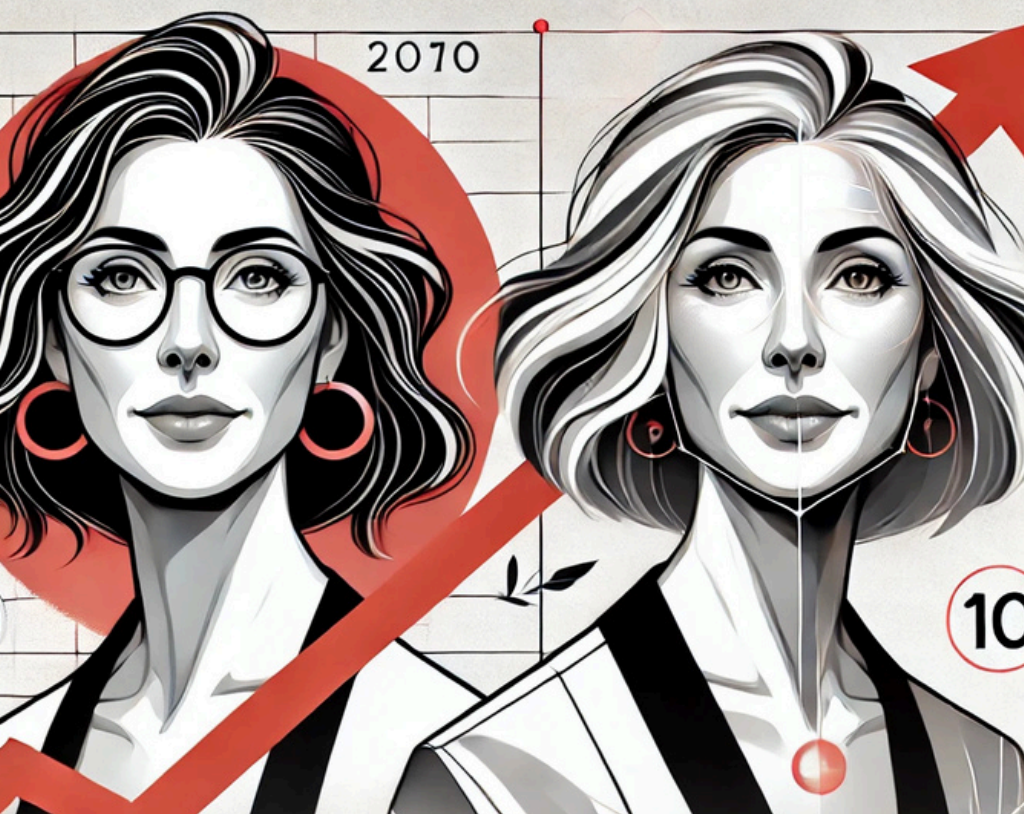


Pause & Shift: A Free Guide to the Menopause Transition

By Julie Cardoza, MS, LMFT





About this Guide

Disclaimer

This booklet is intended for informational and educational purposes only. It is not a substitute for medical, psychological, or therapeutic advice, diagnosis, or treatment. The content reflects general knowledge and lived experience related to menopause and midlife and is not tailored to any individual's specific needs or circumstances.

Always consult with qualified healthcare providers or licensed professionals for any concerns regarding your physical, mental, or emotional health. Julie Cardoza, LMFT, RYT, does not assume responsibility for any decisions made based on the information contained herein.

This guide is offered as a supportive resource and reflective companion, not a clinical intervention.



About this Guide

Inclusion

This guide centers the experience of women, while recognizing that people of various identities experience menopause

Land Acknowledgment

As a therapist, educator, and guide grounded in somatic and nervous system wisdom, I acknowledge that the work I offer—through reflection, regulation, and midlife renewal—takes place on the ancestral and unceded lands of the Yokuts and Mono peoples.

These Indigenous communities have lived in relationship with this land since time immemorial, and their ecological, cultural, and spiritual wisdom continues to shape this region. As I hold space for others, I also honor the histories, presences, and voices that are too often left out of dominant narratives.

I commit to practices of respect, relational healing, and accountability—within ourselves, our communities, and with the land itself.

The Numbers

This is a HUMAN issue



NOT MEASURED

Sudden Menopause



Not specifically defined in terms of percentage, but it is a significant cause of premature menopause.

9.3%

Premature & Early Menopause



Approximately 9.3% of women experience premature or early menopause, which includes those entering menopause before age 45 (combining premature menopause before age 40 and early menopause between ages 40-44).

10.92%

Perimenopause Syndrome



Approximately 10.92% of women in the 40-60 age range experience perimenopausal syndrome (study in Shanghai).

50 MILLION

Menopause



Approximately 50 million women enter menopause annually worldwide.

1.2 BILLION

Postmenopause



By 2030, an estimated 1.2 billion women will be postmenopausal worldwide.

While these are the direct impact Numbers, the menopause transition impacts all the population.

What is the menopause transition?

IT'S A WHOLE SEASON

The menopause transition **isn't one moment in time—it's a whole season of change that unfolds over years.** It affects your hormones, brain, nervous system, body, emotions, and sense of self.

Even though it happens to half the population, it's still widely misunderstood, under-discussed, and often dismissed. Let's change that—starting with clarity

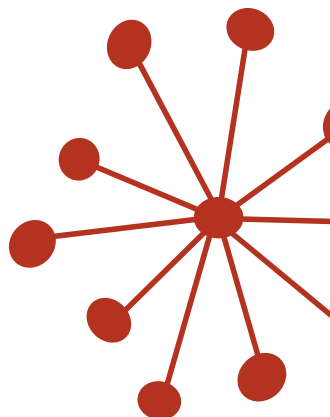
PERIMENOPAUSE

This is **the transitional phase leading up to menopause, and it can begin as early as your late 30s to early 40s.** Hormones like estrogen and progesterone fluctuate dramatically, leading to physical, emotional, and cognitive symptoms that can last for several years.

This **phase can feel disorienting because it's not linear—and many women don't realize what's happening until they're already in it.**

MENOPAUSE

Menopause is officially marked when you've gone **12 consecutive months without a menstrual period.** **The average age in the U.S. is around 51,** but it can happen earlier or later. This is when ovarian hormone production drops significantly.



Consider these stories

PERIMENOPAUSE

Marisa, 41, began experiencing irregular cycles, night sweats, and unexpected waves of anxiety that she couldn't attribute to external stressors. A high-functioning professional and mother of teens, she also noticed a growing sense of disconnection from her once-fulfilling roles. In therapy, it became clear she was navigating hormonal shifts layered with unprocessed grief and a deep questioning of identity.

Menopause and midlife mark both a biological and hormonal transition, as well as a psychological shift in identity and purpose.

MENOPAUSE

Tanisha, 52, entered menopause after not menstruating for over a year. She continues to feel worsening insomnia, emotional numbness, and a return of trauma-related symptoms she had previously managed. Her nervous system was dysregulated, and her symptoms were often dismissed as "just menopause."

Menopause often intersects with and reactivates trauma or nervous system dysregulation due to the profound hormonal, neurological, and psychosocial changes that can amplify underlying patterns of stress, unresolved trauma, or emotional vulnerability.

POSTMENOPAUSE

Carmen, 60, ten years postmenopausal is concerned about experiencing a "flat" mood, low energy, and feelings of invisibility. Although the acute symptoms of menopause have passed, she describes a sense of being "on the other side of everything."

Holding space and engaging in ritual can support postmenopausal individuals by fostering a sense of renewed meaning, belonging, and connection to self, community, and the larger cycles of life.



Identifying Common Symptoms of Perimenopause

COGNITIVE & EMOTIONAL SYMPTOMS

- Brain fog
- Difficulty concentrating
- Memory lapses
- Anxiety
- Depression
- Irritability or mood swings
- Panic attacks
- Low motivation
- Feeling emotionally overwhelmed
- Loss of confidence or identity

SLEEP & FATIGUE

- Insomnia or disrupted sleep
- Night sweats
- Fatigue / “Tired but wired” feeling
- Early morning waking

CARDIOVASCULAR & NERVOUS SYSTEM

- Heart palpitations
- Dizziness or vertigo
- Increased sensitivity to stress or noise
- Tingling extremities (paresthesia)
- Temperature dysregulation

NOTES

Symptoms of Perimenopause

VASOMOTOR SYMPTOMS	NOTES
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Hot flashes• Night sweats• Sudden heat or flushing• Chills or shivering spells	
WEIGHT & METABOLISM <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Weight gain (especially around the midsection)• Slowed metabolism• Blood sugar sensitivity	
REPRODUCTIVE & SEXUAL HEALTH <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Irregular periods• Heavier or lighter flow• Shorter or longer cycles• Vaginal dryness• Painful sex• Decreased libido	
MUSCULOSKETAL <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Joint pain or stiffness• Muscle aches• Breast tenderness• Headaches or migraines• Dry skin or hair• Hair thinning or loss	

Symptoms of Perimenopause

OTHER NOTABLE SYMPTOMS	NOTES
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Itchy skin• Burning mouth syndrome• Digestive shifts (bloating, IBS-like symptoms)• Increased allergies or sensitivities <div data-bbox="62 727 650 794">IMPORTANT REMINDER:</div> <p data-bbox="89 826 594 925">You may not experience all of these, and their severity can vary. But you are not imagining it—and you are not alone.</p>	

Mental Health Risks & Nervous System Shifts

Understanding the unseen terrain of the menopause transition

In our Western culture this phase of life has been medicalized. This means we talk about biological changes and symptoms like hot flashes and irregular periods. However, many of the most destabilizing symptoms, such as the psychological and neurological shifts —are often minimized or misunderstood.

Women in midlife are frequently told: “It’s just stress.”
“You’re probably depressed.”
“It’s part of aging.”

What if what you’re feeling isn’t a personal failing or just a mental health issue—but your nervous system adapting to a profound biological shift, inviting you into a new version of yourself?

Hormones & The Brain

Estrogen, progesterone, and testosterone impact the reproduction and the brain, nervous system, mood, and memory. **As these hormones fluctuate, many women experience:**

- Increased anxiety or panic
- Mood swings or emotional volatility
- Brain fog and difficulty concentrating
- Memory lapses or disorientation
- Sleep disruption and chronic fatigue



These are not signs of weakness. They are signs that your brain is literally rewiring itself and your nervous system recalibrating.

MENTAL HEALTH RISKS & NERVOUS SYSTEM SHIFTS

POLYVAGAL THEORY & TRAUMA REACTIVATION

The polyvagal perspective teaches us that the nervous system constantly scans for safety. When hormonal changes create instability, your body may shift into:

- Sympathetic states: hypervigilance, anxiety, irritability
- Dorsal states: withdrawal, numbness, emotional shutdown

If you've experienced trauma, chronic stress, or burnout before midlife, this transition can reactivate old patterns. What looks like depression may actually be a dorsal vagal response. What feels like spiraling anxiety might be your system trying to protect you.

Depression in midlife can stem from hormonal shifts, sleep disruption, and past trauma. It's important to assess both medical and mental health factors—like thyroid, estrogen, and nervous system patterns—to ensure accurate support and care.

MENTAL HEALTH RISK FACTORS

Even among high-functioning, insightful women, **perimenopause carries real mental health risks—including the highest rate of suicide attempts across the lifespan** during late perimenopause. Misdiagnoses like depression, ADHD, or panic disorder are common, and medications are often prescribed without assessing hormones. **You deserve care that sees the whole picture—your hormones, history, nervous system, and the profound changes of this life stage.**

Self-Inquiry and Advocacy is important.



A New Narrative: You're Not Broken

**"This isn't a breakdown.
It's Recalibration."
—Julie Cardoza, LMFT**

When you understand the nervous system, and when you honor this season as sacred—not shameful—you create space to regulate, reflect, and root into renewal

**You don't need to go
back to who you were.**

**You're allowed to
become someone new.**



Quick Checklist: Talking to Your Provider

- I'm experiencing mood, sleep, or energy changes that feel new.
- Could these symptoms be related to perimenopause?
- I'd like to understand how hormones affect my mental health.
- I want to explore options beyond just medication.
- Can you refer me to someone who specializes in menopause?



Self-Compassion & Embodied Sovereignty

RECLAIMING YOUR RHYTHM AND YOUR VOICE

Midlife isn't a slow fade—it's a powerful return. The menopause transition asks much of us. **It unearths what's been buried. It brings the grief we didn't know we were carrying.** It confronts the stories we've internalized about what it means to age, to soften, to shift. But **it also opens a sacred threshold—one where you are invited to come home to yourself.** This isn't about fixing what's wrong. It's about listening to what's real.

WHAT WE'RE UNLEARNING

Many of us have absorbed silent messages:

- "You're too emotional."
- "You should be able to push through."
- "You're not as needed anymore."
- "You're disappearing."

But the truth is: **this is not your unraveling—it's your reassembly.**

Menopause is not an erasure. **It's a reorientation. It's the moment where you stop living by who you had to be and start living by who you actually are.**

WHAT SOVEREIGNTY LOOKS LIKE

- **Honoring the limits of your body without shame**
- **Saying no without apology**
- **Reclaiming your energy** and time
- Living more from embodiment than obligation
- **Rooting into choices** that support your nervous system, not deplete it

• **Self-compassion isn't passive. It's revolutionary.**



AND MIDLIFE IS NOT A DECLINE—IT'S AN AWAKENING.

CONCLUSION

Embrace Your Menopause Transition Journey

Midlife is not a detour. It's a profound passage—a time to honor your body's wisdom, your heart's unfolding, and the woman you are still becoming. The menopause transition is not something to endure; it's something to embrace with tenderness, courage, and sovereignty. You are not alone on this path. **You are part of a greater cycle of renewal, rooted in rhythm, resilience, and becoming.**



"May you move forward with clarity, compassion, and your own sacred rhythm."

Mental Health & Midlife Support Resources

Menopause and midlife transitions deserve comprehensive support—physically, emotionally, and psychologically. Below are trusted resources to help you navigate this season with care, clarity, and connection.

In Case of Crisis

If you're in immediate danger or emotional distress, please seek support:

- 988 Suicide & Crisis Lifeline (U.S.): Dial 988 or visit 988lifeline.org
- Crisis Text Line: Text HOME to 741741
- National Domestic Violence Hotline: 1-800-799-SAFE (7233) or thehotline.org

Trauma-Informed Therapy & EMDR Support

- EMDR International Association (EMDRIA): Find certified EMDR therapists: www.emdria.org
- Psychology Today: Search by location, specialty, and insurance: www.psychologytoday.com
- Inclusive Therapists: Culturally responsive, trauma-informed providers: www.inclusivetherapists.com

Menopause-Literate Medical Care

- The North American Menopause Society (NAMS): Find NAMS-certified menopause practitioners: www.menopause.org
- Hormone Therapy Support: Ask your provider about estrogen patch therapy, bioidentical hormones, and individualized care—especially if you've had surgical or early menopause.
- Functional & Integrative Providers:
 - Institute for Functional Medicine (IFM): www.ifm.org
 - Integrative Women's Health Institute: www.integrativewomenshealthinstitute.com

Mental Health & Midlife Support Resources

Midlife Wellness & Education

- Dr. Lisa Mosconi – Neuroscience of Women’s Health: www.lisamosconi.com
- Center for Menstrual Cycle and Ovulation Research (CeMCOR): www.cemcor.ubc.ca

Whole-Person Support & Communities

- The Midlife Feast Podcast (Jen Salib Huber, ND, RD): A non-diet, intuitive, hormone-aware approach to midlife wellness: www.jennsalibhuber.ca
- Black Girl’s Guide to Surviving Menopause (Omisade Burney-Scott): Intergenerational storytelling and healing for BIPOC women: www.blackgirlsguidetomenopause.com
- Center for Mind Body Medicine: Trauma-informed, evidence-based mind-body practices: www.cmbm.org
- Menopause Café: Global meet-ups to talk openly about menopause, free of agendas or products: www.menopausecafe.net
- Red Tent Women’s Circles: Community-based gatherings for ritual, storytelling, and cyclical wisdom (search locally or start your own)

INFORMATION ABOUT WORKING WITH ME

► FOR THERAPY & EMDR IN CALIFORNIA:
JULIECARDOZA.COM

► FOR HOLISTIC MIDLIFE CONSULTING & WELLNESS PROGRAMS (NOT THERAPY):
HEARTSCAPESLLC.COM

