



Pathways to Peace and Wellbeing While Navigating Perimenopause

**Navigating Perimenopause: 5 Strategies Women Employ to Maintain the Peace for Psychology
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Perimenopause is a phase that brings a myriad of physical and emotional adjustments for those transitioning to menopause/te ruahinetanga. We are researching with women, and other people who menstruate, who are currently traversing this terrain. Here we share five strategies that they've developed to cultivate peace and equilibrium amidst the fluctuations. Note that all names have been changed to protect their identities.

1. Keeping friendships going

A powerful resource for our participants were their friends. Sharing experiences within these friendships normalised the journey and provided a safe space for discussions, ranging from medical options to emotional struggles. Sometimes it's hard to squeeze in friendships during the many commitments women have on a daily basis, but as Rita's story below illustrates, these friendships can offer solace and valuable insights.

"I feel quite fortunate that I do have a group that I run / walk with on a weekend quite religiously and we have for almost 10 years now. Several of those women have done the perimenopause journey so it has been something that we've shared a lot about and talked about, which has been really helpful and to appreciate that there are differences, that it's going to be different for everybody."

2. Recognising symptoms and planning for some upheaval

Participants described how they learn to recognise symptoms and plan around them. Susan uses an app "just to know when I'm due and what I might be doing around that time and planning my mood and my stresses and triggers and that sort of thing". Others described using this recognition to foster understanding within their families. For example, Ashley has learnt to identify her premenstrual symptoms and explains to her family what her capacities are during that time, delineating boundaries while reaffirming love and connection. She tells the children:

"I'm actually just being a human and this is all I have to give. I have 20% today and there's 80% that I can't, I just can't give and I'm sorry. I got 20%. That's all I can give. It's not your fault. And I love you, but I got 20% and that's it".

3. Recruiting support that validates you

A crucial aspect of navigating perimenopause is finding healthcare providers who listen and understand. Many of our participants used tracking apps as a way to present data to their healthcare provider, with mixed results. Anne's positive encounter with a receptive doctor underscores the importance of advocacy in healthcare.



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“I've shown my app to the doctor and she was really interested and looked through back through all the months and all the symptoms, and asked “what was that and what was that?” She was really good.”

Ava's account sheds light on the significance of mutual understanding within partnerships. By engaging in shared learning experiences, family members can offer empathy and support, dismantling societal taboos surrounding perimenopause.

“And I think it's not just for women. I think it's for men. My husband is the one who sat me down in front of a documentary about menopause [laughing] he needed to learn as much as I did what was going on or acknowledge what was going on. And we were both surprised by some of the things that we learned through this documentary, things that people just don't talk about or acknowledge. And I just I think we need a lot more empathy in that space.”

4. Recording and reflecting on feelings

Many of our participants found keeping a paper or electronic diary to track their feelings was helpful. But only when it didn't lead to rumination. Some enjoyed being reminded about the positive aspects of their day, while others found it was useful to identify what they were actually feeling. For example, Ngaire decided to stop ignoring the reflection prompt on her tracking app, with surprising results:

“I thought it would be a waste of time, like ‘Oh I don't need to write down how I feel. I know how I feel’. Whereas I didn't actually know how I was feeling.”

If you want to know more about the power of reflection, follow [this link](#) to a free-to-access research article.

5. Reframing the rage

Some people in perimenopause experience very strong feelings, including feeling a bit “ragey” as Ella put it. We noticed that it was hard for our participants to talk about those experiences, they could feel shameful and distressing. Some of our participants found it helpful to reframe these feelings as part of a transition into a more assertive womanhood, as Trudy said:

*“I'm just way less inclined to give a **** about what someone else thinks, and it's clearly related to this hormonal shift. As someone who struggles to say no, you know, I've been the kind of person who wants people to like me, and I felt like I have to be a certain way in order to be accepted. I feel like a lot of that has just been stripped away”*



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Having the last word

Many of our participants described having to advocate for themselves and struggling to find the support they need. If that's you, the Australian Menopause Society offers a list of doctors in Aotearoa New Zealand who have a special interest in women's health which you can find at the following link: <https://www.menopause.org.au/health-info/find-an-ams-doctor>

For psychology week, we've chosen to share some of the individual techniques that our participants are using to help them through a time of change. These are important solutions and show us the power and resilience of the women and non-binary identified people who shared their stories with us. But, we also want to recognise the wider social organisations shaping the possibilities for people who menstruate, including their experiences of perimenopause. So we leave the last word to Trudy and an invitation for us to imagine a more inclusive world that is not just *"based on men's embodied realities"*.

This research project is funded by Royal Society Te Apārangi. Research is ongoing, and we will be recruiting mothers and 17-18-year-olds later this year. For updates on the study, or to sign up to participate, we invite you to visit [our website](#)

