

Emotional Wellness Toolkit

Prepared by the Midlife and Menopause Society of Zambia

Practical Tools for Managing Stress, Anxiety, Mood Changes & Sleep During Menopause

Menopause is more than a physical transition. Changes in hormones, sleep, hot flushes and other symptoms can affect how you feel emotionally and mentally.

You may notice increased irritability, anxiety, tearfulness, low mood, feeling overwhelmed, difficulty concentrating or simply feeling less like yourself.

You are not failing, and you do not have to “just get through it”.

This toolkit offers simple strategies you can use in everyday life to support emotional wellbeing during perimenopause and menopause.

Remember: There is no one-size-fits-all approach. Try the strategies that feel realistic for you and build from there.

1. Your 5-Minute Stress Reset

When everything feels overwhelming, don't try to solve everything at once.

Try this five-minute reset:

Step 1 — Pause

Stop what you are doing and put both feet on the floor.

Step 2 — Breathe

Take a slow breath in and allow your exhale to be slightly longer than your inhale.

Repeat for 1–2 minutes.

Step 3 — Notice

Ask yourself:

What am I feeling right now?

You don't need to change the feeling. Simply naming it can help you understand what you need.

Step 4 — Ground yourself

Notice:

- 5 things you can see
- 4 things you can touch
- 3 things you can hear
- 2 things you can smell
- 1 thing you can taste

Step 5 — Choose one next step

Ask:

“What is the one thing I need most right now?”

It might be:

- A glass of water
- Five minutes outside
- Food
- Rest
- A conversation
- A shower
- A short walk
- Saying no to something

Small actions count.

2. When Anxiety Takes Over

Anxiety can feel physical as well as emotional. You may notice racing thoughts, a sense of dread, palpitations, tension, difficulty sleeping or feeling constantly “on edge”.

Menopause symptoms such as hot flashes and sleep disruption can interact with anxiety, sometimes creating a cycle where one makes the other worse.

Try the “Name, Challenge, Choose” technique

NAME

What am I thinking?

“Something is going to go wrong.”

CHALLENGE

Ask:

- Is this a fact or a fear?
- What evidence do I have?
- Am I imagining the worst possible outcome?
- What would I say to a friend thinking this?

CHOOSE

Replace the thought with something more balanced:

“I am feeling anxious right now. That doesn't mean something bad is going to happen. I can deal with the next step.”

This is based on the type of practical thinking and behaviour strategies used in cognitive behavioural therapy (CBT). CBT can be helpful for anxiety, low mood, stress and sleep problems.

3. Create an “Anxiety First-Aid” List

Write down five things that usually help you feel calmer.

My five calming strategies

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____
4. _____
5. _____

Keep this list somewhere easy to access.

When anxiety appears, **choose one strategy rather than trying to do everything at once.**

4. Managing Mood Swings

Mood changes can feel frustrating, particularly when they seem to happen unexpectedly.

Instead of judging yourself for having a difficult emotional moment, try creating a little space between the feeling and your reaction.

The 90-second pause

When you feel yourself becoming angry, upset or overwhelmed:

STOP

Don't immediately send the message, make the decision or start the argument.

BREATHE

Take several slow breaths.

MOVE

If possible, physically change your environment. Step outside, walk to another room or take a short walk.

RETURN

Come back to the situation when you feel more settled.

Helpful phrase:

“I am having a strong reaction right now. I don't have to respond immediately.”

5. Track Your Patterns

Mood symptoms can be influenced by many things, including hormonal changes, sleep, stress and life circumstances.

For two weeks, briefly record:

What to track	My notes
Sleep	_____
Mood	_____
Anxiety	_____
Stress	_____
Hot flushes/night sweats	_____
Caffeine/alcohol	_____
Exercise	_____
Menstrual cycle, if applicable	_____

You may begin to notice patterns.

The goal isn't to monitor yourself constantly. It's to learn what your body and mind are telling you.

6. Protect Your Sleep

Sleep disruption is extremely common during the menopause transition and can affect mood, concentration and resilience.

A consistent sleep routine, a comfortable bedroom environment and addressing factors such as night sweats can help.

Your menopause-friendly sleep routine

During the day

- ☐ Get some natural daylight.
- ☐ Move your body regularly.
- ☐ Avoid long or late daytime naps if they interfere with nighttime sleep.
- ☐ Try to manage stress before bedtime rather than taking worries to bed.

In the evening

- ☐ Keep a consistent bedtime and wake time.
- ☐ Start winding down before bed.
- ☐ Reduce stimulating activities and screens before bedtime.

- ☐ Consider reducing caffeine, particularly later in the day.
 - ☐ Be mindful of alcohol, which can interfere with sleep.
 - ☐ Keep the bedroom cool and comfortable.
 - ☐ Have breathable nightwear and bedding available if night sweats are a problem.
-

7. The “Worry Parking” Technique

Does your mind become busiest the moment your head hits the pillow?

Before bed, take five minutes to write down:

Things I'm worried about

Things I need to do tomorrow

One thing I can let go of tonight

Then tell yourself:

“I have written it down. I don't need to solve it tonight.”

This technique can help create psychological distance from worries at bedtime.

8. If You Wake at 3 a.m.

Don't immediately start calculating how many hours of sleep you have left.

Instead:

1. Take a few slow breaths.

2. Remind yourself that resting is still valuable.
3. Avoid repeatedly checking the clock.
4. If you are wide awake and becoming frustrated, get up briefly and do something quiet in low light.
5. Return to bed when you feel sleepy.

If sleep problems are persistent, consider speaking with a healthcare professional. **CBT for insomnia (CBT-I)** is a structured, evidence-based treatment and has been shown to improve menopause-related insomnia.

9. Move for Your Mood

Exercise isn't a cure-all, but regular physical activity can support overall physical and emotional wellbeing.

Choose movement you actually enjoy.

Try:

- Walking
- Swimming
- Dancing
- Cycling
- Yoga
- Pilates
- Strength training
- Gardening
- Stretching

You don't need a perfect workout.

The 10-minute rule

If you don't feel like exercising, commit to just **10 minutes**.

After 10 minutes you can stop — or continue if you feel like it.

Consistency matters more than perfection.

10. Make Space for Calm

Relaxation doesn't have to mean sitting cross-legged for an hour.

Try:

- 5 minutes of mindful breathing
- Gentle stretching
- A warm bath or shower
- Listening to calming music
- Time outdoors
- Journaling
- Meditation
- Yoga
- Tai chi
- Reading
- Gardening
- Creative activities

The NHS recommends activities such as yoga, tai chi and meditation as options that may support wellbeing during menopause.

11. Don't Do Menopause Alone

Connection matters.

Talk to:

- Your partner
- Friends
- Family
- Colleagues
- A menopause support group
- A therapist or counsellor
- Your healthcare professional

You don't always need someone to fix the problem.

Sometimes you simply need someone to say:

“I understand. You're not alone.”

Social connection and support can be an important part of emotional wellbeing during the menopause transition.

12. Create Your Personal “Wellbeing Menu”

Instead of waiting until you feel overwhelmed, create a menu of things that support you.

Things that calm me

Things that energise me

People who support me

Things that make me laugh

Places where I feel peaceful

Activities I want to do more often

Things I need to do less of

13. Set Boundaries Without Guilt

Menopause can be a time when you reassess what you have energy for.

It is okay to say:

“I can't take that on right now.”

“Let me think about it and get back to you.”

“I need some time for myself.”

“That's not something I can commit to.”

Protecting your time and energy is not selfish.

14. When Your Mood Feels Different

Occasional irritability, anxiety or emotional ups and downs can happen during menopause.

However, persistent or severe symptoms deserve attention.

Speak with a healthcare professional if you are experiencing:

- Persistent low mood
- Loss of interest or enjoyment
- Significant anxiety
- Panic attacks
- Difficulty functioning at work or home
- Persistent sleep problems
- Major changes in concentration or memory
- Symptoms that are affecting your relationships or quality of life

The Menopause Society notes that depression can occur during the perimenopause years and recommends professional assessment when symptoms such as hopelessness, loss of interest, sleep difficulties or problems with concentration persist.

Menopause symptoms should not automatically be dismissed as “just hormones”.

There may be several contributing factors, and effective treatments are available.

15. Your Daily Emotional Wellness Checklist

Every day, aim to:

- ☐ Get some daylight.

- ☐ Move my body.
- ☐ Eat regular, nourishing meals.
- ☐ Drink enough water.
- ☐ Take a few minutes to breathe and reset.
- ☐ Connect with someone.
- ☐ Do something that brings me pleasure.
- ☐ Give myself permission to rest.
- ☐ Create some distance from unnecessary stress.
- ☐ Give myself a realistic bedtime routine.

You don't need to tick every box.

One small positive action is still progress.

My Personal Menopause Wellness Plan

When I feel stressed, I will:

When I feel anxious, I will:

When my mood changes, I will:

When I can't sleep, I will:

The person I can talk to is:

The healthcare professional I can contact is:

One thing I want to do more of:

One thing I give myself permission to stop doing:

A Final Reminder

Menopause is a transition, not a personal failure.

You don't have to manage every symptom perfectly. You don't have to be positive every day. And you don't have to cope alone.

Start small.

Breathe. Move. Connect. Rest. Nourish. Ask for help when you need it.

Your emotional wellbeing deserves the same attention as your physical health.

When to Seek Urgent Help

If you feel unable to keep yourself safe, have thoughts of harming yourself, or feel that you are in immediate danger, seek urgent medical or emergency support in your country.

If you are experiencing severe or rapidly worsening mental-health symptoms, contact a healthcare professional promptly.

Medical Disclaimer

This toolkit provides general educational information and practical wellbeing strategies. It is not intended to diagnose or treat depression, anxiety, insomnia or any other medical or mental-health condition.

Menopause symptoms can overlap with other medical and psychological conditions. If symptoms are persistent, severe, new, or interfering with daily life, speak with a qualified healthcare professional.

