HOW TO MAKE MENOPAUSE A POSITIVE EXPERIENCE

A SELF HELP GUIDE



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DEDICATION

To all women who are going and who will go through menopause

INTRODUCTION

Menopause is a normal, natural event for every woman. It represents the end of a woman's reproductive years. Most women will likely experience some form of symptoms at the time of their menopause. For most, these will be mild, but for others, these symptoms can be debilitating and can significantly affect the quality of home life, work, and relationships.

By definition, menopause is the final menstrual period when there has been no period for 12 consecutive months. If this occurs before a woman is 40 years of age, it is called premature ovarian failure or primary ovarian insufficiency, and if it occurs before the age of 45 years, it's called early menopause

Premature menopause is not addressed in this book; the rest of this book will focus on perimenopause and menopause

After the age of 40, every woman will have a steady decline in female reproductive hormones, estrogen and progesterone. This process may take years before the final loss of these hormones. This transition period leading to the final menstrual period is known as perimenopause

During this transition, the period may become irregular or more frequent, and sometimes it becomes heavier.

On average, most women will have gone through menopause by the time they are 51 years old.

The decline in the female reproductive hormones during perimenopause and menopause has both physical and psychological effects. Some of the emotional and psychological symptoms experienced by women include mood swings, anxiety, panic attacks, anger outburst, irritability, low self-esteem, poor concentration, and memory problems.

The physical symptoms of menopause, such as night sweats and hot flushes, can cause poor sleep and tiredness, invariably leading to stress and emotional upset.

Menopause affects a woman's sexual life, which can vary from painful sex to loss of desire. Sexual difficulties during menopause can also cause stress and emotional disturbances.

All of these can have a major effect on a woman's mental health, which can be significant enough to impair their quality of life.

There are other compounding factors contributing to emotional stress during midlife. These factors include relationship issues, older children leaving or returning home, caring for aged parents or an ill partner, career or financial concerns, or just living in a very ageist society.

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Many other medical conditions can mimic menopause, and careful evaluation by a specialist women's health physician can help identify and diagnose menopause. The confusion of not knowing if the symptoms are due to menopause can also be incredibly stressful for women.

During a recent menopause workshop that I conducted, some women shared how they had thought they were losing their minds and were driven to the point of suicide as a result of

unbearable symptoms which they did not know were due to menopause. Some of them said they were convinced they had a brain tumour or something equally sinister.

The stress caused by undergoing unnecessary investigations for serious conditions such as brain tumours can be avoided if there is a good understanding of this critical natural transition.

Below are true stories of women who had a tough time navigating menopause transition due to lack of insight into the effect of hormone fluctuation in midlife women.

My menopause story (true stories shared with permission)

Story 1

Before my 50th birthday, I started to isolate myself from everyone; I felt unloved and began to think that life wasn't worth living anymore. I'm a single mum with four children, all older adults.

I had mood swings and anger outbursts; my children all left home when they couldn't cope with my irrational behaviour.

I was also having hot flushes and a bizarre reaction to rain; when I hear the sound of rain, I feel unwell and sometimes develop a fever, it's strange, and I just can't explain it.

My periods were also all over the place. I was very irritable, got upset over everything and cried easily. Also, my business wasn't going well; I had bills piled up, it just felt like everything was going wrong all around me.

Before all of these, I was a very bubbly person with a larger-than-life personality. I was the life of the party; I had never been depressed.

The depressed mood became severe, and I started having suicidal thoughts.

On 4th December 2020, I was left alone at home, and I decided to end it all. I went in search of a kitchen knife, but for some reason, I couldn't find my way to the kitchen; I broke down into tears, went back into my room and cried myself to sleep.

I'm a Christian, and I know that God loves me, but I just couldn't see beyond the dark cloud hovering over me at that period in my life.

How I didn't hurt or kill myself that night must have been by God's intervention. I still don't know how I couldn't find my way to my own kitchen; I guessed angels were on an assignment that night and must have blinded my eyes to my kitchen door.

Shortly after this incident, I went to see a medical practitioner who told me it was MENOPAUSE!

I had counselling, given some advice on foods and supplements, but I wasn't offered hormone replacement therapy (I don't know why).

During this dark season, God gave me the vision to start a ministry called Matured Single Ministry. This is a ministry for older single women where we support one another and encourage ourselves on this journey of life.

Menopause is real, and it's frightening to know that there are women who have committed suicide, not knowing that their symptoms are due to fluctuations in their hormones.

O Y lives in West Africa. She is in a better place now with her menopause transition; She has a thriving ministry for older singles. She's considering another visit to her health care provider to discuss hormone replacement therapy.

Story 2

In 2017, I was only 44 when I started to experience heart palpitations, hot flushes, and anxiety. My periods also were becoming irregular; sometimes they were very heavy, other times they were light. I didn't know what the cause of all these symptoms was; I wasn't expecting to be menopausal at the age of 44; I thought that was for women in their 50's.

I endured all these symptoms for over a year, then in 2018, I booked an appointment to see my general practitioner (GP). He ran some tests and said he wanted to check for thyroid problems

The blood tests were negative for thyroid problems. My GP diagnosed EARLY MENOPAUSE to my shock and disbelief. My GP

offered to treat me if the symptoms were impacting my daily life, but I decided to manage the symptoms naturally.

I would have taken Hormone replacement therapy if I had known at the beginning that all my symptoms were due to menopause. By the time I saw my GP, my symptoms had improved, and I had found ways to master menopause.

B O lives in the United Kingdom. Due to her research into natural treatments for some of her menopausal symptoms, she ditched processed foods and drinks, and currently, she runs a company that does natural fruit drinks.

Menopause and Mental health

The effect of menopause on a woman's mental health is enormous and addressing this is paramount to the overall well-being of perimenopausal and menopausal women.

There are worrying statistics showing that the highest rate of suicide in women occurs during midlife, which is more often than not connected to perimenopause or menopause.

Having balanced mental health is crucial for our well-being irrespective of age or gender.

Menopause presents lots of challenges that impact not just mental health but also social life, relationships, and life in general.

So many shy away from talking about mental health because of numerous stigmas associated with it, and this shouldn't be. The more we talk about mental health openly, the more we improve the outcome for everyone.

Some women may already have a background history of depression or mental health challenges, and during menopause, fluctuations in hormone levels can trigger mood swings and emotional stress. Other physical symptoms of menopause, such as hot flushes, foggy brain, and lack of sleep, can worsen moods and emotional stress.

It is appropriate to seek help from a qualified health profes-

sional in menopause care to discuss effective treatments for both the physical and the psychological symptoms of menopause.

Hormone replacement therapies (HRT) are effective treatment options, but there have been many debates and controversies about HRT. For the majority of women, the benefits of HRT outweigh the risks. However, not all women can take HRT, and some may choose not to use HRT

So, what else can you do if you can't or don't want to take HRT or any other medications for your symptoms?

A SELF-HELP GUIDE FOR MANAGING MENTAL HEALTH DURING MENOPAUSE



Some women say they prefer to go through menopause 'naturally'. And really, what they mean by 'naturally' is avoiding the use of hormone replacement therapy (HRT)

For those that can take HRT (after evaluation of risk by their health care provider), it is an effective treatment for managing low mood and anxiety related to menopause and also for other symptoms of menopause.

But if unable to take HRT, there are other options for treatment of menopause such as herbal treatments, non-hormonal prescribed treatments, Cognitive Behavioural Therapy (CBT) and acupuncture. HRT and its alternatives are outside the scope of this book.

However, I will mention a few points concerning HRT alternatives. Only CBT and some of the non-hormonal prescribed treatments have been shown to impact mood and anxiety.

However, most of these alternatives are effective for other menopausal symptoms but not necessarily for managing low moods and anxiety. Herbal treatment is available in most health shops, but you should opt for remedies regulated by a medicine

authority when considering them so you can be sure that the product is of high quality and has the correct dosage

Also, if you are on any prescribed medications for other medical conditions, you should discuss with your health care provider before using herbal remedies for menopause treatment. This is due to the significant risk of drug interactions with some of the herbal treatments.

CBT is a form of talking therapy that can help you change how you think and behave. CBT is known to be effective for anxiety and depression with or without menopause. It is especially a good option if HRT is contraindicated due to other underlying medical conditions. Most mental health services will offer CBT, and this can be available online. The National Institute for Health and Care Excellence (NICE) in the United Kingdom recommends CBT as a treatment option for anxiety and depression experienced by women during menopause transition and post-menopause.

This book is focused on self-help options in combating stress and emotional disturbance associated with menopause. These are simple tips and are non-drug options,

1. HAVE REGULAR 'ME' TIME

To have a regular me-time involves creating time out of your busy schedule to do something for YOU. Life gets busy for all of us, and at different stages of our lives, there is always something or someone competing for our time and attention. It takes conscious effort to STOP and have time to refresh, reflect and re-energize.

There is no hard and fast rule about what to do or how to do this. 'Me' time is different for everyone depending on preference and prevailing circumstances. The important thing is to do something that makes you feel refreshed and renewed. It could

be as simple as going to the salon for a beauty treatment or going on a long walk along the beach!

Being on the go constantly increases stress levels naturally, and coupled with the hormone fluctuations during menopause transition, this takes your stress level to another level. Having regular breaks helps the brain and body to de-stress.

2. IDENTIFY TRIGGERS OF STRESS AND AVOID THEM

Life is stressful at best, and during menopause, it can be even more so. Stress during menopause is multifactorial. Lack of sleep is prevalent during menopause. This can be due to physical symptoms such as hot flushes, night sweats and genitourinary (vagina and bladder) symptoms. It can also be due to the reduction in sleep hormone (melatonin), which is common during menopause.

Not getting enough sleep is a significant trigger for stress; other menopausal symptoms such as foggy brain, fatigue, poor memory, and lack of concentration can also trigger stress.

Sleep disturbance is one of the most troublesome features of menopause and post-menopause. Taking sleeping medications is counterproductive because most sleeping medications have addictive potential, and once you start, it gets difficult to stop.

Below are some simple tips to improve sleep hygiene during menopause. Some of these may appear simple, but if you try them consistently, you will notice improvement. You may have tried some in the past and felt they didn't make any difference, but our body is constantly changing, and there is no harm in trying them again.

Tips for managing sleep problems during menopause:

1. Have a bedtime routine and keep to it. It's not very easy, but it's effective. Let your body get used to a

pattern of retiring to bed at the same time every night. If you do this consistently for some time, naturally, when it gets to the time you usually retire, your body gets tired and will force you to sleep. If this doesn't work for you, try another tip below!

2. Keep your bedroom free of anything that reminds you of work. Don't turn your bedroom into your home office. Associate your bedroom with sleep and not work. If it means changing your room décor, whatever it will take to make your bedroom a place where you can relax and hopefully drop off to sleep easily.
3. Try relaxation techniques just before your bedtime. Find what works for you. There are no hard and fast rules about this. It could be a relaxing warm bath or a prolonged shower. Other techniques include aromatherapy using essential oils, the use of scented candles.
4. Music also plays a good role. Having cool soul music playing softly in the background can help to induce sleep.
5. Meditating on the Bible's promises, especially those related to having a good night sleep. I will be sharing more about this in the next chapter. An audio bible can be left playing softly in the background as you drop off to sleep.
6. Bedroom ambience. Keep your room dark, quiet and cool. Night sweats are one primary reason for poor sleep during menopause. A cool room is definitely desirable. Avoid bright lights from laptops, mobile phones and televisions. Bright lights can affect our internal body clock, known as circadian rhythm, and it can also affect the production of the sleep hormone melatonin.

7. Bedtime rituals. Avoid alcohol and caffeine at bedtime; some herbal drinks such as chamomile tea are better.

Tips for managing anxiety and stress during and post menopause

1. Regular physical exercise. This has both physical and mental health benefits. Keeping physically active doesn't only help to maintain a healthy weight. It also helps to lift mood and increase happiness due to the release of endorphins. These are hormones that interact with brain receptors to reduce pain perception and cause positive feelings in the body.
2. Practice all the relaxation techniques discussed above in the section on improving sleep hygiene.
3. Meditation on God's promises on overcoming anxious moments.
4. Constant declaration of positive affirmations. At the end of this book, I have listed 21 positive affirmations that you can declare regularly.
5. Watch the company you keep. Avoid people who increase your stress levels either by their attitude or their speech. Instead, seek support and surround yourself with positive people who are motivators and encouragers.
6. Reach out and be a blessing to other people. There is a satisfaction that comes from reaching out to bless others; it triggers a positive feeling and a sense of self-worth.
7. Seek professional help for counselling, talking therapies, anger – management and anxiety – management classes.

3. WATCH YOUR THOUGHTS

'*As a man thinks, so is he.*'
Proverbs 23:7 NKJV.

Thoughts are powerful. What we think about can affect and determine our mood. Some of the symptoms of menopause transition and post menopause include constant dread and negative thoughts. Having negative thoughts can be debilitating, especially when we feel it's so out of our control.

Tips for controlling negative thoughts during menopause and post menopause

1. Keep a gratitude journal. Replace negative thoughts with gratitude lists. When you journal things, you are grateful for, it helps to keep negative thoughts at bay.
2. Meditating on the promises of God. Fill your mind with enough scriptures to combat every negative thought that comes into your mind. Focus your thoughts on God's words and declare them regularly.
3. Keep yourself occupied. Engage in mentally challenging activities, learn something new, don't allow idleness, keep yourself busy with things you enjoy.

4. LAUGH OFTEN. YES, LAUGH! LAUGHTER IS GOOD MEDICINE.

'*A joyful, cheerful heart brings healing to both body and soul.*'
Proverbs 17:22 TPT.

Laughter is good for the soul. During menopause, most

women struggle with low mood, irritability, and depression; having a good laugh can lift your spirits. In addition, experts say laughter can stimulate the immune system, enhance our learning and memory, and help us cope with stress. So, make it a habit to laugh, surround yourself with people with good humour or watch a nice comedy. Do things that will make you laugh heartily!

5. HAVE QUIET TIME.

'*And rising very early in the morning, while it was still dark, he departed and went out to a desolate place, and there he prayed.*'
Mark 1:35 KJV.

Develop the habit of having daily quiet time. Take the time to reflect and meditate on God's words. Have fellowship with the Father and receive grace to see you through the day. Learn from Jesus. He got His strength from the quiet time He spent every day with the Father.

Rest and relaxation are medicinal. Take time away from all the busyness and have a retreat. It can be a personal or a group retreat. Make it a priority to do this regularly. The effect is a renewed mind, soul, and body

6. MAKE THE RIGHT CHOICES.

'*Be careful for nothing but in all things by prayers and supplication make your requests known to God.*'
Philippians 4:6 NKJV.

We all have things that we worry about; it's part of our human nature though some people have extreme worry, which can be debilitating. We can't stop worrying thoughts from

creeping into our minds, but we can determine our response to these thoughts.

Exchange your worries with prayers. Every time a concern fills your mind, turn it into a prayer. As you pray, you will be strengthened to confront the situation at hand. Choose joy over worry.

7. SPEAK RIGHT.

'Let the weak say I'm strong.'
Joel 3:10 NKJV
'So, tell them, "As surely as I live, declares the Lord, I will do to you the very thing I heard you say."'
Numbers 14:28 NLT

Words are powerful. Declare what you want and not what you see. This is not always easy, but you can learn this simple practice with significant benefits.

There is power in declaring positive affirmations. When you make those affirmations, you will begin to see yourself become what you have been declaring over time. Rather than declaring all the negative feelings and symptoms of menopause, speak right instead.

Practice daily declarations of God's promises for you. The Bible is full of wonderful promises of a good and healthy life. These promises can be turned into daily affirmations, and as you declare these positive words, your life will begin to align in that same direction.

WHAT DOES THE BIBLE SAY ABOUT MENOPAUSE?



MENOPAUSE: THE TRUTH VERSUS THE FACTS

As Christian women, what should be our perspective of menopause? Should we embrace it with grace, or should we accept that it will be a few years of misery?

It is a medical fact that some women going through menopause may have debilitating symptoms for a few years or many years. For example, science expects women going through menopause to be moody, irritable, at risk of broken bones, tired with no energy, to have hot flushes, foggy brain, memory loss, poor concentration, poor sleep, and the list goes on.

But how is this different from what we know in God's word? What is the truth from the word of God?

Science gave us the facts about menopause, and we understand that the decline in female hormones is inevitable. Unfortunately, with this decline comes debilitating symptoms that could make us feel miserable for years. However, there is a truth in God's words about menopause and how to navigate these uncharted waters.

As a clinician and a woman nearing menopause, I have first-hand experience of how and why women present with menopausal symptoms. But as a believer, I also have the opportunity to study the promises of God in the Bible, and I was thrilled when I came across several scriptural verses that support women going through menopause. I have made these scriptures my companion during this season of change, and I have made a habit of meditating on them and using them to affirm that I can go through menopause with grace. At the end of this chapter, **you will find a list of 21 affirmations with scriptural references.** Please use these to meditate as you navigate this season of change.

The symptoms of menopause are real, and some women will have mild or no symptoms at all while others may have severe debilitating symptoms.

Some will only have symptoms for few years, whilst others will have ongoing symptoms for several years even after the cessation of their menstrual period.

For those who are yet to reach this interesting phase in every woman's life, it is good to prepare ahead since it is inevitable. Every woman will go through menopause at some point, though our experiences will be different. Preparing ahead of time helps to make this experience a positive one.

The symptoms of menopause are the facts, but God's promises concerning women going through menopause transition are the truths.

Know the facts but hold on to the truths. I have made this easy for you by matching each symptom of menopause listed below with a verse in the Bible that promises us of God's divine intervention.

So, if you have any of these symptoms, be reassured that God has already made provisions for you in His word.

When I have experienced tiredness and fatigue, I have declared Isaiah 11:2b, which talks about the Spirit of might and Romans 8:11 that says that the Spirit that raised Christ from the dead will give life to my mortal body.

I worry about the risk of osteoporosis (brittle bone), so I have been declaring Psalm 34:20 that says He guards all my bones; not one of them is broken and Isaiah 58:11 b that says He strengthen my bones.

So, find from below any symptoms you are worried about and apply a corresponding scripture that promises you victory. Declare the promises, meditate on them, use them to pray, do whatever you want with them, but let them encourage and build your faith,

Facts | Truths

Tiredness | Isaiah 11:2, Romans 8:11

Hazy memory | 1 Corinthians 2:16b

Foggy head | Romans 8:11

Brittle bones | Psalm 34:20, Isaiah 58:11

Hot flushes | Isaiah 46:4, Deuteronomy 7:15

Night sweats & poor sleep | Psalm 127:2b, 4:8, Proverbs 3:24, Jeremiah 31:8, Job 11:19

Anxiety & low mood | 1 Peter 5:7, Psalm 94:19, Nehemiah 8:10

It is reassuring to know that there are promises in the Bible for women going through this natural transition and that it is possible to go through menopause with grace.

Remember, you are not alone in this journey; others have gone through it too.

Menopause is not an end; it is a whole new chapter and the dawning of a new season; embrace it with incredible grace and see it as the beginning of bigger, better and brighter things.

A lot of women have mastered menopause, and they are rocking it. You can too!

21 BIBLICAL DECLARATIONS FOR WOMEN GOING THROUGH THE MENOPAUSE



1. I will lie down in peace and sleep, and my sleep will be sweet – Psalm 4:8, Proverbs 3:24

2. I'm bold, and I'm strong for the Lord my God is with me – Joshua 1:9

3. The joy of the Lord is my strength – Nehemiah 8:10

4. I have set the Lord always before me because He is at my right hand, I shall not be moved; therefore, my heart is glad – Psalm 16:8

5. I wait on the Lord, and he will strengthen me – Psalm 27:14

6. The Lord is my strength and my shield, my trust is in Him, and He will help me – Psalm 28:7

7. God protects all my bones; not one of them will be broken – Psalm 34:20

8. Whenever my busy thoughts were out of control, the soothing comfort of your presence calmed me down and overwhelmed me with delight – Psalm 94:19

9. The life-giving Spirit of God will hover over me, the spirit that brings wisdom and understanding, the spirit that gives direction and builds strength – Isaiah 11:2

10. You will keep me in perfect peace because my mind is stayed on you – Isaiah 26:3

11. You will be my God throughout my lifetime until my hair is white with age. – Isaiah 46:4

12. I will go out with joy and be led forth in peace – Isaiah 55:12

13. The Lord will guide me continually and satisfy my soul in drought and strengthen my bones. I shall be like a watered garden and like a spring of water, whose waters do not fail. – Isaiah 58:11

14. This is God's message to me, he will turn things around for me, things will get better and better, my depression days are over –Jeremiah 30:18–19

15. I'm the apple of God's eye – Zachariah 2:8

16. The spirit that raised Christ from the dead gives life to my mortal body – Romans 8:11

17. I have the mind of Christ – 1 Corinthians 2:16

18. God's grace is sufficient for me; His strength is made perfect in my weakness – 2 Corinthians 12:9

19. I will not be anxious; the peace of God guards my heart and mind – Philippians 4:6–7

20. I do not have the Spirit of fear but the Spirit of power, love and sound mind – 2 Timothy 1:7

21. My Lord has anointed me with the oil of joy and gladness – Hebrews 13:5

THANK YOU FOR READING, and if this has blessed you, please tell other women too

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Dr. Olúṣẹ̀yẹ Àríkàwé is a general practitioner with a special interest in women's health. She is passionate about seeing women take hold of God's words and walk in victory over the challenges of life. She blogs at A Word for Her, where she helps women connect the facts of medical science to the truths of God's word.

She lives in the United Kingdom with her husband and daughter, who is a young adult.



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