

Mind over Menopause

Managing mental health during a time of change

By Philmar Mendoza Kabua, BSN

May is Women's Health Month and Mental Health Month, making it a great time to discuss an often overlooked but important topic: **menopause**. Menopause is a natural part of life, but it can cause significant changes in the body that can really affect a woman's mental health. It's important to understand these changes and learn how to cope with them to navigate this phase with ease.

What is menopause?

Menopause happens when menstrual cycles — or periods — stop for good. This typically happens in a woman's late 40s or early 50s, but it can happen earlier or later. During menopause, the body experiences major **hormonal changes**, which can cause a variety of symptoms, including changes to mental health.

How does menopause affect mental health?

Menopause often brings **mood swings**, which can make it hard to control your emotions. You might feel happy one moment, then suddenly sad or irritable. Mood swings are a normal part of menopause and are often due to hormonal changes.

You might also have increased **anxiety** during menopause. You may worry more than usual, feel on edge, or even have panic attacks. These feelings can be overwhelming, but there are ways to manage them.

Depression is another mental health concern that some women deal with during menopause. Feeling sad, hopeless and losing interest in activities you once enjoyed are common symptoms. Seek help if you're experiencing depression during menopause, as it can greatly affect your overall well-being.

How can I manage my mental health during menopause?

- Exercise regularly — Regular exercise boosts mood, reduces anxiety and increases energy levels. Aim for at least 30 minutes of moderate exercise most days of the week.
- Eat a healthy diet — A balanced diet with plenty of fruits, vegetables, whole grains and lean proteins supports overall health and a stable mood. Cut back on caffeine, alcohol and sugary foods to help manage mood swings.
- Try relaxation techniques — Deep breathing, meditation, yoga and tai chi reduce stress and promote relaxation. Add practices like these into your daily routine for better mental well-being.

- Get enough sleep — Aim for 7-9 hours of quality sleep each night. Stick to a consistent sleep schedule and create a relaxing bedtime routine to improve mental health.
- Reach out for support — Talk to health care providers, friends or family about how you're feeling. Seeking support can be incredibly helpful, and health care providers can give you guidance and treatment options if needed.

Sometimes, if symptoms are severe, your doctor might suggest hormone therapy or antidepressant medication. Make sure to talk to your doctor about these options to figure out what's right for you.

Understanding how menopause affects mental health and using coping strategies can make navigating this phase easier. Remember, you're not alone — support is here to help you through it.

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