



Cognitive Behavioural Therapy for treating menopausal symptoms amongst Zambian women

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Empowering Zambian women through evidence-based support for menopause.

What is CBT?

CBT (Cognitive Behavioral Therapy) is a structured, talk therapy that helps people:

- Understand how thoughts, feelings, and behaviours are connected
- Develop practical coping skills
- Change unhelpful thinking patterns

CBT can be delivered:

- One-on-one with a therapist
- In groups
- Through guided self-help (books, digital programmes)

What is Menopause?

Menopause is a natural stage of life, usually occurring between ages 45–55, when menstruation stops. It is caused by changes in hormone levels. Key issues include:

- Hot flushes and night sweats (affecting 60%, often unmanaged).
- Mood changes, anxiety, and irritability (impacting 59% socially).
- Body pains (back pain in 66%, headaches in 45%), sleep problems, and fatigue.
- Urinary issues and reduced activity in daily living.
- Memory and concentration problems
- Changes in sexual wellbeing

How CBT Helps Menopause

CBT has been shown to greatly improve quality of life and, by targeting the mind-body link, CBT equips individuals with coping skills that significantly reduce the impact of menopausal symptoms on daily life.

- **Group CBT:** improves feelings of isolation, encourages shared learning, can be offered in community or clinic settings.
- **Individual CBT:** Good for personalized support, normalizes experiences, equips you with knowledge on menopause (symptoms and triggers), provides you with coping strategies.
- **Self-help CBT:** can be ideal for low-resource areas via books or apps.

Benefits of CBT last 3-6 months post-treatment, with no side effects and CBT works very well alongside HRT or as an alternative for women who cannot/prefer not to use HRT. It is generally recommended that CBT form part of a holistic approach to treating menopause symptoms.

Simple CBT Techniques for Daily Use

Try these evidence-based steps at home or in groups:

- **Track symptoms:** Note triggers (e.g., heat, stress, caffeine) in a journal to spot patterns.
- **Reframe thoughts:** Change "These hot flushes ruin everything" to "This passes in minutes—I can breathe through it."
- **Cooling breath:** Slow inhale (4 counts), hold (4), exhale (6) during flushes; reduces frequency.
- **Relaxation:** Tense-release muscles nightly for better sleep.
- **Activity planning:** Schedule enjoyable tasks despite low mood to build resilience.

Relevance for Zambian Women

In Zambia, many women may not have access to or be able to afford healthcare or medication options. Additionally, menopause is still considered a largely taboo subject amongst many Zambian women and is rarely openly discussed.

CBT offers a low cost, medication free alternative that helps to reduce shame and stigma, build women's confidence and encourages open discussion in a safe environment.

Getting Started in Zambia

- **Join groups:** Contact Midlife and Menopause Society Zambia for resources.
- **Self-help:** Use free online CBT menopause guides (e.g., NICE resources) or books.
- **Healthcare:** Ask nurses/doctors for referrals; combine with lifestyle tips like balanced diet and exercise.

