

YOUR GUIDE TO A PERFECT PERIMENOPAUSE

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A WOMAN'S GUIDE TO A PERFECT PERIMENOPAUSE

Many women fear perimenopause, that time in life when a woman's reproductive hormones start to fluctuate more erratically.

Indeed, perimenopause has gotten a bad reputation because it can be accompanied by a host of unpleasant symptoms, including weight gain, mood swings, severe period problems (like heavy or irregular, bloating, and PMS), feeling tired all the time, lackluster skin and hair, thyroid issues, non-existent libido, and infertility.

But here's what most women don't know: these symptoms aren't inevitable. Yes, the hormonal shifts during perimenopause are real, but the symptoms many women experience are optional. With the right knowledge about your unique female biochemistry, you can sidestep the unpleasant symptoms of perimenopause.

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SECTION 1:

WHY YOU'VE ACCEPTED PERIMENOPAUSE SYMPTOMS AS “NORMAL”

As women, we live our whole lives believing that our menstrual cycle is something to dread, month after month. Most of the time we don't question the story we've been told about how having a period means we have to suffer. We just expect that once a month we will experience symptoms like PMS, bloating, acne, moodiness and fatigue — and that, in the later decades of our childbearing years, or symptoms will probably only get worse. So of course, your expectation of perimenopause is not a positive one.

During perimenopause, the monthly ebb and flow of our reproductive hormones may start to be a bit unpredictable, and that can show up as new hormone-related symptoms or an increase in the severity of existing symptoms. Maybe you've seen your doctor or a gynecologist for this upswing in symptoms, but you have been told that your only option is to take (even more) ibuprofen or other pain killer. Maybe you've been offered the pill to suppress your cycle and pave over perimenopause symptoms. Maybe — infuriatingly — you've been told “Some vaginal dry loss? Low libido? Trouble sleeping? That's just what it is like to be a woman in her late-30s or 40s.”

Why are the conventional medical treatment options for perimenopause problems so dismal?

One reason is how medical research has deprioritized women's health issues. Historically, women are excluded from medical research studies because their 28-day hormone cycles are considered too complicated to control for in studies.

Another reason? Women's concerns about their health are often dismissed as psychological. Women are told that their symptoms are in their head, or that they are imagining their pain. Or women are considered complainers, or overly concerned about their physical well-being. Studies support this theory: one report found that almost half of those who went on to be diagnosed with an autoimmune condition (the majority of people who experience autoimmune conditions are women) were originally told that they were too worried about their health. Women with health concerns have a long history of being deemed hormonal or hysterical or told that they are making it all up.

Whatever your journey has been, let me reassure you: you've come to the right place. Regardless of the frustration you've faced and the confusion you've encountered, you can successfully manage your perimenopause symptoms and bring your body back into balance. I'm here to show you how.

SECTION II:

WHAT IS PERIMENOPAUSE?

WHAT IS IT HAPPENING TO ME?

Perimenopause means “around menopause” and it starts for most women around age 35 and lasts until menopause (your very last bleed). Perimenopause symptoms are triggered by a handful of factors, including:

- Hormone imbalances (this may be especially relevant for you if you experienced hormone imbalances during your peak reproductive years that went untended and that are getting worse as your body starts to transition away from a focus on reproduction)
- Life stressors (which are often amplified in this stage of life)
- Exposure to toxins
- Practicing self-care that is NOT in sync with your natural hormone cycle

Let's take a closer look at each of these factors:

Hormone imbalances. Perimenopause is characterized by uneven swings in estrogen, progesterone, and androgens. These hormones follow a more or less even pattern during your 20s and early 30s, but they start to behave more erratically as you enter your late 30s and 40s and, as you get closer to menopause, they start to trend downward. This can give rise to familiar perimenopause symptoms, like vaginal dryness and low libido.

Psychological stress. Now add in the fact that life in one's late 30s and early 40s can be full of unique stressors: raising young children and teenagers, working long (often stressful) hours at the peak of one's career, navigating busy family schedules, and caring for aging parents. This can send the stress hormone cortisol on its own frenzied roller coaster, so in addition to shifts in reproductive hormones, a woman might be facing the symptoms of high cortisol, like feeling tired-but-wired all the time, never sleeping, having intense sugar cravings, and experiencing big swings in blood sugar.

Exposure to endocrine-disrupting chemicals. Your level of exposure to endocrine-disrupting toxins also makes a difference in how well you'll navigate perimenopause. Today there are more endocrine disruptors in the environment than ever before, and these chemicals can overwhelm the body's detox system (which is in charge of getting rid of used-up hormones as well as toxins) and wreak a special kind of havoc on the thyroid, which is very sensitive to chemical exposure.

Not practicing The Cycle Syncing Method™. Practicing the Cycle Syncing Method™ might sound complicated, but in reality it is simple: it is the act of knowing which of the four phases of your 28-day menstrual cycle you are in at any given moment and then tailoring your food, movement, relationship, work, and lifestyle choices to your unique strengths, weaknesses, and needs during that phase. This type of phase-based self-care can help bring your hormones into alignment and ease hormone-related symptoms, including those that are associated with perimenopause.

Perimenopause happens in two phases: Phase 1 and Phase 2.

Here is what you can expect in each phase:

Phase 1 (35 to 45 years old)

This phase is when reproductive hormone production starts to shift and become less consistent. That said, if you're in good hormonal health and you're engaging in cyclical self-care you shouldn't feel symptoms during this phase. You should be ovulating and menstruating regularly and have good muscle tone, skin quality, energy, and sex drive. In other words, you should still be making enough hormones to feel vital and youthful. If you are experiencing symptoms like difficulty with fertility, vaginal dryness, accelerated skin aging, or dry hair (or all of the above), these are signs that your hormones need some TLC.

Phase Two (45 to 55 years old)

During this phase, FSH levels rise to the point where you no longer ovulate. And while that sounds dramatic, this phase will be relatively smooth sailing if you've taken care of your hormonal health during Phase 1. However, many women let the symptoms they experience in Phase 1 go unaddressed and that compounds their symptoms in Phase 2.

This gives you a picture of what you might notice in the two phases of perimenopause, but symptoms aren't inevitable. You can address the root causes of your discomfort with nutrition, supplements and lifestyle.

The next section outlines what I recommend for each phase.

SECTION III:

NATURAL REMEDIES FOR PERIMENOPAUSE SYMPTOMS

Whether you are in pre-perimenopause, Phase 1 perimenopause, or Phase 2 perimenopause, the first thing I encourage you to do is practice cyclical self care. Living in sync with your cycle will help you feel your best as you enter and move through perimenopause.

The first step in practicing phase-based self-care is tracking your period with the [MyFlo app](#).

Once you become familiar with your cycle by tracking it, you'll want to take action based on which phase you are in each week. (This applies no matter where you are in the perimenopause process.) I encourage women to begin by eating and moving in sync with their cycle:

Step 1: Practice phase-based eating. You will eat specific foods each week that support your body's unique needs during that phase of your cycle, changing what you eat in each phase to support optimal hormone balance and metabolism.

This phase-based approach to eating provides the most variety of micronutrients to support overall hormonal balance. It also ensures that you're getting key foods at critical times to break down the excess levels of estrogen that can cause symptoms. This approach will improve the quality of your bleed, support fertility, and boost sex drive, energy and mood.

You'll enjoy a wide variety of cuisines when you start eating cyclically – macrobiotic, raw, ketogenic, Mediterranean, and not ever get stuck doing one day in and day out. Phase-based eating is the true differentiator for the FLO protocol. Everything about your diet and lifestyle should be relevant to your female biochemistry, and the FLO protocol ensures that.

Step #2: Engage in phase-based exercise. The cyclical nature of your 28-day menstrual cycle provides the perfect architecture for planning how to work out and when to work out. During each phase of your menstrual cycle your body is primed for different kinds of exercise. At certain times—during the luteal phase and during menstruation, for example—the nutrients and hormones in your body are directed toward building up the lining up of your uterus, so you won't have all the internal resources you need to workout at full capacity. During the other phases, however, your body can channel all its resources into a really strong work out. By engaging in phase-based exercise, you will save yourself from exhaustion, burn-out, and unpleasant perimenopause symptoms.

Once you have your phase-based self-care dialed in, you can customize your approach for perimenopause symptoms based on which phase you are in.

SELF-CARE STRATEGIES FOR PERIMENOPAUSE—PHASE 1

You'll want to stick to your cyclical self-care routine, and liver health becomes even more important during this phase. Continue to emphasize phytonutrient-rich vegetables and drink warm water with a squeeze of fresh lemon juice in the mornings.

Supplements are non-negotiable for keeping hormones balanced and stable as you enter Phase 1 perimenopause. Specifically, I recommend:

B-complex. A deficiency in B vitamins can cause low energy and fatigue. B6 is a particularly important vitamin that can help boost progesterone production, which starts to wane during perimenopause. B6 also works with your liver enzymes to remove excess estrogen from the body.

Magnesium. Magnesium supports the production of FSH (follicular stimulating hormone) LH (luteinizing hormone) and TSH (thyroid stimulating hormone), the critical hormones that signal other glands in the endocrine system to perform optimally. Low levels of those foundational hormones can be a factor in irregular ovulation and thyroid-function issues.

Liver detoxifier/estrogen metabolizer. Your liver plays a critical role in maintaining hormonal balance and keeping symptoms at bay. In order to detox efficiently, the liver needs a fully stocked supply of micronutrients and antioxidants. If your liver doesn't have enough essential micronutrients, you'll be more likely to develop menstrual, fertility, and libido problems in perimenopause.

Probiotics. A healthy microbiome is essential for managing hormonal conditions—and this is especially true as you enter perimenopause. Women age 35 to 45 need optimal gut health in order to absorb the key micronutrients they get in their food and supplement. Good gut health also means a healthy estrobolome, or the community of bugs in the gut that help metabolize excess estrogen.

Tending your adrenal health is critical in Phase 1 perimenopause, so you will want to prioritize rest and relaxing activities. You might also consider taking adaptogens to support the adrenal system, including:

Maca powder. I recommend maca powder as part of a wider hormonally-supportive diet when you're age 35 or over and experiencing symptoms of perimenopause. Maca can help with:

- Low energy levels
- Low sex drive
- Brain fog and poor focus
- Mood swings and depression
- PMS symptoms

Ashwagandha. This well-researched herb has been shown to reduce oxidative stress (the internal process that contributes to cell damage and accelerated aging) and support a healthy stress response. In a double-blind, placebo-controlled study, ashwagandha was shown to improve stress resistance and participants' self-assessed quality of life. When it comes to hormones, ashwagandha has been shown to safely improve sexual function and low libido for some women (perhaps because it supports healthy testosterone production). I recommend ashwagandha if you struggle with anxiety and/or if you're wrestling with low libido.

Holy Basil. This herb supports a healthy adrenal response as well as helping stabilize blood sugar, which is essential for healthy hormone balance. Research also suggests that holy basil can help protect the liver and support liver function. I recommend holy basil if stress and anxiety are an issue and/or if you wrestle with imbalanced blood sugar. If you have a history of taking over-the-counter or prescription medications, you may consider taking holy basil for liver and detox support.

Reishi mushroom. Reishi is a powerful adaptogen that is also full of antioxidants. The antioxidant benefits of reishi are well-studied, and when it comes to hormones studies show that reishi (and other cordyceps mushrooms) may help ease hormone-related symptoms by exerting an anti-androgenic effect in the body.

SELF CARE STRATEGIES FOR PERIMENOPAUSE—PHASE 2

Phase 2 occurs when FSH levels rise to the point where you no longer ovulate. Because many women experience accelerated hormone aging in Phase 1, they have a rough time in Phase 2. But when hormones are balanced entering this phase, your body should adapt relatively seamlessly by manufacturing slightly less, but a balanced amount of estrogen and progesterone and testosterone. If you're having hot flashes, night sweats, no libido, etc., then you likely have unbalanced levels of these hormones.

Take D3 and Evening Primrose Oil. These two supplements are especially helpful in the second phase of perimenopause. Evening primrose oil is a source of gamma-linolenic acid (GLA), an essential fatty acid that influences prostaglandin synthesis and calms perimenopausal symptoms. Vitamin D is foundational for hormone balance and overall health at every stage of life. You can read more about D3 [here](#).

Increase your Zinc intake. Zinc is critical for the production of testosterone production. Having enough testosterone eases the perimenopausal transition. Zinc is bountiful in beans and seeds. You can also supplement with 50mg a day.

Eat enough healthy fat. Cholesterol (yes, the very substance that has been demonized for many years) is what our body uses to make our hormones. You need enough healthy fat in your diet to have enough cholesterol to support adequate hormone production. Your body is slowing down hormone production at this stage, so it's critical to make sure you have enough of this key building block.

If You Take These Steps in Phase 1 and Phase 2 and Your Symptoms Don't Fully Resolve...

Once you begin practicing phase-based self-care, you will start to feel better. But you may still need additional support in certain areas. That's normal. Here are some of the common symptoms unique to perimenopause and additional steps you can take to help ease them:

Irregular, heavy, or painful periods. Try taking Vitex, also called chasteberry. It has been shown to support regular ovulation and healthy progesterone levels. But proceed with caution if you have PCOS. In some women with PCOS, certain reproductive hormones are already high and Vitex may raise those hormones even further, which you don't want.

PMS/PMDD. Studies also suggest that Vitex, also called Chasteberry, may help improve symptoms of PMS and PMDD. One study even found that **Vitex** outperformed fluoxetine (generic name for Prozac) for easing symptoms of PMDD (premenstrual dysphoric disorder).

Fertility struggles. By supporting regular ovulation and healthy hormone levels, Vitex can be a great choice for fertility support during perimenopause. Research that looked at a proprietary blend of herbs that included Vitex found that the supplement supported fertility without negative side effects. (Don't combine Vitex with fertility drugs, however, because that can lead to over stimulation of the ovaries)

CoQ10 has also been shown to help improve egg quality.

Depression and irritability. Try taking **maca powder**, which studies suggest may help improve symptoms of depression. Some animal research also suggests that maca may help with cognitive function and concentration.

Weight gain. Try **alpha lipoic acid**, which helps support healthy blood sugar and insulin balance and, in turn, healthy weight loss and healthy weight maintenance. The compound may also guard against bone loss. ALA also helps support and nourish the liver and optimal liver function is essential for getting rid of excess estrogen and keeping reproductive hormones balanced. Alpha lipoic acid is one the key ingredients in the [my Balance supplement kit](#).

Dull skin and hair. A [high-quality omega-3 supplement](#) will help nourish dry skin and hair. Also, an obvious tip, but one that often gets overlooked and under-appreciated: stay hydrated! This works wonders for skin and hair.

Low sex drive. Studies suggest that **maca** may help boost sex drive in menopausal women, and other research found that maca may act as a “toner of hormonal processes” in early post-menopausal women. Additional research has shown that maca may help with low libido as a side effect of taking SSRI antidepressant medications in menopausal women. The adaptogenic herb **ashwagandha** may also help support sexual function in women.

Stress and anxiety. Taming stress requires a multipronged approach, one that includes lifestyle modifications, exercise, and more. But adaptogenic herbs can be a powerful part of your stress-reduction arsenal. I recommend ashwagandha, which research suggests is a safe and effective way to build up resistance to stress and improve self-reported quality of life. Holy Basil is another great choice for stress and anxiety support, according to research.

Coming Off Birth Control to Conceive. If you're coming off birth control after many years on the pill, I recommend [several important steps](#) for hormone healing and fertility support. But one of the best things you can do is prioritize eating leafy greens and cruciferous vegetables like broccoli, cauliflower, cabbage, and Brussels sprouts. These foods help support estrogen metabolism in the liver and bring your hormones back into balance after years of hormonal birth control.

Thyroid issues. With thyroid concerns, your first best bet is always to consult a trusted healthcare practitioner. You'll want to run thyroid lab tests and discuss next steps with a licensed professional. But you'll also want to make it a top priority to [avoid endocrine-disrupting chemicals](#) as much as possible. The thyroid is uniquely sensitive to endocrine disruptors. I recommend ALL women take steps to protect themselves from these environmental chemicals, but it is especially critical if you are working to heal your thyroid.

SECTION IV:

WHAT'S NEXT?

Information is powerful. Once you know more about your unique female biochemistry, you can take charge of your hormone health. But sometimes you want or need more support.

You can find more resources on www.floliving.com. At FLO Living, we work with women all over the world who experience hormone-related symptoms, including everything from PMS and heavy, irregular, or missing periods to infertility and perimenopause. We use functional foods, supplements, and lifestyle strategies to heal the root causes of hormone imbalances and help women live symptom-free.

Here are some of the ways we work with clients:

Monthly FLO: The most widely used digital hormone recovery program worldwide, helping women put PCOS, endometriosis, fibroids, infertility and period symptoms into remission naturally.

The Cycle Syncing Membership: The revolutionary online program and community that supports women to live in their Flo - www.cyclesyncingmembership.com

Balance Supplements: The bestselling female-hormone biohacking supplements delivered to your door every other month. These five formulations provide essential micronutrient support that you need to balance your hormones.

One-on-One Support: Access our FLO coaches anytime to talk through questions and concerns and to get support and accountability to make lasting changes in your health and life.

MyFLO App: The only period tracker app that tells you what to do to be symptom free and helps you sync with your cycle - www.myflotracker.com

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