

Perimenopause Symptoms You Can't Ignore

Plus 5 Healthy Ways to Relieve Your Symptoms

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Introduction

Perimenopause can feel like an overwhelming and stressful ordeal. It's only natural that you have a lot of questions, and hope for finding relief.

For many women, perimenopause can trigger feelings of anxiety and depression. You might feel saddened by the declining function of your reproductive system and the passage of time. While those feelings are real, it's important to understand that the emotions you're feeling are likely amplified by perimenopause itself.

Plus, there are all of those other unpleasant symptoms, and they are no fun at all.

You want to understand these symptoms and learn how to cope with them so they won't control your life. Well, you're in luck – that's exactly what this guide will help you do.

The purpose of this guide is to answer all of your questions about perimenopause and to calm any fears you might have about this pivotal stage that happens in every woman's life.

One of the best treatment options available is to naturally treat your symptoms in a healthy, balanced way. That allows you to enjoy other health benefits and to make the most out of so many other aspects of your life.

Take heart – this isn't the end... It's just the beginning. It's the start of a whole new you. What kind of healthy and vibrant woman you become is entirely within your control.

And you are beautiful... no matter what. Never forget that.

To your health and wellness,

Jeffrey Horacek, MD



The Startling FACTS About Perimenopause

Perimenopause refers to the time period that begins when the ovaries begin to decline in function. It continues until *menopause*, which is defined as the total cessation of menstrual flow for an entire year.

Many women think of perimenopause as a "change of life" or "transition period." It usually begins when you're in your 40s, but it may start as early as your late 30s. During this time, you may exhibit a number of symptoms that are largely due to abnormal hormonal fluctuations.

Perimenopause: A Very Real Condition

Up until not long ago, conventional medical practitioners have had little to offer women suffering from symptoms of hormonal change. Until a woman was deemed to be officially in menopause and could be prescribed synthetic hormone therapy, she was often told that her pre-menopause symptoms were all in her head.

Even today, women struggling with hormonal imbalance are frequently sent home with a token prescription for antidepressants, rather than being offered real solutions for a very real condition.

In integrative medical circles, there has long been an understanding that a transitional period of time exists before menopause, which is different for each and every woman (including you). During this transition period, hormones can wildly fluctuate and may cause serious distress. Thankfully, conventional medicine has finally caught up and we now have an official term for this passage in medical textbooks: *perimenopause*.

14 Facts About Perimenopause

Before you move forward in seeking relief for your perimenopause symptoms, it's important to acknowledge a number of facts about this stage in your life.

- ❖ The average length of perimenopause is 4 years, lasting as little as 4 months to as long as 10 years in some women.
- ❖ On average, women enter menopause from perimenopause around the age of 51.
- ❖ 8% of all women enter menopause from perimenopause before the age of 40.
- ❖ 5% of all women don't fully transition from perimenopause to menopause (they continue menstruation at least regularly) until the age of 60.



- ❖ Women who smoke tend to go through perimenopause and menopause earlier than nonsmokers.
- ❖ Having a hysterectomy can cause an early onset of perimenopause/menopause, as can being treated for cancer.
- ❖ 75% of women experience hot flashes and night sweats at some point during menopause.
- ❖ 20% of those women have severe hot flashes at times.
- ❖ 30% of women experience some sort of sleep disturbances during perimenopause and menopause.
- ❖ Women who are perimenopausal may still become pregnant, since there is on average a 5- to 10-year period between the beginning of a decline in ovarian function and the complete cessation of menstruation.
- ❖ Perimenopause is a time period associated with a high risk of mood disorders, including anxiety, depression and insomnia.
- ❖ Not all women experience all the symptoms of perimenopause to the same degree, and symptoms vary among women.
- ❖ About 55% of all women going through menopause suffer silently, doing nothing at all to treat their symptoms.
- ❖ Treatment of perimenopausal symptoms can include medications, hormone therapy and lifestyle changes, such as diet, exercise and quitting smoking.

Fortunately there are a number of treatments that can help lower the risks that are linked with these conditions. And that's great news for you. In the next section, you'll learn all about the most common ways to seek relief from your perimenopausal symptoms.



13 Signs and Symptoms to Watch For

Symptoms of perimenopause can begin as early as 10 to 15 years before menses completely stop. Women in their late 30's, 40's and early 50's may transition in and out of a perimenopausal state many times before they finally enter menopause.

If you are currently experiencing symptoms such as irregular periods, heavy bleeding, hot flashes, sleep disruption, headaches and weight gain – or any other extreme emotional distress, you may be relieved to know that these are all common signs of perimenopause.

Common Signs and Symptoms

You may experience symptoms different from other women. But the signs and symptoms you do notice are likely to include a number of the following:



1. Irregular periods and menstrual changes.

Periods tend to occur every two to four months on average at first, and then further and further apart. At times, your periods can also get heavier or lighter.

2. Hot flashes and night sweats.

When you get the feeling of heat suddenly starting to spread throughout the body, often causing sweating and redness, you're experiencing a hot flash. "Hot flush" is the term given to the redness that's caused by an increase in body temperature. These perimenopause symptoms are caused by hormonal changes mostly affecting the hypothalamus, which controls body temperature.





3. Insomnia and decline in sleep quality.

Many women start to have trouble getting a good night's sleep. You may wake up sweaty and hot at times. You also may have trouble falling asleep.

4. Weight gain.

As your metabolism slows down, muscle mass is reduced and bones start to become less dense. As a result, it's common to gain some weight (especially in the stomach). Exercise and a healthy diet are more important during this time of your life than ever.



5. Changes in libido.

A decrease in estrogen causes blood flow to be reduced to the genital area. Throughout the menopausal years, the labia becomes smaller, and the muscle tissue of the clitoris starts to shrink and become less sensitive. There are also many changes taking place in the uterus, ovaries and cervix (becoming smaller and narrower). All of this can lead to a decrease in your sex drive.

6. Vaginal changes and dryness.

The vagina shortens and loses elasticity. Vaginal dryness and thinness can come along with higher susceptibility to urinary tract infections caused by vaginal fluid loss and less lubrication to move bacteria out.





7. Thinning hair and dry skin.

You might notice your skin starting to show signs of aging, such as more wrinkles, dark spots and dryness. You also may have thinning hair.

8. Changes in breast composition.

Your breasts might start to become smaller and less dense, with more fatty tissue while losing some of their volume (i.e., becoming “saggier”).



9. Mood swings and irritability.

This can include feeling like you're always tired, increased anxiety, fatigue or symptoms of depression. Perimenopausal women have been found to have higher than normal levels of MAO-A, the enzyme that breaks down serotonin, norepinephrine and dopamine. MAO-A is the same enzyme linked to major depressive disorder and postpartum depression.

10. Heart palpitations.

This is caused by changes to the blood vessels, heart and autonomic nervous system. Palpitations might occur during hot flashes or with anxiety, muscle spasms and headaches.





11. Frequent headaches or migraines.

Reduced blood flow, lack of sleep, anxiety and other problems can contribute to frequent painful headaches.

12. Lack of concentration.

Estrogen and testosterone play a role in memory, motivation and mood. It's common to start noticing a loss of concentration, forgetfulness, drowsiness and an increased reaction to stress. These perimenopause symptoms can also be worsened due to poor sleep and increased anxiety (especially if you don't eat a nourishing diet).



13. Greater risk for other complications and diseases.

Studies show that during menopause and afterward, a woman's risk for heart and blood vessel (cardiovascular) diseases, as well as osteoporosis, increases. This is due to a decline in estrogen levels, which changes fat accumulation and also contributes to loss of bone density, weak bones and increased risk of fractures.



The good news is that there are natural, healthy things you can do to improve (or even eliminate) every one of these symptoms.



5 Ways to Relieve Perimenopause Symptoms

In our fast-food culture, most women tend to be operating with an internal hormonal balance tipped toward the estrogen side of the scale. This tilt is often the result of a diet high in simple carbs and low in quality protein, a lack of vital nutrients and good fats, and chronic exposure to environmental toxins and artificial hormones, such as endocrine disruptors.

Prolonged emotional and physical stress, defined as anything that works against your state of balance, will also tip the hormonal applecart. In today's fast-paced, disconnected, eat-and-run world, it is no surprise that younger and younger women are experiencing symptoms of hormonal imbalance and perimenopause.

With that in mind, as long as you follow these five crucial steps, you can count on some – perhaps complete – perimenopausal relief.



1. Maintain a healthy diet and optimize the foods you eat.

The most effective medicine that exists is in the food that you eat. A nourishing, unprocessed diet is key for boosting your intake of essential nutrients, helping your body adjust to changing hormones, managing your weight and reducing your intake of empty calories.

Foods that are most helpful during perimenopause and menopause include organic fruits and veggies, high-fiber foods like nuts and seeds, omega-3 foods, probiotics, clean and lean proteins like fish or grass-fed meat, healthy fats such as olive and coconut oil, and foods that supply natural phytoestrogens, including flax and fermented soy.

You can optimize your nutrition by making sure that you consume enough vitamins, minerals and essential nutrients. There are natural supplements you can add to your daily regimen to help on this front.



2. Use herbal remedies to supplement your own hormones.



Food is a form of medicine and there is incredible strength in plants and herbal remedies that have been known for centuries to prevent perimenopausal symptoms. It's amazing that many plants and herbs can adapt to the needs of your body. They can do this because they share various molecular features with our own hormones, allowing them to actually support our hormone production, make it slower, or even mimic what our own hormones do depending on your own body's unique needs.

Herbs and supplements that can help mitigate certain symptoms of perimenopause (such as anxiety, fatigue, hot flashes and sleep-related problems) include omega-3 fatty acids, adaptogen herbs such as maca or American ginseng, black cohosh, red clover, raspberry leaf, vitex and St. John's wort.

3. Exercise regularly to reduce fat and rebalance your hormone ratios.

Most women tell us that they feel as if they're steadily gaining weight during perimenopause, especially around their stomachs and abdomen. This can be particularly frustrating because the weight sticks to unusual places and their scales refuse to budge.



One of the reasons that this weight gain is so common is because fluctuating estrogen levels tend to cause your body to grab onto fat. On top of this, fat actually produces estrogen, which can create even more fat. It can become a vicious cycle.

Keeping up with an exercise routine that you like – one that consists of a mix of aerobic and strength-training exercises – at least three or more times per week for a minimum of 30 minutes can result in improvements in body weight, sleep quality, insomnia or depression symptoms, bone density, muscle mass, and inflammation. Even if you haven't been active in the past, it's never too late to start getting the benefits of exercise.

Remember to pick something you like, such as walking, dancing, yoga, swimming, or biking - your enjoyment is key to sticking with it!





4. Get a proper amount of sleep every night.

Sleep is important for a great number of bodily functions. A healthy amount of sleep is essential for restoring energy, balancing hormones, keeping cortisol levels under control, and reducing anxiety or depression.

You should aim for seven to nine hours a night during perimenopause and menopause, even if you've functioned well before on less sleep.

If you have trouble sleeping (as many perimenopausal women do), try using hormone-balancing essential oils such as lavender, reading or writing in a journal, taking magnesium supplements, using Epsom salts in a warm bath prior to bed, turning down the temperature in your room, and practicing mind-body practices such as yoga and meditation.

5. Reduce your stress through mind-body practices.

Because sleep problems, anxiety, fatigue and depression tend to climb during the transition into menopause, it's important to manage stress as best you can.

Stress can be the culprit behind additional imbalances in hormones and neurotransmitters that affect mood as well as mental function, thyroid function, digestive function, and especially blood sugar imbalances. Stress has also been linked to symptoms such as hot flashes and low libido.



When it comes to lowering stress, different things work for different people. There are natural stress relievers, like aerobic exercising (walking, jogging, dancing and swimming), spending time outdoors, meditation or prayer, seeking social support, joining a helpful cause or volunteering, reading something inspirational and uplifting, and doing something creative.

You might also try taking detox baths with Epsom salts, adaptive exercises (barre, yoga, pilates and weight-training), reading spiritual growth books, and fostering good relationships. These are all proven stress relievers.

Reclaim Your Life, and Your Health



When women make natural adjustments to their lifestyles, not only do they feel much better about themselves, but they also feel in control of their health. It's time for you to feel inspired and take control over your perimenopause symptoms.

Start to make these small yet very important changes, as they can create some remarkable results. Add a morning veggie/fruit smoothie and start your day with a morning ritual.

Ensure that you remember to breathe each day (put up signs to remind yourself if needed) and make a commitment to take helpful herbal supplements every day.

With a little bit of time and (and perhaps a little bit of outside help from perimenopausal experts), you'll discover the combination of natural steps that works to relieve your perimenopause symptoms!

Healthy Connections: Helping You Start Your Perimenopause Relief Today

If you're ready to begin a natural therapeutic way to address your perimenopause symptoms, Healthy Connections is an excellent place to start. We believe in guiding you through all five of the necessary steps toward relief to help correct the symptoms you are experiencing.

We have a strong reputation.

We have an excellent reputation in treating (and in some cases, eliminating) perimenopause symptoms. We run a cutting-edge center within our Functional Medicine practice.

We know women's health.

We have a long history of understanding the unique health needs of women. By taking your whole body into account, we're able to pinpoint and treat the discomfort caused by perimenopause as naturally as possible.

Our on-staff specialists are experts in perimenopause.

We are best qualified to understand your particular perimenopausal symptoms and needs. At Healthy Connections, Dr. Horacek is Board Certified in Internal Medicine and is a Certified Functional Medicine Provider through IFM (Institute for Functional Medicine), the leading functional medicine organization in the world. You can rest assured that we know how to take care of you and your needs.

We consider your medical history.

We care about your health and we'll work collaboratively to get you the best possible results. This is important to you, of course, but it's equally important to us to maintain our exemplary reputation. Not every place will review and consider your unique medical history. We will do our best to ensure you're able to get the most targeted natural treatment for your perimenopause symptoms.

We offer ongoing support.

You can count on our team to continue to work with you to help you balance your nutritional needs with the recommendations for minimizing your perimenopause symptoms. With this level of ongoing support, you'll progress faster and more quickly achieve a thriving life. Your perimenopause will eventually feel like a distant memory.

If you're ready to hop on a no-obligation call to find out what we can do to help you treat your perimenopause symptoms, call us at 541-716-5786 for a free Discovery Call!



Your Next Steps

Now you've learned everything you need to know about finding relief for your perimenopausal symptoms.

Conventional approaches to treating perimenopause traditionally involve prescribing medication and hormone replacement. Neither of these options come without strings and risks.

But all-natural perimenopause therapy is among the quickest, least invasive and most effective treatment options available today. Treating the root cause of your symptoms is less invasive and extremely advantageous to your overall health.

Schedule a free, no-obligation Discovery Call with Healthy Connections to learn exactly what we can do to alleviate your perimenopause symptoms.

Put your fears to rest – treatment is possible. Call now to discover the ways we can work with you to keep your perimenopause in check and maximize your well-being.

Remember – your health is worth it, *and so are you!*

We look forward to helping you.

Jeff Horacek, MD, IFMCP
Board Certified Internal Medicine
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About The Doctor

For over 20 years, Dr. Jeff Horacek has spent each day helping people transform their health. Board certified in Internal Medicine in 1995 after graduating with honors from the U. of Oklahoma Medical School, he served as Chief Resident at Providence Portland from 1995-96.

For Dr. Horacek, medicine is part of his heritage. His grandfather was a respected family practice doctor in rural Nebraska; his mother was a beloved RN in rural Oklahoma. Through them, he learned that the “healthy connection” between doctor and patient is the foundation for all healthcare.



After attending the Applying Functional Medicine to Clinical Practice (AFMCP) conference in early 2015, Dr. Horacek found his passion. The centerpiece of Functional Medicine is the “whole person approach” of treating patients who have complicated, unrelenting chronic illnesses. Reinvigorated by his new-found passion, Dr. Horacek began implementing the functional medicine approach in his practice.

After launching two daughters to the University of Oregon, Dr. Horacek relocated with his family from Portland to beautiful Hood River in 2016, returning to small-town life with all its community benefits and connections. Here, he enjoys time in nature and loves the abundant recreational options of The Gorge.

The following year, in 2017, he founded our clinic, Healthy Connections Hood River, along with his wife, Heather. Healthy Connections serves the Columbia Gorge and Portland Metro communities. We also serve clients via our online courses and workshops from anywhere in the world!

Dr. Horacek believes the blend of traditional and functional medicine - in a team approach with lifestyle education and support - provides the best outcomes for his patients. We support participatory care where the patient is an instrumental partner in returning their body back towards health. He implements the latest in scientific and medical breakthroughs to advance the healing of his patients, with individualized care for each one. Our unique approach to diagnosing and treating diseases and disorders recognizes that lasting health depends on resolution of the root causes of your dis-ease.

Dr. Horacek is the co-founder and leader of the non-profit board of Mindful Medicine PDX, an organization providing mindfulness training and weekend workshops for healthcare providers. He also served on the board of Living Yoga which helps people overcome personal challenges through mind-body practices.

In December of 2020, after months of intense preparation and study, Dr. Horacek became an Institute for Functional Medicine Certified Practitioner (IFMCP). We are proud of this accomplishment!

