



Harley Street at Home
MENOPAUSE

Anxiety Management in Menopause



Managing anxiety through menopause is no easy task. Symptoms may be overlooked as something other than hormonal fluctuations, and it can be difficult to get the help you need to take control of your menopause journey.

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Introduction

This resource, alongside the 'Anxiety Management in Menopause' course, aims to introduce simple evidence based tools and strategies to help manage the experience of anxiety in menopause.

The information provided isn't medical advice and isn't intended to take the place of seeing a GP or other licensed health professional.

Moreover the tools and strategies aren't a substitute for counselling, mental health care or medical treatment of any kind.



Rachel Willett – Course Leader

Rachel Willett is a Transformational Therapist and Coach, specialising in helping people overcome low self-worth and to live with courage, confidence and joy. In particular, Rachel enjoys working with women in perimenopause and menopause to help them rediscover themselves and develop their emotional resilience.

Having trained extensively, Rachel is an Advanced Rapid Transformational Therapist, Certified and Clinical Hypnotherapist and has a Bachelor of Philosophy/Diploma in Social Work and Probation Studies.

Rachel has worked in the UK criminal justice system for over 25 years delivering rehabilitative one-to-one and group work interventions underpinned by Cognitive Behavioural Theory (CBT), mindfulness and coaching. Within this, Rachel has specialised in working with relationship abuse for the past 18 years. You really are in safe and trustworthy hands with Rachel.

All of Rachel's work is underpinned by her passion to support others in accepting and truly valuing who they are.



Mental Health in Menopause

If you ask any woman, or indeed any man, to name a menopause symptom, chances are they'll all mention the classic, physically debilitating symptoms of hot flushes, joint pains and night sweats. Far less of them, if any, will mention the often equally debilitating symptoms that impact a woman's mental health, including anxiety, low mood and depression.

In fact, anxiety can often be the only menopause symptom to cause a woman considerable menopause distress, causing relationship issues, workplace challenges and more - yet the possible underlying impact of declining hormones in the body is very often not even considered.

While menopause isn't a mental health issue, you can still have mental issues alongside menopause, and neither should be dismissed out of hand. Moreover, whatever the cause, it's important to recognise when your mental health might need a helping hand and seek the right guidance and support.



What is Anxiety?

The NHS describes anxiety as a 'feeling of unease'. This shouldn't be confused with the nerves you might experience before a job interview, or a big presentation at work. Rather, anxiety occurs when these feelings of unease are consistent and start to take their toll on daily life.

Much like menopause, there are many symptoms of anxiety, and you certainly don't need to experience all of them for diagnosis. What's important, is that you seek help early, and that your mental health concerns are taken seriously by the right healthcare professionals. Don't suffer in silence.

Medical Foreword

Dr Sam Brown, a British Menopause Society accredited Menopause specialist GP, has a special interest in mental health. She's passionate about empowering women to speak up in menopause: *'Whatever you do, don't suffer in silence. Your mental health matters as much as any other medical condition or menopause symptom. However low you may feel, there's something and someone that can help.'*

Sam is also keen to reassure women there's nothing to be embarrassed about. *'Mental health vulnerabilities often don't show themselves for some women until menopause, and asking for help isn't something that comes easily. Put yourself first, seek help, and know that your healthcare professional is there to listen and offer support – there's no judgement.'*



Medication

Anxiety brought on by hormonal fluctuations of menopause, may be helped by Hormone Replacement Therapy (HRT). As always, HRT is patient choice, but it's worth a conversation with your doctor to see if it might be an option for you.

While NICE guidelines for menopause diagnosis and management (NG23) don't support antidepressants as a first line treatment for menopause, they can play a part in easing anxiety symptoms for some women, not least where other underlying anxiety disorders exist. Antidepressants can also be used alongside HRT - it's absolutely not an either or option, though all prescribing is individualised.



Lifestyle Management Matters

Mood changes, anxiety, depression, and panic attacks are all very common menopause symptoms, and often appear at a time when a woman's life is already stressful with busy careers, young children, relationships, supporting elderly parents, and more.

The need to be on top of things both physically and emotionally has never been greater and self-care must become a priority, not a luxury. From eating well to moving well, a holistic approach really can make a difference – whether or not you choose to take HRT.



Menopause Psychological Symptom Checklist

Hormonal changes in menopause can lead to a variety of symptoms, both physical and psychological. While no two women will experience exactly the same journey, or symptoms, we've listed some of the most commonly mentioned psychological symptoms below. For many women, these can be more debilitating than anything physical, and contribute to considerable distress and anguish if disregarded or dismissed out of hand.

NICE guidelines say that diagnosis of menopause can be based on symptoms alone, and are not usually needed at age 45 and over. Symptoms may also be due to other causes, and your doctor may wish to exclude these.

Psychological symptoms may include:

Psychological Symptoms	Yes	No	Details
Anger			
Anxiety			
Brain fog			
Crying spells			
Depression			
Feelings of dread and despair			
Irritability			
Loss of confidence and self-esteem			
Loss of joy			
mood swings			
Panic attacks			
Poor concentration			
Poor motivation			
Rage			



Easing Anxiety

Easing anxiety isn't always easy.

There's no one treatment – medical or otherwise – that works for everyone.

As with everything menopause, we're all different.

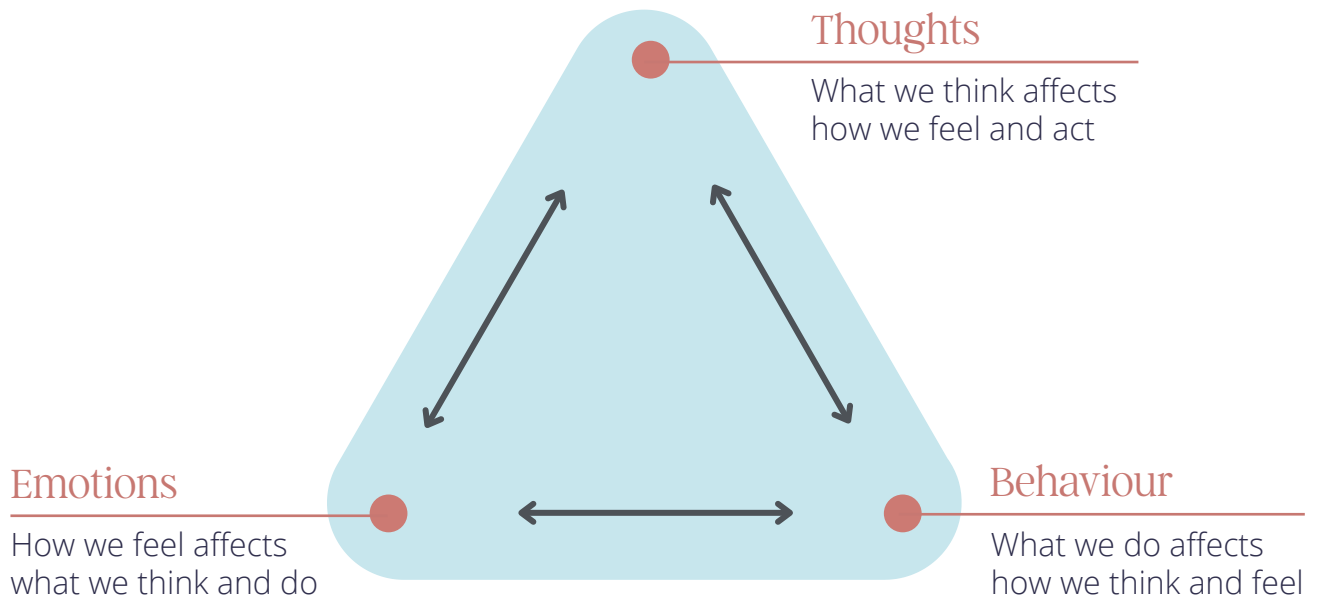
There are, however, a number of tools and techniques that may be helpful. From problem solving to mindfulness, one or more approaches may be of help.

Tools and Techniques

- The Cognitive Triangle
- Grounding
- Better Problem Solving
- Box Breathing
- Mindfulness
- Slow Breathing
- Recognising Your Body's Response (Fight or Flight)
- Progressive Muscle Relaxation
- Challenging Anxious Thinking
- Managing Anxious Thinking
- The Worry Tree



The Cognitive Triangle



Grounding



Things you can **see** in the present



Things you can **touch** in the present



Things you can **hear** in the present



Things you can **smell** in the present



Things you can **taste** in the present



Better problem solving

Identify the problem

What in particular is bothering you?

Be very specific here. If the problem is too big you may need to break it down into several small sub-problems.

Brainstorm solutions

Brainstorm as many solutions as possible. No matter how unrealistic or silly they may sound, write them all down.

Advantages

Make a list of the advantages of each solution. Why might each solution be a good idea?

Disadvantages

Now make a list of the disadvantages of each solution.

Make a choice

Having made a list of possible solutions, with the advantages and disadvantages of each one, it's now time to choose a solution. Remember there is no perfect solution here.

Implement

Try out your chosen solution and see what happens.

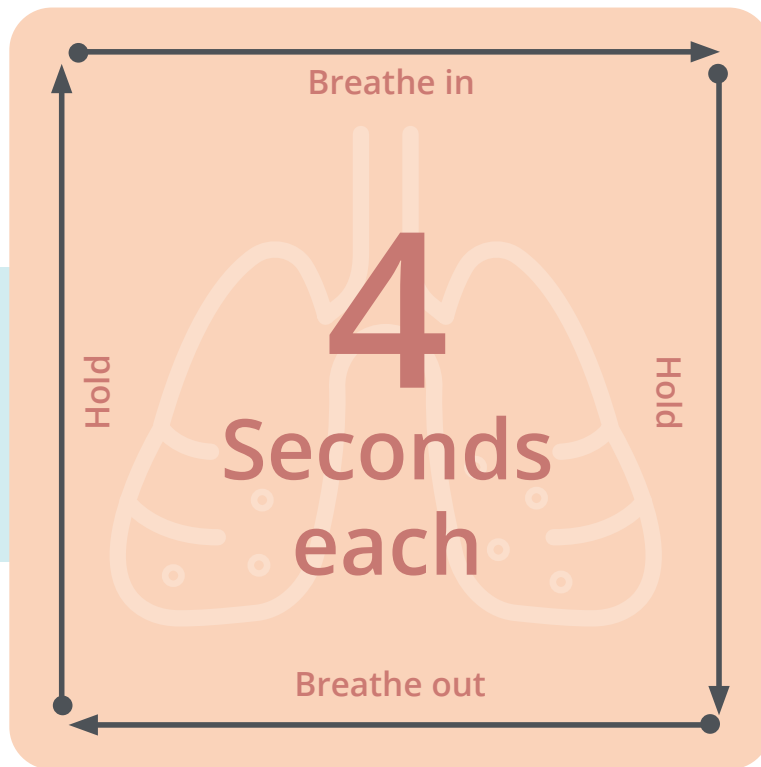
Review

How did it work for you?

What can you learn going forward?



Box Breathing



Mindfulness

Your Body is present,
but where is
your **mind**?



Slow Breathing

- 1 Find a **quiet space** where you won't be interrupted or distracted.
- 2 Get yourself into a **comfortable position** either lying down or sitting upright. If you feel comfortable doing so you can gently **close your eyes**.
- 3 Place **one hand** gently on you **stomach** and the **other** on your **chest**.
- 4 Take a **slow deep breath into your nose**. Pull the air right down into your stomach and as you do you will notice the hand on your stomach rising. The hand on your chest should rise much less.
- 5 **Slowly exhale** through your **mouth** and notice your stomach dropping gently to where it started.
- 6 **Breathe in** for a count of 3 and **out** for a count of 4.
- 7 Now place your **hands gently at your side** and **open your eyes**.



Recognising Your Body's Response (Fight or Flight)

Fast, shallow breathing

Racing thoughts

Light headed or dizzy

Dry mouth

Increased heart rate

Tense muscles

Tummy upset, butterflies

Urge for the toilet

Tingling in hands and feet

Hot and sweaty

Progressive Muscle Relaxation

- 1 Take **3 deep breaths**
- 2 Squeeze your **feet** for **5** seconds...then **RELAX**
- 3 Squeeze your **legs** for **5** seconds...then **RELAX**
- 4 Squeeze your **stomach** for **5** seconds...then **RELAX**
- 5 Squeeze your **shoulders** for **5** seconds...then **RELAX**
- 6 Squeeze your **arms** for **5** seconds...then **RELAX**
- 7 Squeeze your **whole body** for **5** seconds...then **RELAX**



Challenging Anxious Thinking

Is this a fact or an opinion?

What's the worst that could happen?

Am I underestimating my ability to cope here?

Will this matter in a month's time? In six months time?

What's the evidence?

What's the best that could happen?

What's most likely to happen?

What advice would I give to a friend or loved one?

What would a friend or loved one tell me?

If the worst were to happen how might I cope?

What's the bigger picture here?



Managing Anxious Thinking

1

Unhelpful Thought

I can't cope, it's all falling apart....

I'm not good enough

I'm useless & a waste of space...

2

The Bridge

Hold on...

That's not true...

Stop...

3

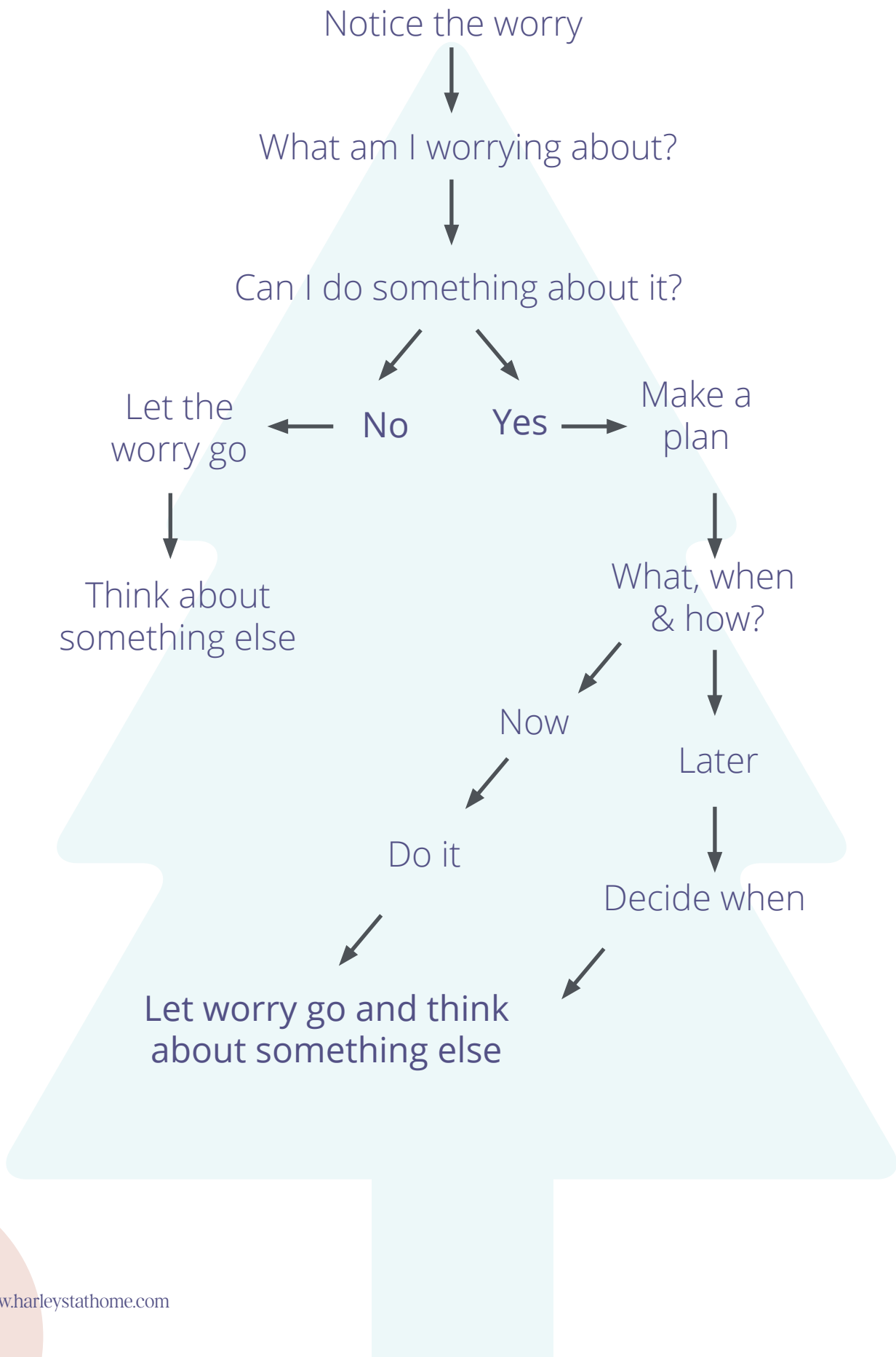
Resourceful Thought

I choose to focus on what's within my control

I am enough

I am valuable & worthy

The Worry Tree



Useful Links

Empowering women through their menopause journey, and beyond, is what we're all about at Harley Street at Home. So, we've pulled together a few websites below that you may find useful while navigating anxiety as part of your menopause journey.

Please note, as these are external websites, Harley Street at Home has no responsibility for any content listed on them.

General Menopause

The British Menopause Society (BMS)

The BMS is the specialist authority for menopause and post reproductive health in the UK. They educate, inform and guide healthcare professionals, working in both primary and secondary care, on menopause and all aspects of post reproductive health.

<https://thebms.org.uk/>

Women's Health Concern (WHC)

WHC has been the patient arm of the BMS since 2012. They offer a confidential, independent service to advise, inform and reassure women about gynaecological, sexual and post reproductive health.

<https://www.womens-health-concern.org/>

NICE Guideline [NG23] | Menopause Diagnosis and Management

This guideline covers the diagnosis and management of menopause, including in women who have Premature Ovarian Insufficiency (POI).

<https://www.nice.org.uk/guidance/ng23>

The International Menopause Society (IMS)

The IMS brings together the world's leading experts to collaborate and share knowledge about all aspects of ageing in women. They advocate evidence-based treatment options that optimise mid-life women's health and promote best practice in women's health care.

<https://www.imsociety.org>

HRT

Information about HRT for menopause symptoms, including types and how to take it

<https://www.nhs.uk/medicines/hormone-replacement-therapy-hrt/>



Support Resources

Mental Health Foundation Empowering

A registered charity focused on protecting all aspects of people's mental health, including through menopause.

<https://www.mentalhealth.org.uk>

MIND

A registered charity working to improve lives of people with mental health problems.

<https://www.mind.org.uk>

NHS UK | Talking Therapies

NHS Talking Therapies can offer support to help with common mental health concerns, including anxiety and depression

<https://www.nhs.uk/mental-health/talking-therapies-medicine-treatments/talking-therapies-and-counselling/nhs-talking-therapies/>

Women's Health Concern | Cognitive Behavioural Therapy (CBT) Factsheet

Evidence based guidance on CBT for menopause symptoms.

www.womens-health-concern.org

Women's Health Concern | Emotional Wellness in Menopause

Evidence based guidance on emotional wellbeing in menopause.

www.womens-health-concern.org



Other Courses





Harley Street at Home

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- 📘 www.facebook.com/groups/2670315193229158
- 📷 [@harleystreetathomemenopause](https://www.instagram.com/harleystreetathomemenopause)
- 🌐 [linkedin.com/in/nigel-denby-menopause-dietitian/](https://www.linkedin.com/in/nigel-denby-menopause-dietitian/)