

Menopause and relationships



we can Relate



About this resource

Welcome to the menopause and relationships toolkit. If you're personally experiencing menopause or perimenopause then this resource is for you.

At the core of this resource is a focus on the dynamics of relationships during menopause and perimenopause, offering strategies to help you find balance with your loved ones during this time. For some, menopause brings a change in sex drive and mood swings, both things that can impact your relationship if you don't know how to talk about them.

Alongside advice and guidance from our relationship experts, you'll find practical strategies to help you thrive during this period, focusing on day-to-day solutions that encourage wellbeing. Towards the end, we focus on building resilience, emphasising ways to nurture strength in your relationships through collaboration and mutual support.

While this tool is designed for independent use, we recognise that successful relationships are not one-sided. They require effort from all parties involved. That means you might want to suggest your partner reflect on some of the questions in this toolkit too. And, if your exploration reveals areas that could benefit from additional support, remember, you're not alone. We are here to support you every step of the way. Discover more about relationship counselling options at [Relate.org.uk](https://relate.org.uk). You can count on us to support your journey towards healthier and more fulfilling relationships.

Self reflection

First, you'll start with self reflection, to explore your thoughts and feelings about menopause or perimenopause or perimenopause and your relationship.

Try to be honest and patient with yourself as you go through this process and remember there are no right or wrong answers.

How has your perception of yourself changed since entering the menopause or perimenopause stage?

Are there aspects of menopause or perimenopause that have empowered you or positively impacted your self-esteem?

How do you feel about your body now, compared to before the onset of menopause or perimenopause?

Menopause and self-esteem

Menopause often brings with it fluctuations in self-esteem. Cultivating good self-esteem during this time means harbouring a healthy and balanced belief about oneself -- affirming that you are, indeed, doing okay. Beyond that, self-esteem holds a substantial influence over relationships during menopause or perimenopause because, more often than not, we accept the love we feel we deserve.

Where does self-esteem come from?

Like much of our adult thoughts and behaviours, how we feel about ourselves mostly comes from how we were taught to feel about ourselves growing up.

If you grew up without much encouragement, or you weren't praised when you got things right, you might come to share this idea of yourself - that you're not all that great, and you're not deserving or worthy.

Working on your self-esteem

Here's our tips for how to develop good self-esteem...



Work on your relationships

As you navigate menopause or perimenopause, try sharing your feelings and experiences more openly with trusted individuals in your life.



Be kind to yourself

Dedicate time to appreciate your accomplishments and to acknowledge the distinctive qualities and strengths you possess.



Talk to someone

There's nothing wrong with getting a bit of professional support. Our counsellors can help you develop your self-esteem.

Relationships

First, you'll start with self-reflection, to explore your thoughts and feelings about menopause or perimenopause and your relationship.

For some, menopause brings with it a sense of sexual liberation, not having to concern themselves with unwanted pregnancy, or worries about having sex during menstruation. Others experience a loss of sexual desire and sexual satisfaction and cause them to feel they are no longer sexually attractive.

Navigating midlife and menopause can also be challenging due to physical and emotional changes, mood swings, family demands, and work-life balance. All of these things can impact your relationships.

This part of the workbook is designed to help you think through how menopause or perimenopause might be impacting your relationship. Try to be honest and patient with yourself as you go through this process and remember there are no right or wrong answers.

How has menopause or perimenopause affected your relationship with your partner?

Relationships

How have your feelings towards your partner evolved since the onset of menopause or perimenopause, and what might be the underlying reasons for this change?

What are the strengths in your relationship that have become more apparent through navigating the menopause or perimenopause journey together?

Relationships

What fears, if any, do you have about your relationships as you navigate the changes brought on by menopause or perimenopause, and how can you address these openly with your partner?

Can you recall a moment where your partner showed great understanding or empathy towards you during this transitional phase? How did that make you feel?

How has your intimacy been affected during this time, and what steps can you take together to foster a deeper connection?

Navigating vulnerability during menopause or perimenopause

Being vulnerable, particularly during a transformative period like menopause or perimenopause, can lead to deeper and more fulfilling relationships with those around you. However, reaching that level of openness, and understanding, and navigating the challenges that make vulnerability complex, is a sensitive task.

Why is being vulnerable so difficult?

During menopause or perimenopause, you might be experiencing a spectrum of new feelings and uncertainties, possibly even changing how you perceive yourself. Sharing these deeply personal aspects can mean relinquishing some control over how others perceive you, potentially altering an image that took years to build. Despite this, embracing vulnerability can pave the way for a richer understanding and deeper trust in your relationships.

How to be more vulnerable

At the heart of the process is getting into the habit of expressing - and listening to - emotions. That might be as simple as once a day, expressing some element of how you're feeling, sincerely and openly. One of the things that can be tempting if you struggle with being vulnerable is sharing your emotions along with some kind of negative behaviour - like saying how you feel, but then immediately making a joke, or apologising. If you can, try to simply express yourself, and then stay in that moment.

And for the person hearing this, it can help to mirror this process. People who struggle with vulnerability often struggle to accept feelings too. Again, it can be tempting to make jokes or express some sense of awkwardness - or even to respond negatively or say something defensive. But part of getting used to being open is allowing yourselves to sit in the moment and allow it to breathe.

You may find being more vulnerable with your friends makes it easier to do the same with your partner. It can make the habit feel like one you're practising generally - not one you only have to focus on in intense bursts, or when the stakes feel higher.

How to navigate heated discussions during menopause or perimenopause

Disagreements are natural in any relationship, and during the menopause or perimenopause, fluctuating hormones can sometimes heighten emotions, leading to more frequent or intense disputes. It's crucial to be aware of this and to work proactively to maintain healthy communication with your partner.

How can you break free from negative cycles? Here are our top tips for navigating heated discussions during this transitional phase.

Don't let things get heated in the first place

The best way to avoid an argument is to not let things get to the point where one is likely. On a basic level that might mean trying to recognise and address any negative patterns of communication that you and your partner might have gotten into. One example is the use of exaggerated language like 'we never', or 'it's always like this'. This can increase the chance of your partner feeling like they're being attacked and make it more likely they'll respond defensively.

Stop and take a step back

Sometimes avoiding an argument can mean swallowing your sense of pride and putting peace over justice - prioritising resolution over satisfaction. This means seeing what's about to happen and rejecting the temptation to allow it to continue, by walking away until you're ready to approach things again in a more constructive manner. This can be enough to make the difference between a discussion that goes off the rails and one that you're able to bring back under control.

Examine from a distance

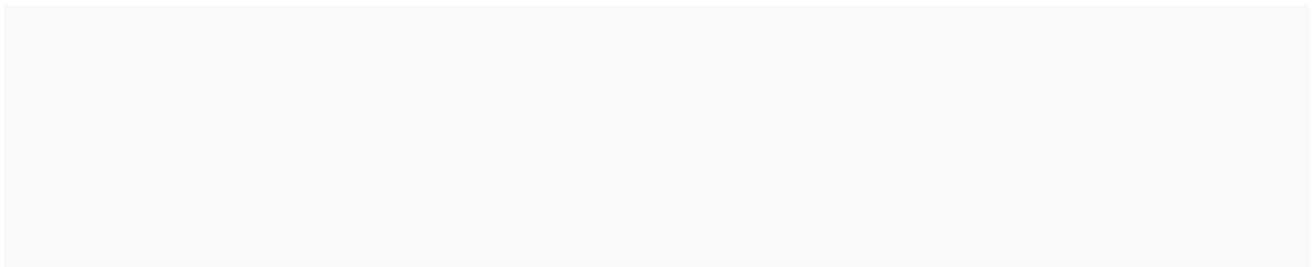
One of the techniques practiced in a popular form of therapy called Cognitive Behavioural Therapy is attempting to interrupt certain patterns of negative thinking by avoiding engaging automatically with them, before examining them from an objective standpoint. The same principle can apply when it comes to arguing in relationships. When we argue with our partners, it's not uncommon for the actual cause of the argument to be different from the apparent cause. Ask yourself, 'why are we actually arguing?'

Communication

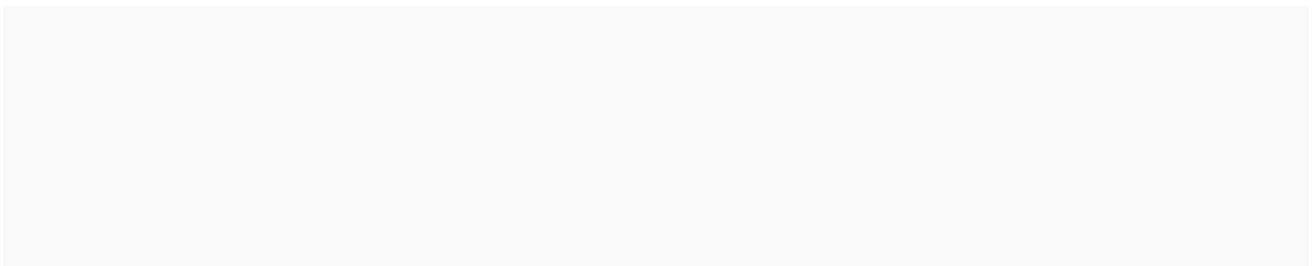
As you navigate the changes brought on by menopause or perimenopause, open and empathetic communication with your partner and support network becomes more important than ever.

In this section, we'll explore strategies and offer guidance to foster understanding, improve dialogue, and strengthen your relationships.

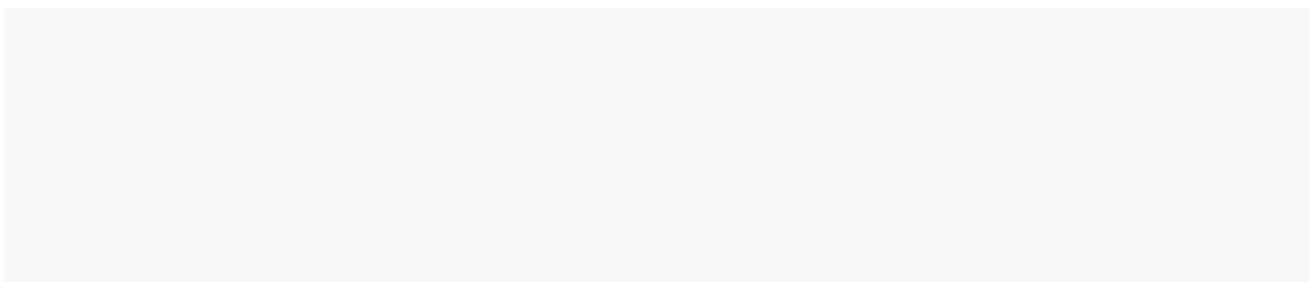
How comfortable do you feel discussing menopause or perimenopause with your partner, family, or friends?



Can you think of practical examples where communication about menopause or perimenopause has led to a positive outcome?



How do you resolve conflicts in your relationship?



Are you communicating effectively?

Differences between partners are rarely the problem. It's how those differences are dealt with that's important. That's why it's so crucial that you're able to communicate effectively.

When you talk to a partner in a way that's clear, constructive, and collaborative, you can avoid so many arguments and misunderstandings that might otherwise cause trouble. This quiz helps you work out what your communication strengths and weaknesses are and suggests practical ways you can start to improve.

How often would you say you and your partner sit down to talk uninterrupted in an average month?

- | | |
|--|---|
| A. Barely. We don't have enough time to sit down and chat. | C. We talk about the important stuff when we need to. |
| B. Occasionally, but not frequently. | D. We make time to sit down and talk regularly. |

Do you have a tendency to steer clear of certain subject areas (eg sex, money, chores) to avoid conflict?

- | | |
|---|--|
| A. Yes, most of the time. It's easier. | C. Occasionally, but I do try to be open about things. |
| B. Quite a lot, as talking about these topics can mean we end up arguing. | D. Nothing is off limits between my partner and I. |

How easy is it for you and your partner to apologise to each other?

- | | |
|---|---|
| A. We don't tend to apologise, we let things blow over. | C. It's not always easy, but we do usually manage it. |
| B. Not very easy. We have a tendency to argue about who should apologise first. | D. We don't sweat the small stuff and tend to say sorry relatively quickly. |

When you feel that your partner has treated you unfairly, how do you tend to react?

- A. I go quiet until my partner realises I'm upset.
- B. I tend to get angry and remind them of all the other stuff they've done that has upset me.
- C. I get distressed for a while, but eventually I calm down and let them know what's upsetting me.
- D. I'm specific about what's upsetting me so we can deal with it effectively.

When your partner tells you you've upset them, you tend to...

- A. Shut down and back away until things blow over.
- B. Remind them they're not perfect either.
- C. Get anxious as I don't like confrontation.
- D. Listen to what they are saying, acknowledge their feelings and talk through it.

How much would you say you trust your partner?

- A. Not much at all. They've let me down in the past.
- B. Sometimes I trust them, but there are times when I test them to see if they're telling the truth.
- C. I trust them most of the time.
- D. Trust is the basis of our partnership - and we trust each other to be honest.

When it comes to compromising, how flexible would you say you are with your partner?

- A. It's my way or the highway!
- B. We often end up in a power struggle where neither of us is willing to give way.
- C. Sometimes I give in to make things easier.
- D. More often than not, we try and meet each other halfway.

How quickly do you and your partner tend to resolve disagreements and move forward?

- A. Resentments tend to hang around and we can get stuck in a pattern of not talking.
- B. We can spend a long time arguing about who's right before coming to an uneasy truce.
- C. We don't usually let things drag on and usually just let the argument go.
- D. Quite quickly, we prefer to nip things in the bud rather than let them get out of proportion.

Results

Mostly As or Bs

You may have developed a defensive communication style with your partner.

Your tendency may be to argue first and ask questions later. You may also have a habit of criticising to try to score points, meaning rows often end up going round in circles.

It can be difficult at first, but there are steps you can take towards more effective and rewarding communication with your partner. You have a choice: you can either attack or you can talk. Talking is much more likely to result in the issue being resolved.

When you do talk, try to take responsibility for your own emotions, rather than blame everything on your partner. Use 'I' statements - 'I feel upset about...' rather than 'you' statements like 'you always...' or 'you never'.

If, in the heat of the moment, it all gets a bit much, take a break before you say something you'll regret. And agree to take turns to speak and not to interrupt one another.

Results

Mostly Cs

You work hard to communicate effectively with your partner, but sometimes feel a little anxious tackling more tricky subjects.

One or both of you may feel uncomfortable with confrontation and do all you can to avoid it. As a strategy, this works on the surface - as you both appear to maintain a calm exterior - but underneath there may be worries that just don't get expressed.

Burying feelings is not good for mental or physical health. Honest, constructive communication is about working as a team.

Try setting aside a specific time when you're both feeling relaxed to share any issues. This can enable you to more confidently express your feelings. If you're feeling unsure, try using 'I' statements - 'I feel upset when we fight' - rather than 'you' statements - 'you tend to criticise me'. That way, you're taking responsibility for your emotions and your partner is less likely to feel like they're being attacked.

Mostly Ds

You have developed an open and honest communication style with your partner.

You've got into the positive communication habit of nipping problems in the bud. You make time to talk regularly and you take the time to really listen to what each other is saying.

For you, communication is not about winning arguments or scoring points, it's about responding to each other, nurturing your connection and working as a team so the relationship is rewarding for both of you. Well done!

Tips for talking about menopause or perimenopause

Talking about menopause or perimenopause with your partner, family, or friends, is something you might find difficult. Here are some strategies that might make it a bit easier to get the conversation started.

Choose a comfortable setting

Find a quiet, comfortable space where you won't be interrupted. A familiar and relaxed environment can foster open and honest conversations.

Educate and share resources

Before diving into personal experiences, share educational materials or resources on menopause or perimenopause with those you want to speak to. This gives a gentle introduction that helps in setting a solid foundation for understanding what you're going through.

Be patient and give space

Understand that your loved ones might need time to digest the information. Give them space to process and come back with their thoughts and questions.

Share your personal experiences

Speak from your perspective, using "I" statements to convey your feelings and experiences without putting the listener on the defensive.

Seek feedback and encourage questions

Invite your loved ones to share their feelings and concerns openly. Encourage them to ask questions.

Keep the conversation going

Menopause is a journey, not a one-time event. Make communication about it a regular part of your interactions, allowing room for evolving feelings and experiences.

Involve them in your coping strategies

Share your coping mechanisms and involve them in your strategies, helping to create a supportive and understanding environment.

Exercise: Shared journalling

Earlier in this toolkit, we talked about menopause or perimenopause being a journey, not a one-time event. Shared journalling can be a great way to keep the conversation going. Create a shared journal with your partner where you can both note down your feelings and experiences regularly. Set a regular time to sit down and discuss what you've written. Not sure how to get started? Here are some prompts you might find helpful...

Prompt 1

Describe a moment this week where you felt particularly connected to your partner. What were you doing? How did it feel?

Prompt 3

What is something you appreciate about your partner's support during your menopause or perimenopause journey?

Prompt 5

Describe a time this week when you felt misunderstood or not heard. How can you communicate your feelings more effectively in the future?

Prompt 2

Are there changes in your emotions that you've noticed this week? How have these changes affected your perception of yourself?

Prompt 4

List any worries or concerns you have about your relationship as you navigate the menopause or perimenopause together?

Prompt 6

Note down any dreams, aspirations, or plans you have for the future as you envision your life post-menopause or perimenopause.

Intimacy

Navigating intimacy during menopause or perimenopause can be a journey of rediscovery. In this section, we invite you to explore the reflective questions designed to help you and your partner communicate openly and nurture a fulfilling intimate relationship amidst the changes brought on by menopause or perimenopause.

What changes, if any, have you noticed in your sexual desire and responsiveness since the onset of menopause or perimenopause?

How can you communicate with your partner about the changes you're experiencing without feeling embarrassed or uncomfortable?

Feeling insecure during menopause or perimenopause

Feeling insecure in your relationship can be really painful and upsetting, and feeling that way as you go through menopause or perimenopause can be even more distressing. You might find yourself constantly fretting over the changing dynamics in your relationship or struggling with trust issues stemming from shifts in your own body and libido.

Where does insecurity come from?

If you and your partner haven't been communicating effectively about the physical and emotional changes happening during this phase, you might start to feel like you're drifting apart. Insecurity can also stem from changes in your relationship. For instance, if you've moved in together or recently married, you may be feeling all kinds of new strains and pressures. If you aren't able to discuss these together, you can start to feel less confident in your ability to work as a team.

It can also come from issues surrounding self-image or self-esteem. We can sometimes carry feelings from past relationships into our current one – including ones with family members.

What can you do to address insecurity?

Keep things relaxed

Frame things positively to ward against defensiveness.

Say how you feel, not how you think they make you feel

Yep, it's those 'I' phrases again. If you're both blaming each other for everything, you won't get anywhere.

Make a plan

Think beforehand about what you want to say.

Pick the right moment

Try to talk when things are going well, not badly.

Listen

Even if what your partner has to say is difficult to hear, try to stick with it.

Come back to it

These things are rarely solved in one chat. It takes time and effort, so revisit things in a month to see how you're each getting on.

Coping strategies

Finally, it's time to translate your insights into coping strategies.

Based on your self reflection, is there anything you want to do or approach differently?

What are some specific actions you can take to improve the things that aren't where you want them to be?

How can you support yourself to achieve this? How can your partner support you?

Moving forward...

Strengthening our relationships isn't something we do once. It's a lifelong exercise. Now is a great time to set a date for a future audit, maybe a few months into the future. Decide now what you want to focus on in your next audit. You might even want to set some goals for your relationship in the future, so you can reflect on how far you've gone towards achieving them.

Chat to us

Hopefully this resource has helped you reflect on the way menopause or perimenopause is affecting your relationships.

You might have realised that your relationships need a bit of TLC - and that's totally normal. So if you need a chat, we're here for you.

Head to relatebooking.as.me/OneSessionTherapy to discuss your answers with one of counsellors specifically trained in supporting people around menopause and relationships. Use the code AUDIT for £10 off a 60 minute session.

we can Relate