

Perimenopause & the Workplace

INSTITUTE
of
ORGANISATIONAL
PSYCHOLOGY

Te Kabui Mātūi Hinengaro ā te Wāhi Mahi



EVOLUTIO

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Objectives

01

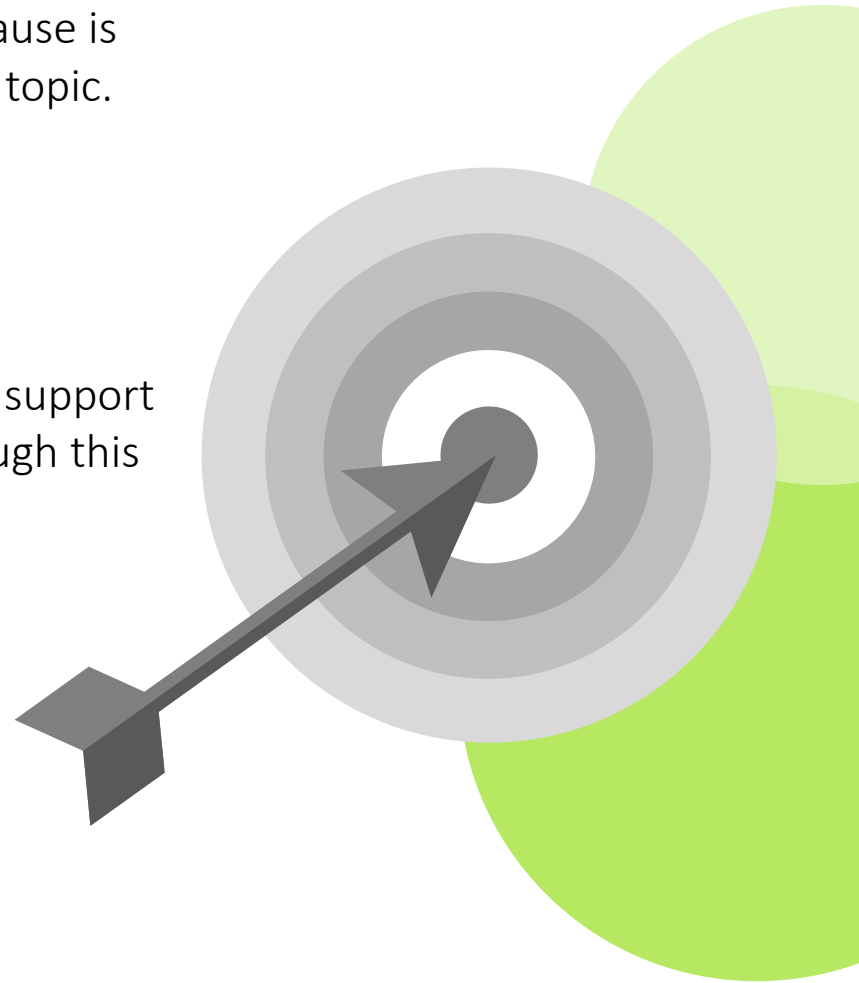
Increase awareness of what perimenopause is and why we should be interested in this topic.

02

Reduce the stigma of talking about perimenopause.

03

Provide attendees with ideas on how to support both workplaces and people going through this transition.



Agenda

- Demystifying perimenopause - what it is, a little history,
- What's happening...and the impact
- Breaking the silence: why we need to reduce the stigma
- Workplace implications
- What can workplaces and leaders do to create a supportive environment



What is perimenopause

Also referred to the menopause transition

- When a person's (who has a uterus and ovaries*) body starts to transition to menopause.
- Perimenopausal means "around menopause"
- Perimenopause characterised by hormonal fluctuations,
- Transgender, non-binary and intersex people can also be affected because of hormonal changes, very little research or support available for these groups.
- 'Menopause' is 1-day in a person's life
- Occurs across a wide age range and duration:
 - Many people experience symptoms between 45-55years old, but can be in 30s or earlier for medical reasons.
 - Duration of symptoms average of 4-10 years



Other stats to ponder on

- By 2025 more than 1 billion women around the world will be post-menopausal (North America Menopause Society)
 - *“why did no one tell me it would be like this”*
 - *“That was part of the taboo. You were supposed to suffer in silence.” Dr Nachtgall when talking about her mother’s experience.*
- NZ 2023 census 363,000 women / Wahine between 45-55 years old
- 40 – 50s are characterised by multiple demands
- Corporate world, 40 and 50s is often a pivotal point of their careers and the next step will



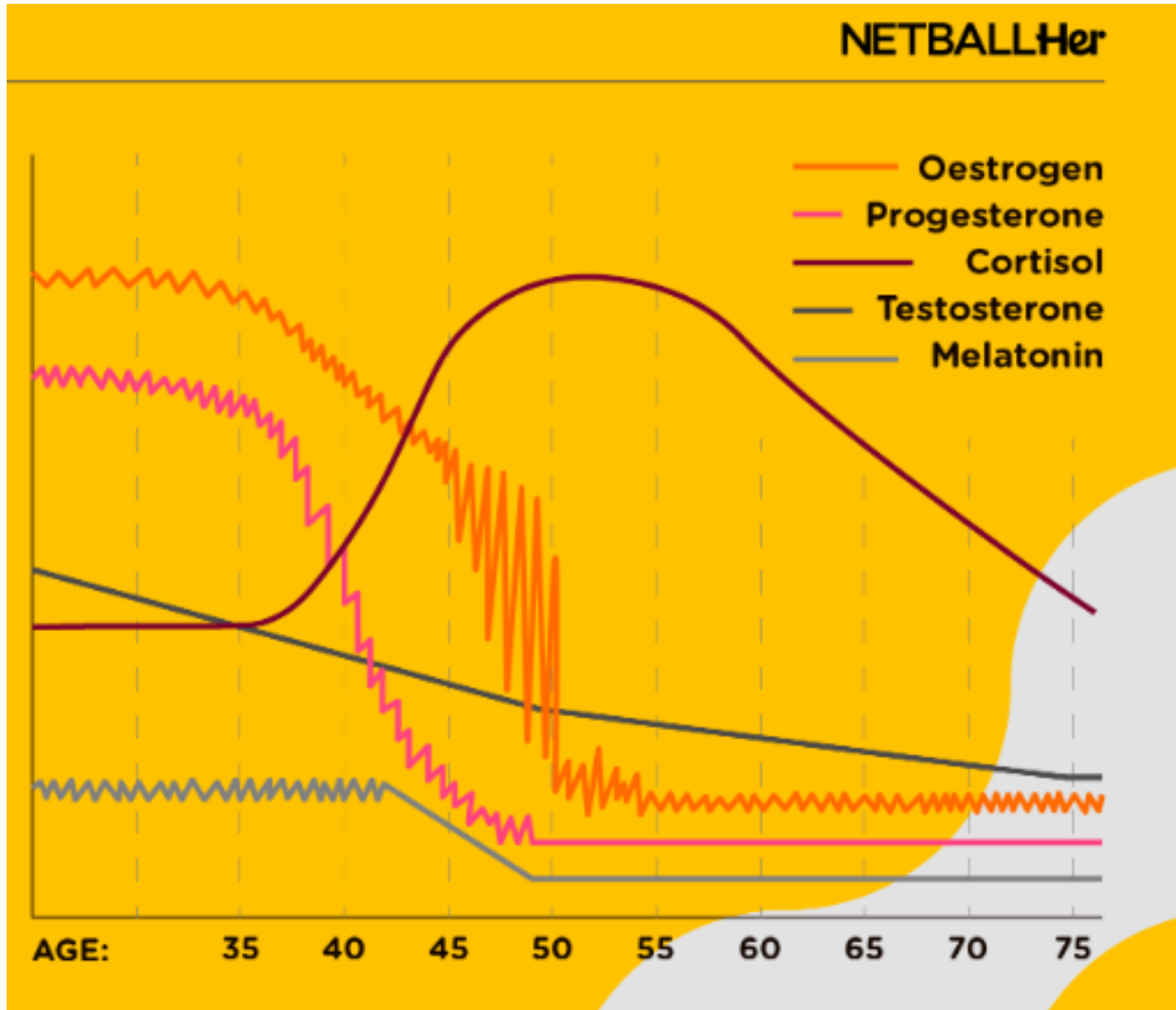
A little history

From “women’s hell” to Age of Renewal”. From NY times article

- 1820 the term ‘menopause’ began to be used by French physician Charles de Gardanne
- Prior to this it was referred to as “women’s hell”, “green old age”, and the “death of sex”.
- 19th century knew very little about perimenopause, but this didn’t stop ‘medical’ claims being made what caused it (bad news or working in ‘unwomanly’ occupations), its impact (swelling on breasts, mental illness, stealing, murdering...) and how to treat it.
- First half of the 20th century the hormone oestrogen was discovered. While a relationship was found, cultural ideas didn’t shift much.
- **1980s** longitudinal studies deepened knowledge about the role of hormones during perimenopause. In particular – it’s a turbulent process (not just declining oestrogen as originally thought).
- There is a **menopause management vacuum** (Dr Faubian, 2021) – limited practitioners that specialise in its management.
- There are a lot of ‘fem-tech’ treatments out there.
- In 2021 an online Arabic dictionary changed the description of menopause from “age of despair” to “age of renewal”



Beneath the surface...



Aside from reproduction

How these hormones serve us

Oestrogen – serves the brain, bone, heart and immune function.

Progesterone – important for body and mental health.
Calming hormone.

Cortisol – regulates stress response, influences metabolism and sleep-wake cycle

Testosterone – maintains muscle and bone strength, heart health, energy levels, sleep.

Melatonin – controls our sleep-wake cycle and influences mood and immune function



And then there is...the reproduction element

A major transition

Physically.....

Mentally, for some this is a major change :

- Identity
- Society's views etc



Common symptoms

Lists range can go up to 56 symptoms – here are a few

- Insomnia
- Anxiety
- Anaemia
- Depression
- Mood swings
- Brain fog
- Forgetfulness
- Loss of motivation
- Apathy
- Loss of skin elasticity
- Night sweats
- Incontinence
- Hair thinning
- Hair growth
- Loss of bone density
- Joint and muscle pain
- Arthritis
- Loss of muscle
- Lethargy
- Headaches
- Weight loss or gains
- Changes in libido
- Pain in genital area
- Cycle irregularity
- Hot flashes
- And more....

Even if a person doesn't experience symptoms the health changes can still occur such as osteoporosis, cholesterol changes, blood sugar level changes



“Most people tend to instantly think of hot flushes and sweats when it comes to the menopause.

In truth, it's the impairment to mental wellbeing and brain function which can be the most debilitating. This is where workplaces should really be focusing their efforts when it comes to supporting their employees”.

Gidon Liberman, Deputy Medical Director at Fertifa



Why is this relevant for psychologists?

- Study of 2000 women between ages of 46-60 (carried out free women's health app called Health & Her) found:
 - 1 in 10 women experience suicidal thoughts because of perimenopause
 - 1/3 of the 2000 hadn't sought help for their symptoms
 - 8 out of 10 do not discuss mental health issues with their partner or spouse
 - 6 out of 10 were experiencing low energy and motivation
 - 50% were suffering low mood and depression
 - 4 in 10 were experiencing anger and mood swings
 - 1/3 were grappling with feelings of worthlessness

Many examples of studies such as this.....



The management challenge

How women can manage their symptoms

- General Practitioner BUT not always helpful
- Flawed research still being relied on by some
- **Ability to research and advocate for yourself** is important (equity and time challenge)
- Specialist GPs are knowledgeable but expensive and means going 'around your own dr'



The management challenge cont'd

How women can manage their symptoms

- Hormone replacement therapy is an option

BUT

There is a worldwide shortage of patches and it can take 6 months for the body to adapt.

- Progesterone was only funded mid-last year
- Some women can't take HRT or don't want to...
- Lifestyle changes are needed but often not enough...
- There is an industry of expensive 'natural alternatives' but the science doesn't tend to back them, or the quality of them



Why we need to reduce the stigma

"The changes, the highs and lows and the hormonal shifts, there is power in that. But we were taught to be ashamed of it and to not even seek to understand it or explore it for our own edification, let alone to help the next generation." Michelle Obama.

" For many women, our level of life satisfaction INCREASES post-menopause. Mental health improves, and women are generally happier about their life than before menopause. However, unlike other major life transitions, there is very little sympathyIn fact we are ridiculed for our irrationality and hot flushes.....Reduced to a caricature"

Sarah Tuckett , psychotherapist



Why reduce the stigma?

If we're not able to talk about it, and the medical professionals aren't all up to date/aligned, how do people know where to look for help and support?



Specific to work

Vodafone, Menopause Toolkit (2021) states...

Vodafone published new independent research conducted by Opinium, surveying 5,012 people in five countries aged 18+ who had experienced menopause while at work. Opinium found that:

62%

Nearly **two-thirds of women** (62%) who experienced menopause symptoms said that this **impacted them at work**, rising to four in five (79%) for 18-44-year olds.

33%

A third (33%) of those who had symptoms said they **hid this at work**.

66%

Two-thirds (66%) of women agreed there should be **more workplace support** for women going through menopause.

44%

44% of women who experienced menopause symptoms said they have felt **too embarrassed to ask for support in the workplace**, rising to 66% for 18-44-year olds.



New Zealand's Context

Global Women and ANZ (NZ) reported research conducted by NZ Institute for Economic Research

- $\frac{3}{4}$ of kiwi women experience perimenopause symptoms felt it is negatively impacting on their work, yet only 11 % had talked to their manager about it.
 - Concentration and brain fog were most common reasons
 - Yet 94% of employers said they had no concerns with their employee's performance
 - Anecdotally this lines up with those I have had discussions with
- 90% of employers said they were comfortable to discuss about the topic, but almost 40% said they needed more information.
- Flexible work conditions, reducing hours of work were solutions listed.

The Health and Safety at Work Act (2015) requires employers to provide a safe work environment and this includes managers making adjustments to accommodate health conditions such as menopause



Workplace implications

UK workplace-healthcare provider Simply Health surveyed more than 2000 women aged between 40-60.

- 23% considered resigning due to the impact of perimenopause
- 14% said they are planning to hand in their notice.

Mayoclinic study in US estimates the costs in lost worktime per year USD1.8 billion

"I know first-hand how awkward it can be to talk about your menopause symptoms whilst at work – it's one of the main reasons why I left my own job."

Katie Taylor, The Latte Lounge



A topic of inclusivity...

Considering the impact perimenopause can have, what can be done in workplaces?

- Organisational level
 - Work environment and culture
 - Employment conditions
 - Policies and practices
- Person centred approach
- Leaders centred approach
- Peer centred approach
- Reducing the stigma
- Anything else to....support people to be engaged, retained and help them perform?



Examples?

Vodafone

Person centred approach

- EAP
- Menopause support groups
- Line manager training
- HR also equipped
- Reasonable accommodations:
 - Work environment
 - Privacy and quiet spaces
 - Flexibility and increased breaks

Manager centred approach

Colleague centred approach

Family & friends centred approach

Repeated stating of the stigma research and importance of overcoming this



Resources

- This Changes Everything (NZ book), by Niki Bezzant
- <https://www.tvnz.co.nz/shows/sex-mind-and-the-menopause> (investigative documentary available for streaming)
- Balance website by Newson Health. www.balance-menopause.com
- The Dr Louise Newson Podcast.
- Dr Mary Claire Haver: How to Navigate Menopause & Perimenopause, Huberman lab (Podcast)
- Work-life balance: What's that. National Advisory Council on the employment of women (Mana Wahine, Mana Mahi) <https://www.women.govt.nz/sites/default/files/2022-05/work-life-spread%20%281%29.pdf>
- Why is perimenopause still such a mystery? Jessica Grose. The New York Times
- Menopause Toolkit, Vodafone (2021) <https://www.vodafone.com/sites/default/files/2021-10/vodafone-menopause-toolkit.pdf> [20your](#)
- Menopause at work, Support Guide for Managers, University of Otago
- ANZ article <https://news.anz.com/new-zealand/posts/2023/10/quarter-of-kiwi-women-say-menopause-halves-work-efficiency>





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