

Writing your (r)age

A set of hints, tips and writing exercises which might help you through some of the more challenging menopausal days

This pack is for Writers who are experiencing the menopause, or perimenopause (which brings with it numerous symptoms which can make writing feel very challenging).

It contains practical steps that might be helpful in ameliorating the worst of your symptoms so that you can carry on doing what you do best ... writing.

You should always seek professional medical and therapeutic support before embarking on a course of action.



It is VERY IMPORTANT to note that none of the advice or suggestions in this document constitutes medical advice. Seeking advice from a GP or specialist is essential. There are links to medical advice at the end of this document.

What is menopause and perimenopause

Perimenopause is when you have symptoms of menopause due to failing hormones, but your periods have not stopped. Perimenopause ends, and you reach menopause, when you have not had a period for 12 months. Physical symptoms can include hot flushes, sweats, fatigue, joint pain, urinary symptoms, altered cycles, and vaginal dryness. Cognitive symptoms can include anxiety, low mood, memory lapses, and poor concentration, often known as 'brain fog'.

Menopause, signalled by falling hormones, ends menstruation. Perimenopause brings fluctuating hormones, causing hot flushes, mood swings, and "brain fog". Cognitive shifts include memory lapses and concentration problems.

Physical changes involve altered cycles and joint pain. Emotional fluctuations, like anxiety, are common. Neurological effects impact mood, cognition, and sleep. This intricate mix of hormonal, physical, and neurological changes makes menopause a personal, transformative experience.

Why do we need this Document?

Brain Fog, Rage, Hot Flushes, Chronic Pain, Exhaustion, and more ... All of this has a massive impact on your ability to write - positive as well as negative.

This document exists to suggest practical steps that you might choose to follow, or try out, so that you can carry on with your job, and maybe even find new ways to express yourself creatively.

These tips have been crowd-sourced from menopause-experienced writers.

You probably know most of this already - but hopefully it's a useful reminder.

Remember - you're not alone.

Be Kind To Yourself

- Acknowledge and accept fluctuating energy levels: Recognise that some days will be more productive than others, and allow yourself to rest without guilt when needed.
- Prioritise rest and relaxation: Schedule regular breaks and downtime to recharge, whether it's a short nap, a relaxing stroll, or simply quiet time.
- Practise self-compassion: Treat yourself with the same kindness and understanding you would offer a friend going through a difficult time.
- Set realistic expectations: Adjust your writing goals and deadlines to accommodate your changing needs and avoid feeling overwhelmed.
- Nurture your physical and emotional well-being: Prioritise self-care activities that promote physical and emotional health, such as healthy eating, gentle exercise and mindfulness.
- Give yourself permission to say no: Learn to set boundaries and decline commitments that would add unnecessary stress or overwhelm to your life.
- Embrace the process of change: Accept that menopause is a natural transition, and allow yourself to adapt and evolve at your own pace.

Harness the Power

- **Navigate brain fog:** Periods of clarity, amongst the brain fog, can bring a sharper focus and renewed concentration to your writing sessions.
- **Transform sleep disruptions:** Use those moments of wakefulness during sleep disturbances as opportunities for quiet contemplation and the possibility of new ideas for your writing.
- **Channel emotional fluctuations:** The heightened emotional landscape of menopause, including periods of introspection or heightened sensitivity, can give your writing deeper emotional resonance and authenticity.
- **Harness hot flushes into vivid imagery:** The intensity of a hot flush can be a reminder of the body's power and change, potentially fuelling the creation of more vivid and visceral imagery in your descriptions.
- **Reframe fatigue:** Periods of fatigue can necessitate rest, which can inadvertently create mental space for ideas to percolate and unexpected creative solutions to emerge.

There is Hope

- Embrace the potential for renewed energy: Recognise that many people experience a surge in energy and creativity post-menopause, opening up new possibilities.
- Anticipate increased clarity and focus: Look forward to the potential for improved cognitive function and mental clarity as hormonal fluctuations stabilise.
- Explore new creative avenues: Anticipate the opportunity to pursue new writing projects or explore different genres with a fresh perspective.
- Cultivate deeper self-awareness: Embrace the potential for increased self-understanding and personal growth gained through the transition that happens during menopause.
- Foster stronger connections: Look forward to deeper relationships and connections with others as you navigate this phase of life.
- Reimagine your writing career: Consider this a time to reinvent and re-energise your writing goals, and to write from a place of experience.

Combating Brain Fog

- Prioritise quality sleep: Establish a consistent sleep schedule and optimise your sleep environment, try and keep screens and work out of the bedroom.
- Nourish your brain with a healthy diet: Focus on whole foods, including omega-3 fatty acids, while limiting processed foods, sugary drinks and alcohol to support brain health.
- Engage in regular physical activity: Increase blood flow to the brain and improve cognitive function by aiming for a combination of aerobic and strength training exercises. (Or just a nice walk in the fresh air!)
- Practise mindfulness and stress reduction: Incorporate mindfulness techniques and explore stress-reducing activities to combat the effects of chronic stress on brain fog.
- Organise and structure your tasks: Break down tasks, use planners, and create a distraction-free workspace to manage your workload effectively.

Managing Emotional Fluctuations

- Practise mindfulness and deep breathing: Use mindfulness techniques and deep breathing exercises to regulate emotional responses and reduce feelings of anger or frustration.
- Journal your emotions: Record your feelings and triggers in a journal to gain insight into emotional patterns and develop coping strategies.
- Establish healthy boundaries: Learn to say no and set clear boundaries to protect your emotional well-being and prevent feeling overwhelmed.
- Engage in regular exercise: Release pent-up energy and reduce stress through regular physical activity, which can help stabilise mood.

Alleviating Physical Symptoms

- Implement temperature regulation strategies: Wear layers of breathable clothing, use fans or cooling devices, and avoid triggers like spicy foods or alcohol to manage hot flashes.
- **Prioritise Rest: Sometimes you just need to stop ... and rest.**
- Incorporate gentle exercise and stretching: Engage in low-impact activities like walking, yoga, or swimming, and perform regular stretches to alleviate muscle aches and joint pain.
- Optimise ergonomics and posture: Adjust your workspace to promote good posture, use ergonomic supports, and take frequent breaks to minimise physical strain.
- Explore relaxation techniques and stress management: Practise relaxation techniques like deep breathing, meditation, or progressive muscle relaxation to reduce pain and fatigue exacerbated by stress.

Optimising Your Writing Environment

- Establish a consistent writing routine: Set specific times for writing each day, even if it's just for short periods, to create a predictable schedule that your body and mind can work with.
- Create a dedicated and comfortable writing space: Designate a quiet area free from distractions, which you enjoy being in, where you can focus solely on your writing, and ensure it's ergonomically sound.
- Surround yourself with objects that bring joy: Personalise your writing space with items that evoke positive emotions, such as favourite photos, plants, or comforting objects, to enhance your mood and creativity. Be kind to yourself by making your space comfortable.
- Minimise distractions and set boundaries: Turn off notifications, close unnecessary tabs, and communicate your writing schedule to others to create uninterrupted writing time.

Connecting with Other Writers

- Recognise the importance of shared experience: Understanding that menopause can be isolating, actively seeking community with fellow writers provides invaluable emotional support and practical advice.
- Engage in both online and in-person writer communities: Participate in online forums and local groups to share experiences, gain support, and foster a sense of belonging.
- Seek out mentorship or accountability partners: Find a mentor or accountability partner who understands your challenges and can provide guidance, encouragement, and feedback.
- Share your experiences and offer support to others: Be willing to share your own experiences and offer support to other writers who are going through similar challenges, fostering a reciprocal support network.

Writing Exercises

If you're struggling to get words down on paper, you could try taking a break from your current project and having a go at one of these exercises to see if you can get the words rolling again.

- "Memory Lanes": Combat brain fog and stimulate memory.
 - Exercise: Set a timer for 10 minutes and write about a vivid memory from your childhood or early adulthood. Focus on sensory details (sights, sounds, smells). Repeat with different memories.
- "Five Senses": Enhance focus and sensory awareness.
 - Exercise: Choose an object or a familiar setting. Write a description focusing on each of the five senses (sight, sound, smell, taste, touch) in turn.
- "Character Re-Write": Explore emotional depth and develop empathy.
 - Exercise: Take a character from a previous work or a favourite book. Rewrite a scene from their perspective, focusing on how hormonal changes might affect their thoughts and actions. For example - how did Jane Eyre cope with a hot flush?
- "Fragmented Story": Embrace non-linear thinking.
 - Exercise: Write a series of short, fragmented scenes or paragraphs that are not necessarily connected. Focus on capturing fleeting thoughts and images. Later, try to arrange the fragments into a coherent narrative or poem.

Further Resources

Menopause - NHS - This is a comprehensive resource covering symptoms, diagnosis, treatment, and lifestyle advice. A further resource is available here: Patient Info on Menopause

The British Menopause Society - This is the specialist authority for menopause and post reproductive health in the UK.

NICE Guidance - This is thorough and aimed at medical professionals but details the care you should be able to receive from your doctor.

British Association of Performing Arts Medicine - Can provide free consultation to those concerned with menopause symptoms - they specialise in the way health concerns affect work in the performing arts work and provide free clinical advice and onward signposting. Their training sessions may be of interest.

Dr. Louise Newson:

- Newson Health: <https://www.newsonhealth.co.uk/> This is the official website for Dr. Newson's clinic and resources.
- The Balance App: <https://balance-menopause.com/> This app, created by Dr. Newson, provides information and support for menopause.

Industry Minds - Offers mental health support and therapy specifically tailored for individuals working in creative industries.

Artist Wellbeing - Provides resources and support for the mental health and well-being of artists.

The Menopause Charity - A charity dedicated to providing accurate and unbiased information about menopause.

Gov.uk - Workplace adjustments: <https://www.gov.uk/reasonable-adjustments-for-disabled-workers> This provides information on reasonable adjustments, which are the basis of a needs assessment.

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