

Hormones and ADHD



Hormones

The medical profession in the United States hasn't properly researched and understood the unique needs of women. This has led to inadequate care, insufficient support, and much misinformation. As an Adhd woman, you may need to advocate for and educate yourself. You may need to take it upon yourself to understand the impact of your hormones on your ADHD symptoms and communicate that to others, including your doctor.

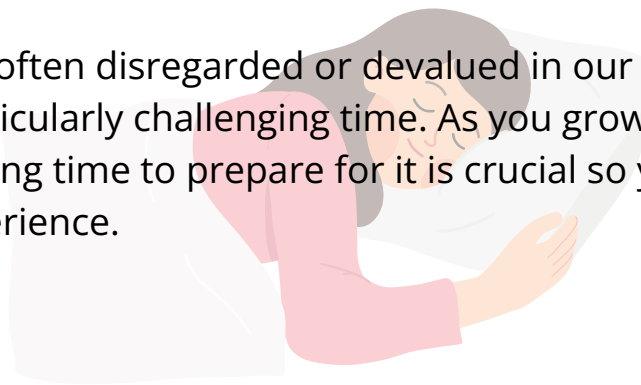
Women have been fed false messages about our bodies and the changes we undergo.

As a young girl, you may have been taught that your period is something to hide and shouldn't interfere with your daily activities. This mindset can lead to a disconnection from your body and its natural processes. We should have been taught to rest when we feel pain and care for ourselves.

Women are frequently subject to unrealistic expectations and pressures during pregnancy and postpartum. Experiencing postpartum depression can be especially difficult due to the glorification of motherhood on social media and in the media, which perpetuates false representations of reality.

Perimenopause and menopause are often overlooked and misunderstood stages of a woman's life. You may not have been educated about the physical and emotional changes during these times, making it more challenging to navigate them with confidence and self-compassion.

Aging women are often disregarded or devalued in our society, making menopause a particularly challenging time. As you grow older, knowing what to expect and having time to prepare for it is crucial so you don't feel so alone in your experience.



Hormones

This module is about:

- How to recognize the relationship between your ADHD symptoms and hormonal fluctuations.
- Understanding that your medication needs may change throughout your life as your hormones fluctuate.
- Practicing self-accommodation to better adapt to hormonal changes that impact your emotions and executive functions.
- Prioritizing self-care and self-compassion to nurture your well-being during times of hormonal fluctuations.
- Advocating for yourself to ensure your unique needs are met and understood by others.
- Developing self-awareness to become more in tune with your body and its natural processes.
- Embracing and acknowledging your body's natural processes can help you navigate life with greater understanding and resilience as an ADHD woman.

These things are not easy when we have been taught to hate our bodies and not care for them.

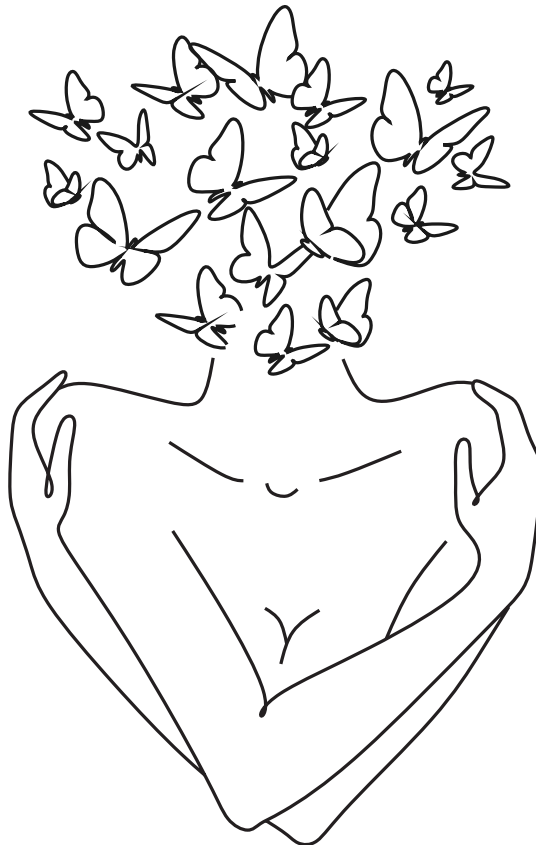


Hormones

- Think about what accommodations would make your life easier during the difficult weeks. Do you need more help, less noise, to order food, to do less housework, to take activities off your plate, or to take a Lyft instead of driving somewhere?
- Set realistic expectations for yourself and be patient with your progress. Managing ADHD symptoms and hormonal fluctuations is ongoing, but you can do it!

Listen to Your Body

As a woman with ADHD, you may have been taught to ignore your body's signals. But during your menstrual cycle, taking care of yourself is essential. By giving yourself rest and care during the luteal phase, you can better manage ADHD and improve your health. Remember that your body's needs may change during your cycle, so adjust your activities to support your health.



Hormones

Reconnecting with Your Body's Signals

We have talked about rethinking what you have been taught about responding to your body's stress signals. You may have been taught to ignore those signs and push through them. Now, beginning to use your new coping skills, you can begin to listen to and respect your needs for rest, relaxation, or pain relief. Reconnect with your body's signals and learn to hear and honor them.

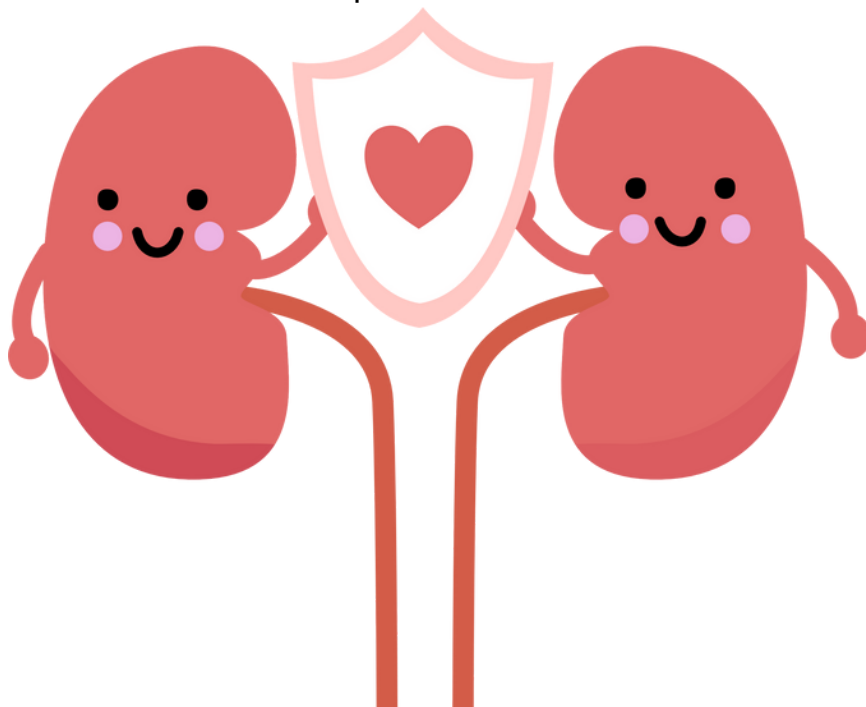
Understanding Estrogen's Role in ADHD

Estrogen is a hormone that helps our body and brain work properly. It affects the way our brain chemicals, called neurotransmitters, work. Three neurotransmitters are essential for ADHD: acetylcholine, dopamine, and serotonin.

When estrogen levels change in our body, it can affect the way these neurotransmitters work.

This can happen during different times in a woman's life, such as puberty, menstrual cycles, pregnancy, and menopause.

For women with ADHD, these fluctuations in estrogen can make their symptoms worse or better. For example, when estrogen levels are low, some women with ADHD might struggle to concentrate, remember things, or control their emotions. But when estrogen levels are high, they might feel more focused and less impulsive.

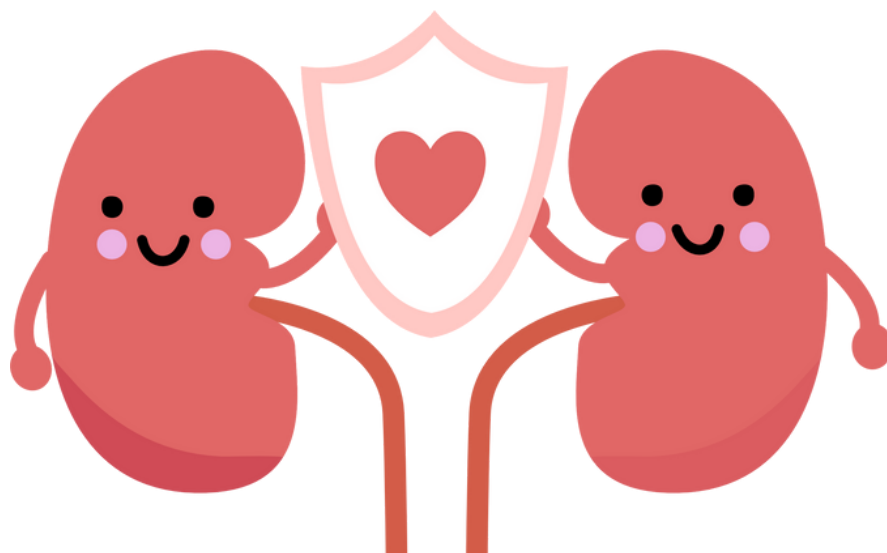


Hormones

Mental Health and Hormones

Studies have found that changes in hormones during menstrual cycles can worsen mental health symptoms, such as anxiety and depression. For example, after teenage girls start menstruating, they are more likely to experience anxiety and depression. Girls with ADHD typically experience worse symptoms during their menstrual cycles, especially before their period starts. In fact, research indicates that up to 20% of teenage girls experience depression and anxiety during their menstrual cycles.

During different times in a woman's life, such as during puberty, menstrual cycles, pregnancy, and menopause, anxiety and depression can worsen or occur when estrogen levels change. Because girls and women with Adhd seem more sensitive to these fluctuations, they are at a greater risk.



Hormones

ADHD and Your Period

Your menstrual cycle has two phases: the follicular phase at the beginning and the luteal phase near your period.

Estrogen levels rise during the follicular phase and fall during the luteal phase.

By paying attention to your cycle, you may notice how your mood, concentration, memory, and emotions change with your estrogen levels.



Hormones

ADHD Medication and Your Period

Studies show that in non-ADHD females, medications tend to work better in the first half of the menstrual cycle. If you experience this, you're not alone. Although women have reported this for a long time, research is needed to support their claims.

Tips to manage ADHD symptoms during your menstrual cycle:

1. Increase body awareness: Utilize the increased energy and focus at the beginning of your cycle for tasks requiring full attention.
2. Be flexible: Hormonal fluctuations during the luteal phase can worsen symptoms. Listen to your body, engage in manageable tasks, rest, and avoid scheduling stressful activities.
3. Practice self-compassion: Be gentle during difficult times, remembering that up to 90% of women have PMS, and most women with ADHD experience similar issues. Offer yourself kind words or thoughts.
4. Consider medication adjustments: Hormonal changes can affect medication needs. If your healthcare provider doesn't understand, find a new one.
5. Communicate and set boundaries: Share your needs with others and avoid overcommitting during times when you're more prone to stress.
6. Prioritize self-care: Focus on activities like eating, gentle exercise, relaxation, and enjoying your favorite snacks during challenging weeks.

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What is PMDD

PMDD, or Premenstrual Dysphoric Disorder, is a severe form of premenstrual syndrome (PMS) that causes debilitating emotional and physical symptoms. These symptoms usually occur in the week or two before menstruation. PMDD can cause extreme mood swings, irritability, depression, anxiety, fatigue, and sleep disturbances. It has been known to cause suicidal ideation and even self-harm.

PMDD is often not detected and can be misdiagnosed because its symptoms are similar to those of bipolar disorder or borderline personality disorder. This is especially true when assessed by an inexperienced clinician.

IT IS VERY DEBILITATING.

PMDD is a common disorder among those with ADHD and autism. Up to 92% of autistic women and 46% of women with ADHD have it. In those without ADHD or autism, the rates are 5-10%.

Tracking PMDD symptoms can be challenging, especially for women with ADHD. Time blindness and other executive functioning challenges associated with ADHD can make it harder to identify a pattern in the symptoms and link them to a specific week or phase of the menstrual cycle.

Hormones

What do doctors do to help?

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

SSRIs, such as fluoxetine, sertraline, and paroxetine, are FDA-approved and are considered the best treatment for PMDD, with a 60-90% response rate. Other effective medications include SNRIs like clomipramine, venlafaxine, and duloxetine.

You can take medications every day, only during certain days of your menstrual cycle, or take a higher dose during certain days.

Drospirenone pills, which are a type of birth control, have been effective in treating PMDD. However, they can be risky and may increase the chance of suicide.

In severe cases, reversible medical menopause can be induced using GnRH agonists. However, it is not the preferred treatment option.

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How can you help yourself when you struggle with PMDD?

Self Awareness

- Use your growing practice of self-awareness to track where you are in your hormonal cycle and how it may impact your mood. You can do this in whatever way works best for you.
- Checking in with how you are doing using the questions “How do I feel?”, “What do I need?”, “What can I do?” from time to time is the practice we have discussed, and building this skill can be facilitated with timer check-ins.



Self-Advocacy with Doctors and Educating Family:



- Please let healthcare professionals know about symptoms, challenges, and concerns.
- Seek a supportive and understanding doctor who is knowledgeable about PMDD and ADHD.
- Educate family members and loved ones about the challenges of PMDD and ADHD to garner support and understanding.

Self-Accommodation: Adjusting Environment for Difficult Days

- Create a calm and comforting personal space.
- Minimize distractions and noise in the environment if you notice your sensory needs are higher.

Hormones

- Use noise-cancelling headphones, fidget toys, or dim lighting to help with sensory overload.
- Adjust your schedule depending on your energy and mood.
- Communicate your needs for less stress and attend to self-care needs when feeling overwhelmed or emotionally drained.
- Reach out to a support network when feeling lonely or isolated.

Self-Care: Kindness and Lightening the Load on Difficult Days

- Prioritize self-care and self-compassion during challenging times.
- Delegate tasks or seek assistance when feeling overwhelmed.
- Set realistic expectations and be gentle with oneself when not meeting them.

Caring for Mood: Remembering to HALT (Hungry, Angry, Lonely, Tired)

- Regularly assess physical and emotional needs using the HALT technique.
- Take breaks and attend to self-care needs when feeling overwhelmed or emotionally drained.
- Reach out to a support network when feeling lonely or isolated.

Hormones

Self-Compassion and Kindness

- Practice self-compassion by acknowledging the difficulty of experiencing intense emotions during PMDD.
- Use self-talk to remind yourself of personal strengths and resilience.
- You can use the third person technique by using your name when talking to yourself, and you can also practice self-validation: “Of course you feel this way.”



Of course you feel sad its a hard thing to deal with PLUS its a difficult week with your hormones. You're doing the best you can.

Hormones

Pregnancy and ADHD

Pregnancy can affect ADHD symptoms due to changes in estrogen levels. While some women may feel better, others may struggle more due to increased responsibilities and mood changes.

When it comes to deciding on whether to stay on medication, it's essential to consult with a doctor who is knowledgeable about treating ADHD during pregnancy. They can help you weigh the risks and benefits of continuing to take ADHD medication while pregnant or breastfeeding. Failing to manage your ADHD can have negative consequences for both you and your baby. Some doctors and women opt to continue taking ADHD medication during pregnancy and breastfeeding.

Taking Care of Yourself and Reducing Stress

Reducing stress when pregnant is important because too much pressure and worry can harm your baby. You may need help taking medicine, attending appointments, and taking prenatal vitamins or medication.

SELF-CARE IS IMPORTANT.

Plan to:

- Ask others for help.
- Seek support from friends and family.
- Consider therapy or coaching to learn coping skills and manage stress.
- Ask for accommodations at work and home to reduce stress, if needed.

Hormones

Postpartum Considerations

Be prepared for potential increases in ADHD symptoms and postpartum depression caused by hormonal changes and caring for a newborn. Lack of sleep, emotional overwhelm, and hormone fluctuations can worsen symptoms. Talk to your doctor about breastfeeding and medication options, as taking medication in small doses may be safe while breastfeeding.

By proactively managing ADHD during pregnancy, you can take better care of yourself and ensure a healthier environment for your baby. Seek support during this time because you will need it!

SPECIAL NOTE ON Postpartum Depression

Postpartum Depression

Postpartum depression (PPD) can affect women with ADHD more severely than women without it. Depending on the severity of the ADHD, the rate of PPD among women with ADHD can range from 30% to 80%. For women without ADHD, the rate is lower, at 10% to 35%.

If you have ADHD and think you may be experiencing PPD, it is important to keep an eye out for it. Both conditions can exacerbate each other.

Do not ignore your feelings if you suspect you have PPD. Women with ADHD often do so, but please seek help if you feel anything unusual after childbirth!

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Signs of PPD.

Signs of postpartum depression (PPD) include feeling sad, hopeless, guilty, irritable, having difficulty bonding with your baby, losing appetite, having insomnia, and thinking of harming yourself or your baby.

Tips for managing ADHD and postpartum depression:

- Work to use self-awareness of your emotional state and any changes in your mood, energy levels, or daily functioning.
- Tell your close friends, family, and healthcare professionals about your ADHD and the possible risk of postpartum depression. Ask them to watch for any changes in your behavior or mood and to offer support if needed.
- Keep regular appointments with your healthcare provider during and after your pregnancy. Talk about any concerns you have about your mental health and share any changes in your mood or behavior.
- If you can afford it, consider seeing a therapist. It can be helpful during this time.
- Take some time for yourself when possible. If your family wants to babysit, please take advantage of the opportunity.

Hormones

- Join a support group for new mothers or those with ADHD. Talking to others who can relate to your experiences can provide valuable insights and help you feel less isolated.
- Women's medication needs change throughout their lives. If you take ADHD medications, work with your healthcare provider to adjust dosages as needed during and after pregnancy. Be aware that changes in medicine may affect your mood.

Treatment for postpartum depression and ADHD:

Antidepressants are often used to treat postpartum depression and ADHD. Hormones may also be used, depending on your doctor's recommendations. Additionally, exercise, sleep, and a healthy diet can be beneficial.

Hormones

Perimenopause and Menopausal Transition

Let's get the definition right.

Menopause is the natural biological process that marks the end of a woman's menstrual cycles and fertility. It is officially diagnosed after a woman has gone 12 consecutive months without a menstrual period. The average age of menopause for women in the United States is around 51, but it can occur earlier or later depending on various factors.

Perimenopause is the transitional phase leading up to menopause and can last anywhere from a few months to over a decade.

Often, when we say menopause, we are referring to the entire transition of menopause, including perimenopause.

Other Causes of Menopause

Surgical menopause occurs when a woman's ovaries are surgically removed, either as a part of a hysterectomy or as a standalone procedure. This immediately decreases estrogen and other hormones, leading to symptoms similar to natural menopause.

Chemotherapy and radiation therapy can also cause menopause by damaging the ovaries and reducing hormone production. This can be temporary or permanent, depending on the type and duration of treatment.

Primary ovarian insufficiency (POI), also known as premature ovarian failure, occurs when a woman's ovaries stop functioning normally before age 40. This can result in irregular periods, infertility, and symptoms of menopause, such as hot flashes and vaginal dryness.

Hormones

What happens during menopause and perimenopause?

- Women with ADHD have worsening issues with memory, concentration, attention, and emotional control during menopause, and many women who have never had ADHD symptoms before may experience them for the first time. Commonly, women report symptoms as "brain fog."
- All women are at high risk of feeling depressed and anxious during this time.
- Issues with sleep, hot flashes, increases in pain, daytime fatigue, early morning waking, hair loss, increasing hunger and cravings, temperature regulation, and symptoms that feel like withdrawal from drugs are not uncommon because you are withdrawing from hormones.
- Menopause can cause changes in appearance, such as weight gain, and can cause issues with libido and pain during sex. This can be incredibly challenging for women because they are often judged and devalued based on their physical appearance and sexual attractiveness. This can contribute to feelings of inadequacy, shame, and loss of identity for women going through menopause.
- Other physical changes during menopause, such as hot flashes and night sweats, can disrupt sleep and mood, sometimes making emotions harder to control and adding more stress.
- Other factors common to this time, such as taking care of older parents and children and having more stress at work, can make everything worse for women during this time in life, especially women with ADHD.

Hormones

Menopause and Perimenopause

- We need more research on hormones, brain scans, and hormone levels in women with ADHD, as well as better treatments that are personalized to each person.
- Despite these issues and the high depression and suicide rates in women during perimenopause, most of us are not educated or prepared for this time.
- Society does not invest enough funds into women-centered care and research, particularly for those with Adhd.
- Depression rates in middle-aged women can be up to 17 times higher than in younger women and men. {World Health Organization. (2017). Depression and Other Common Mental Disorders: Global Health Estimates. Geneva: World Health Organization.}

Hormones

How are women helped who have Adhd during menopause and perimenopause?

- Lifestyle changes such as regular exercise, a balanced diet, stress management techniques, and adequate sleep can help manage perimenopause symptoms.
- Alternative therapies such as acupuncture, herbal supplements, yoga, and meditation may also provide relief for some women.
- Low levels of adrenal androgen and dehydroepiandrosterone (DHEA) have been linked to menopausal depression. Treatment with DHEA has been found to be effective.
- Depression can also be reduced with estradiol supplementation.
- Treatment with SSRIs/SNRI or a combination of SSRI and estradiol have also been effective.
- Changes to stimulant meds may be required.
- Some practitioners suggest Aricept off-label to help with issues with memory and cognition.
- SAMe has been shown to help with depression and may be an alternative to SSRIs for people with trouble taking them.

Hormones

How our model can help you with this transition

As women with ADHD navigate the menopausal transition, the skills of self-awareness, self-accommodation, self-care, self-advocacy, and self-compassion can help.

Self-awareness

Self-awareness means being aware of your mood, concentration, attention, working memory, tiredness, and other issues affecting your body and mind. It helps you ask yourself what you need and recognize when stressed. It also helps you realize when to care for yourself or advocate for yourself. Self-awareness helps you recognize and acknowledge your emotions. Paying attention, not taking on new projects either professionally or at home, and instead prioritizing rest and care can be crucial during this transition.

Self-advocacy examples

Speaking up for yourself is essential, especially when talking to healthcare professionals who may dismiss hormone-related symptoms.

- Women can track their symptoms and speak up for their needs to ensure they receive the proper care from practitioners who understand the connection between ADHD and hormonal changes.
- Talking openly about perimenopause can reduce shame and improve overall well-being.
- Sharing experiences with trusted friends and family can help them understand better.
- Improving communication skills can help set limits with family and coworkers.

Hormones

Self-compassion

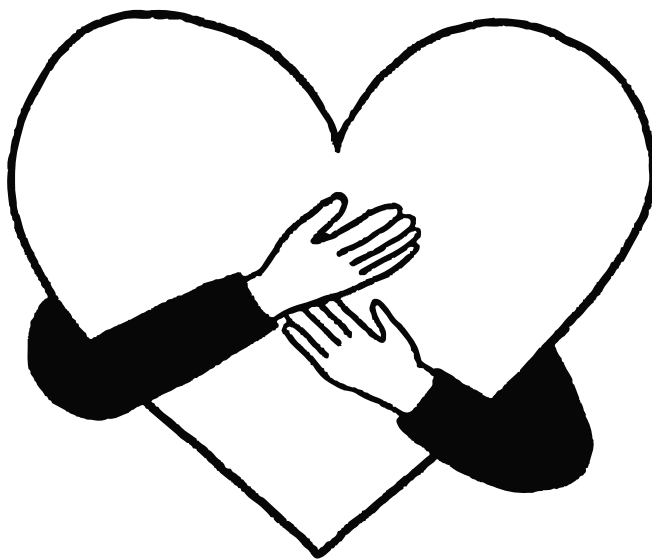
Being compassionate towards yourself is important during times of change. You can check in with yourself by asking questions like "How am I feeling?", "What do I need at the moment?", and "What actions can I take?". By practicing self-compassion, you can learn to accept and embrace the changes in your body and life roles with kindness and understanding.

Self-accommodation

Self-accommodation means adjusting your environment or routines to mitigate memory and sensory issues, which can be particularly challenging during the menopausal transition. Offloading or eliminating tasks can provide much-needed relief and support.

Self-care

Self-care is a key component in managing the menopausal transition. Prioritizing sleep, rest, and nurturing activities can help. By focusing on self-awareness, self-advocacy, self-compassion, self-accommodation, and self-care, you can navigate the menopausal transition successfully.



Hormones- Group Exercises

Group Questions

During menopause and perimenopause, almost all women do not feel supported enough, and a third do not feel supported by anyone.

- What have you learned about menopause/perimenopause?
- Who talked to you about it? Did you learn about it in school? From your mother? Your friends? Your doctor? Books?
- Do you feel like it's discussed openly among family and friends in the workplace?
- Could better preparation make this transition easier?
- Do you think your doctor or healthcare provider understands how hormones during the menopausal transition interact with your ADHD symptoms and medications?
- If not, do you feel comfortable talking with your doctor about your concerns or sharing information with them about what you've learned?
- Studies show that women who live in cultures where aging women are valued more have less of a difficult time with menopause. How do you think our culture treats women as they age?

✧ End The ✧
STIGMA



Hormones Group Exercises

Ideal Menopause Talk

As a woman gets older, her eggs become fewer and lower in quality, which affects the production of hormones such as estrogen and progesterone. Symptoms of menopause include changes in periods, hot flashes, vaginal dryness, sadness, trouble sleeping, and difficulty with concentration memory, and a feeling of brain fog. Studies suggest brain fog during menopause is often temporary and eventually lifts. These symptoms can last for years and usually start in a woman's mid-40s but can start sooner. Women with ADHD may experience worse menopause symptoms.

Available treatments include HRT, antidepressants, and hormonal treatments. For women with ADHD, adjustments to their stimulants are recommended.

HRT. is safe for most women who start before age 60. Women with a uterus may also need to take progesterone or a progesterone-like hormone to decrease cancer risk.

There are treatments available for you that can help. Don't give up if you are feeling bad, but also be careful not to try untested products that could be harmful because menopause isn't discussed; companies with products that don't work prey upon menopausal women who are struggling.

You deserve the support you need to navigate this transition. Share about what's happening with people you trust. Don't keep it a secret.

Self-care, accommodations, self-compassion, and self-advocacy are crucial. Gather your support system and break the shame by discussing it and educating yourself. Ask for help when you need it. Don't be afraid to change your routine or environment to make it more comfortable. You may need to adjust your workload, take breaks, or ask for accommodations to help you manage your symptoms. Be kind and patient with yourself; this journey is unique to you.



Hormones Group Exercises



Periods 101

1. Think about the messages you received about menstruation:
- Were you encouraged to rest and care for yourself when you felt sick or uncomfortable?

- Were you taught about the potential impact of hormones on your mood and emotions?

End the Stigma 

- Were there any negative messages or stigmas associated with periods in your upbringing?

2. Consider your discussions with healthcare providers regarding ADHD and hormonal fluctuations:



- Has your doctor ever discussed the possible impact of your menstrual cycle on your ADHD symptoms?



- If yes, did they provide helpful information and guidance on managing these fluctuations?

- If no, do you feel this is an important topic to discuss with your doctor in the future?



3. If you have a daughter with ADHD:

- Have you discussed menstruation and its potential effects on her ADHD symptoms with her?

- What information or resources have you provided her to help her navigate this aspect of her life?



Hormones- Group Exercises

IDEAL PERIOD TALK

Every month, you get your period which now means you can have a baby. It has three phases: the bleeding phase, the follicular phase, and the luteal phase. During the bleeding phase, which can last between 3-7 days, some people may feel tired and experience discomfort. It is important to respect your body and listen to how you're feeling. This means taking a break if you need it, resting, taking any necessary medication, and staying home from school if you don't feel well. During the follicular phase (day 1 to around day 14), many people usually feel good and have lots of energy. This is a great time to do things that need a lot of focus or energy, like working on a project or doing sports.

Ovulation is the process in which a mature egg is released from the ovary and travels down the fallopian tube, where it may be fertilized by sperm. It usually occurs midway through the menstrual cycle, around day 14.

During the luteal phase (between ovulation and menstruation), some people may feel tired again, and it's important to take care of yourself by doing things like taking a bath, doing simple tasks, and indulging in things you enjoy. It's important to understand your menstrual cycle and listen to your body. This means noticing when you're feeling tired, or when you have a lot of energy, and doing what you need to take care of yourself.

Later in life, if you feel sick, don't hesitate to call out of work and take time to rest. It's important to prioritize your health and well-being. Remember to always be kind to yourself and take care of your body and mind. If you have any concerns or questions, ASK.

ADHD and Perfectionism

ADHD and Perfectionism

What is Perfectionism? How is it Defined?

Perfectionism is the belief that everything you do must be perfect or done perfectly. This mentality can prevent individuals with ADHD, particularly women, from trying new things and living their lives to the fullest. Perfectionism can also increase feelings of inadequacy and contribute to procrastination and stress. There are two types of perfectionism: back-end and front-end. Back-end perfectionism refers to the focus on correcting mistakes after they have been made, while front-end perfectionism is more concerned with preventing mistakes in the first place.



Back End and Front End Perfectionism

Back End Perfectionism

Back-end perfectionism (BEP) means having high and rigid standards for your task once you've started. When you are a back-end perfectionist, other tasks suffer, pile up, and you may procrastinate and feel anxiety. You may also become overwhelmed and dysregulated when you start tasks because you have made them too hard to do. Perfectionism can also cause you trouble with time management, which may already be an issue for you.

Here are some examples of BEP:

- Feeling like all work-related emails must be answered in a lengthy and perfect way and writing them several times, even if it means staying up late or sacrificing time with loved ones.
- Spending hours obsessing over the layout and formatting of a presentation, even to the point where other tasks and areas of your life suffer.
- Refusing to delegate tasks to others, even when overwhelmed, because you fear the work won't be done to their standards.

Back End and Front End Perfectionism

Front End Perfectionism

Front-end perfectionism is a mindset that manifests as rigid standards or preconditions that must be met in order to engage in a task or endeavor. These standards go above and beyond what you would need to get the task done.

- Feeling like you cannot start your homework unless you have 12 hours of sleep and all the laundry is done, so you put off the task indefinitely.
- Believing that you cannot do the laundry unless everyone is out of the house for the full day, so it never gets done.
- Feeling like you cannot look for a job unless you feel motivated and you lose 20 pounds, so you haven't looked for a new one even though you are miserable.

Front-end perfectionism is the most commonly endorsed kind of perfectionism among people with ADHD.

Our Definiton of Perfectionism

Defining Perfectionism in a new way.

Perfectionism is a critical inner voice that leads individuals to make choices about tasks based on fear rather than growth.

