

Menopause & Mental Health

29th September 2021



Today

- Definitions of Menopause & Mental Health
- Hormones & Neurotransmitters
- Hormones - Estrogen & Progesterone
- Symptoms
- How we can help
- Stress Management



Definitions

- **Menopause** - Absence of menstrual cycle for 12 consecutive months and subsequent absence of female sex hormones including estrogen, progesterone +/- testosterone
- **Peri-menopause** - Fluctuations to frequency of menstrual cycle and subsequent fluctuations in female sex hormones
- **Mental health (WHO definition)**- “a state of wellbeing in which the individual realises her own abilities, can cope with the normal stresses of life, can work productively and fruitfully, and is able to make a contribution to her community”

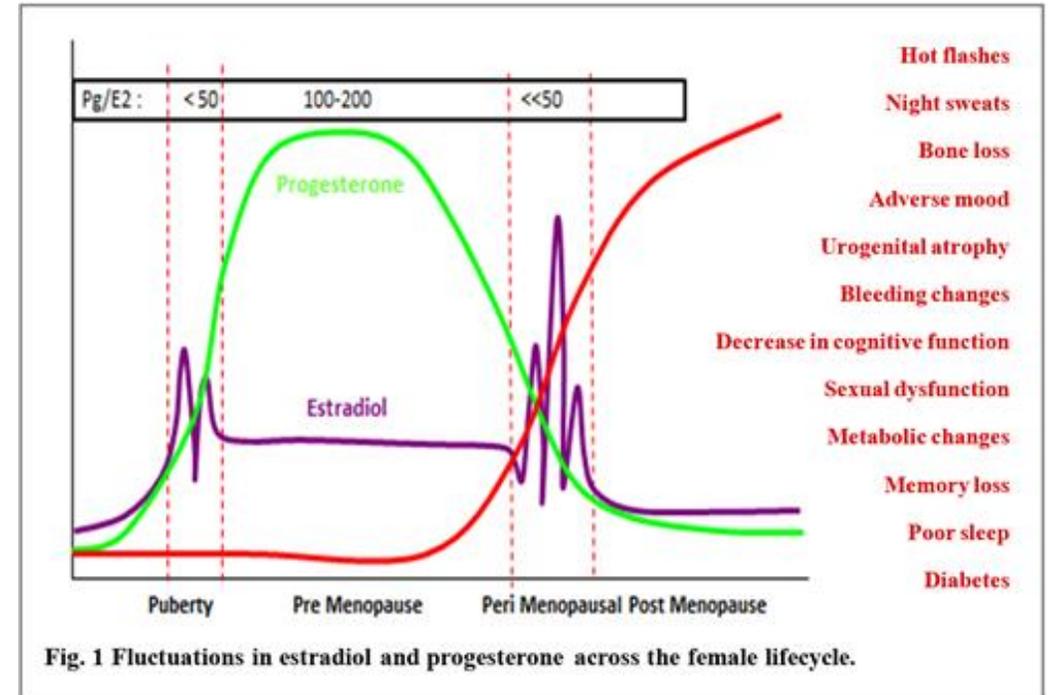


Mental Health & Menopause

Mental health changes during the menopause and perimenopause are very common and often, not actively discussed or adequately treated.

Women's brain ages differently to men's brain. This is because brain and ovaries are part of "neuro-endocrine" system. Health of ovaries is linked to health of our brains and vice versa.

50% of perimenopausal women get treated with antidepressants. Although these offer some relief, but little improvement is offered to the overall quality of life.



How Menopause Impacts Mental Health

Mental Health can be **directly** impacted via declining hormone levels. Sex hormones affect neurotransmitters involved in controlling mood.

Also, **indirectly** by troubling symptoms:

- Hot flushes/night sweats
- Insomnia
- Lack of energy
- Low libido
- Muscle and joint aches
- Decline in mental agility and memory
- Uro-gynaecological symptoms (poor bladder control and recurrent UTI/cystitis)



Stress & Menopause

Stress: midlife transition and the time of menopause can be very stressful with different responses. Some of these stresses women face include:

- Wide range of emerging symptoms
- Physical and emotional changes of ageing
- Demands of growing children and elderly parents
“sandwiched generation”
- Juggling home/work/social life

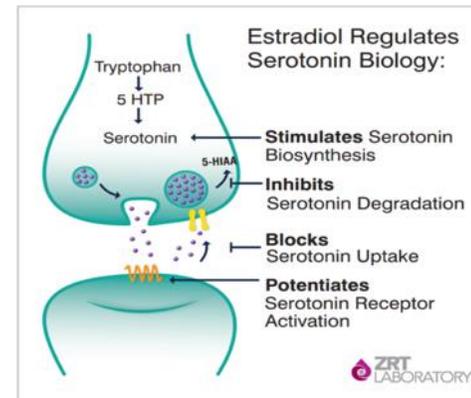
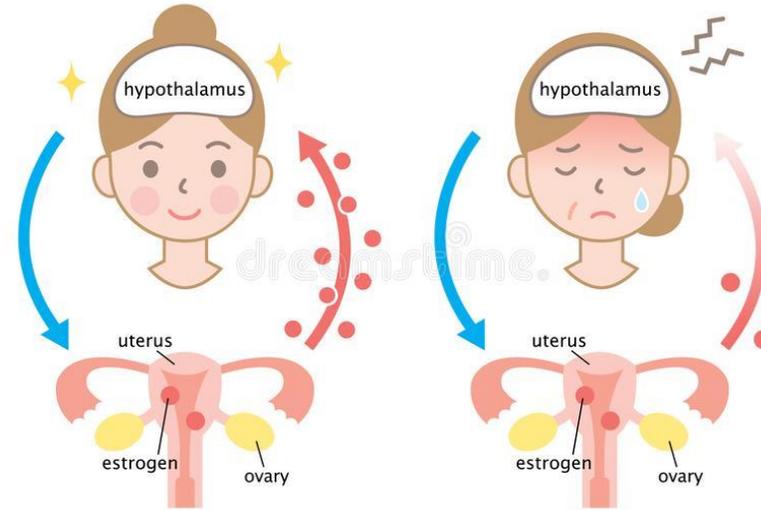


Hormones & Neurotransmitters

Hormones directly affect neurotransmitters.

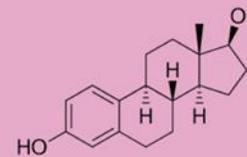
Estrogen (esp. Estradiol E2) is neuro-protective and plays an important role in stimulating neurotransmitters involved in mood like:

- Serotonin- Happy and Positive
- Dopamine- Motivation and Reward
- Cholinergic system- Memory and Learning



Estrogen & Brain Fog

Estrogen is also key in energy production in brain and at cellular level E2 encourages neurons to absorb glucose so they can make energy. There is a 30% drop in energy level at the time of menopause.



Estrogen

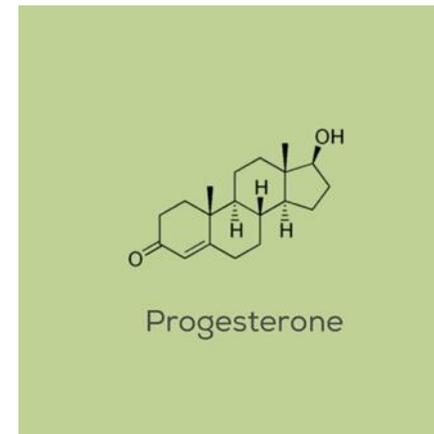
Progesterone

Progesterone is neuro-active, as it enhances the GABA receptors in brain.

GABA is considered an inhibitory neurotransmitter because it inhibits certain brain signals and decreases activity in nervous system.

Progesterone at low doses can therefore produces a calming effect.

This can help with feelings of anxiety, stress, and fear.



Symptoms

What are some of the mental health symptoms women can experience?

- Mood swings and feeling emotional
- Feeling increasingly anxious including panic attacks
- Feeling tearful /down / depressed
- Irritable / angry / losing temper

They can start as either worsening of pre-existing mental health problem for which women can already be on treatment or emerge as new onset symptoms.



Approach to Treatment

Is she coping and functioning, or does she need an urgent referral for psychological support?

- Full and detailed history
- Family history mental health problems
- History of PMT/PMS
- Concurrent conditions like hypothyroidism, vitamin deficiency (food restrictions and allergies)
- Alcohol/illicit drug dependencies
- Work/life balance
- Social connection- who do they live with, what else is going on at home and work, what are her hobbies



How we can help – Nutrition, Exercise & Environment

Actively ask and listen. Empower the patient by helping her understand the principles of hormone health and wellness:

Nutrition

- A healthy gut is necessary for healthy hormone production and metabolism
- Mediterranean diet - legumes, seeds and good fats

Exercise

- Endorphin release. 30mins of exercise 5x per week including 2 weights sessions

Environment

- Our environment can play a significant role in how we feel. Surround yourself with people and things you enjoy

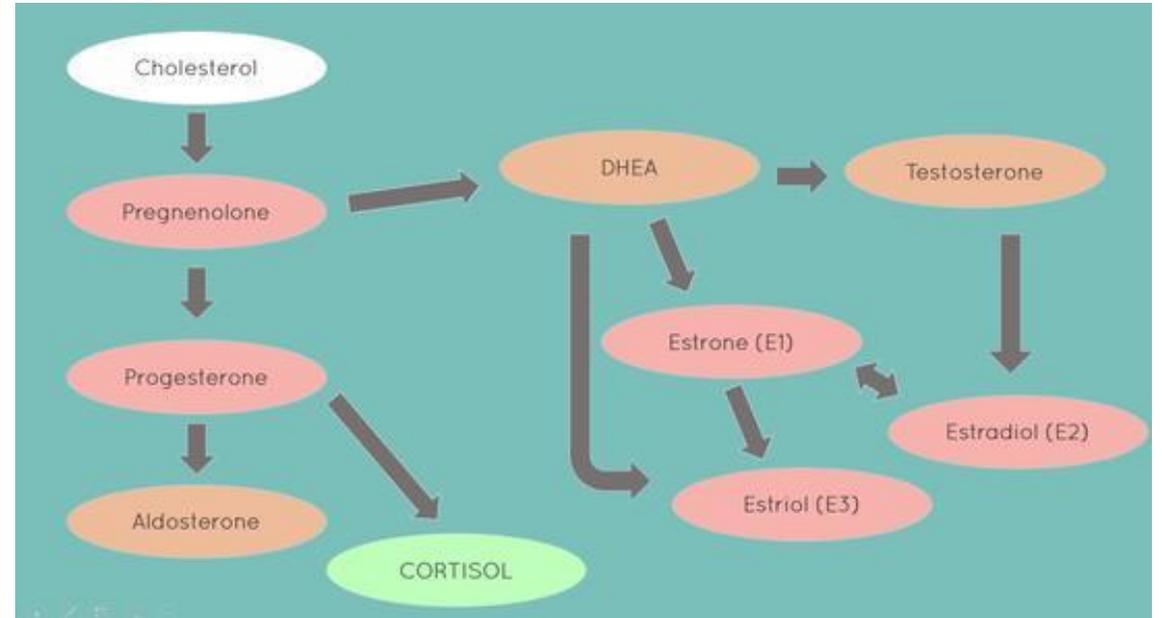


How we can help - Stress Management

Stress reduces production and effectiveness of sex hormones as it prioritises production of stress hormone, cortisol.

Ways to manage stress:

- Self-care- fill your cup before others
- Yoga
- Deep breathing
- Nature



Stress Management (2)

Other ways to manage stress

- **Connection** - encourage them to stay connected with their social network
- **Sleep** - restorative, uninterrupted sleep for emotional stability and cortisol control. **Free sleep apps** - Pillow, Sleep Cycle, Sleep time
- **Supplements** - B3, B6, vit D, magnesium, omega 3
- **Psychotherapy** - CBT, talk therapy
- **HRT** - helps improve mental health



Summary

- Mental health problems are common during menopause - actively ask and listen
- Approach should be holistic-pharmacological as well as non-pharmacological options
- Prepare a leaflet with written advice to share with the patient

