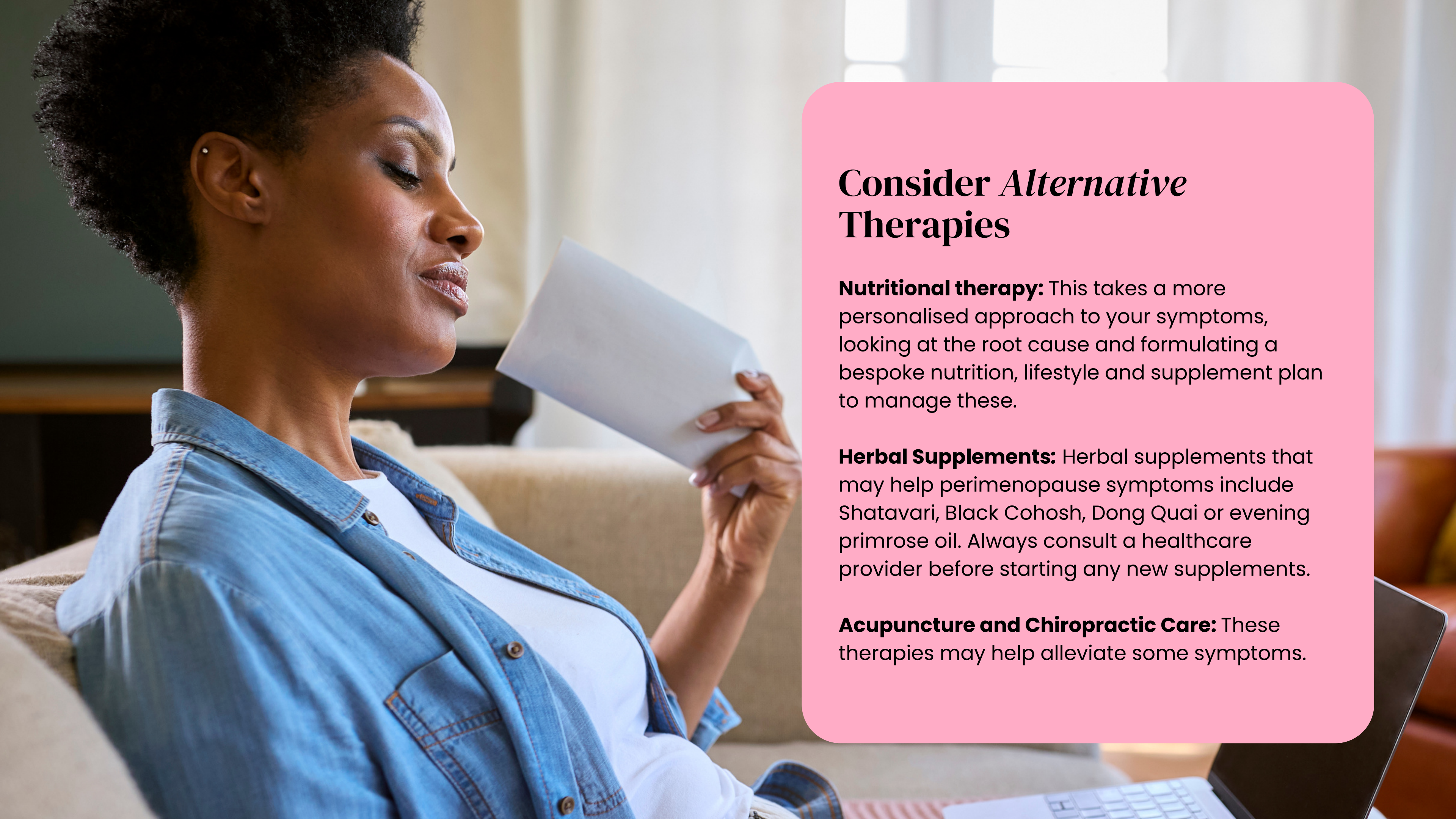
Seek Support: Talk to friends, family, or a therapist about your feelings. Support groups can also be beneficial.

Sleep Disturbances

Establish a Sleep Routine: Go to bed and wake up at the same time each day to regulate your body's internal clock.

Create a Comfortable Sleep Environment: Keep your bedroom cool, dark, and quiet, and consider using blackout curtains or white noise machines.

Limit Screen Time Before Bed: Reduce exposure to screens in the hour before sleep to improve sleep quality.



Consider *Alternative Therapies*

Nutritional therapy: This takes a more personalised approach to your symptoms, looking at the root cause and formulating a bespoke nutrition, lifestyle and supplement plan to manage these.

Herbal Supplements: Herbal supplements that may help perimenopause symptoms include Shatavari, Black Cohosh, Dong Quai or evening primrose oil. Always consult a healthcare provider before starting any new supplements.

Acupuncture and Chiropractic Care: These therapies may help alleviate some symptoms.

Supporting menopause and perimenopause *in the workplace*

Create an open dialogue: Encourage conversations about menopause to reduce stigma and create a supportive environment. Some employees experiencing menopause may see this as an area they do not feel comfortable addressing with their employers, so they suffer in silence. By starting the conversation, this barrier can be removed and staff can feel valued and listened to.

Flexible work options: Offer flexible hours or remote work to accommodate symptoms like fatigue, mood changes, or sleep disruption.

Adjust workspaces: Provide temperature control options, like fans or cooler environments, to help manage hot flashes.



Training and awareness: Educate all managers and HR about menopause so they can offer informed, compassionate support.

Access to resources: Offer wellness programs, access to healthcare professionals, or employee assistance programs to support mental and physical wellbeing. Nutrition, diet and lifestyle can play a huge role in managing symptoms so the more resources made available, the better.

Review policies: Ensure health and wellness policies consider the specific needs of employees going through perimenopause, such as the Menopause Workplace Pledge.

Offer period care products: Perimenopause can lead to a heavy menstrual bleed, therefore, free tampons and pads can help to reduce the stress of managing a heavy flow in the workplace.





With special thanks...

This guide was created with the assistance of our collaborative partners, The Natural Balance, with special thanks to their fertility and hormone nutritionist, Gail Madalena.

The Natural Balance consists of a network of nutritional therapists who embrace a holistic approach to health and wellness.

MEET GAIL

Fertility, Pregnancy & Hormone Nutritionist.

Gail Madalena is a registered nutritional therapist specialising in fertility, pregnancy and women's health. Her expertise lies in hormonal imbalances, such as irregular cycles, debilitating PMS, PCOS, endometriosis, thyroid issues and sub-optimal fertility.

Her goal is to reduce hormonal side effects and symptoms by addressing the root cause of the issue.