IN THIS CHAPTER

- Understanding the changes happening during perimenopause
- Learning how exercise and nutrition ease the menopause transition
- Thriving in midlife despite the hormonal changes

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Chapter 1

What Is Perimenopause and Why Fitness and Nutrition Matter

Maybe you've found yourself standing in front of your closet mirror, wondering why your jeans are getting stuck below your hips even though you haven't changed your eating habits. Maybe you're waking up at 3 a.m. out of nowhere, forgetting why you walked into a room, getting annoyed at people you love, or feeling exhausted by midday. The workouts and nutrition habits that used to work don't seem to help anymore. The scale is ticking up, and you don't know why. You barely recognize your body, and if you're being honest, you barely recognize yourself.

If you relate to any part of this, I want you to know that you aren't lazy, you're not failing, and you're definitely not alone. I gained 50 pounds in one year as I was entering perimenopause. I was a fitness coach with 15 years of experience under my belt, and I felt so frustrated and, frankly, a bit humiliated that I had no idea

what was going on with my body. Over the course of that year, I met with numerous doctors, read a variety of books, and worked with different coaches as I learned more about perimenopause and the hormone changes that happen during this menopause transition. I learned what hormones change, how these changes affect our day-to-day lives, and, most importantly, what we can do about them to feel our best again. Then I went on to work with women all over the nation who were going through the same things I was, and I was able to help them feel better, manage their symptoms, lose weight, and get their confidence back. I'm excited to give you simple education that you can understand and tactical strategies that you can use to feel your best in midlife.

In this chapter, I want to teach you what's going on inside your body, why you feel so off all the time, and why the things that used to work no longer work — and also give you hope. The good news is that although your body has changed, it isn't broken. Throughout this book, you learn exactly how to work with your changing body instead of fighting against it. Chapter 2 offers a closer look at the connections among hormones, metabolism, and muscle.

What Exactly Is Perimenopause?

Perimenopause is the transition phase that comes before menopause. It's marked by changing hormone levels, irregular periods, and, unfortunately, often unpleasant physical symptoms. It typically lasts about four to ten years and begins in a woman's early 40s or sometimes even in her late 30s. *Menopause* is the biological process that marks the permanent end of your reproductive years. It's officially diagnosed after 12 consecutive months without a period and typically occurs between the ages of 45 and 50. The current national average for the onset of menopause is around age 51 or 52, but this is actually genetic. So if you're curious, I highly recommend asking your mom how old she was when she reached menopause. *Postmenopause* refers to the rest of your life after you reach menopause.

Considering what hormones are changing during perimenopause

The main hormone fluctuations you experience are declines in your sex hormones: estrogen, progesterone, and testosterone. Chapter 2 explains these hormones and how the hormones in this list affect your metabolism and muscle in much greater detail:

- **Progesterone** typically starts decreasing first because its production is driven by the changes that start to occur in your menstrual cycle. Because progesterone is made after your body releases an egg, when ovulation starts to become irregular, your ovaries make less progesterone.
- **Estrogen** eventually declines as well, but before that, it stays high and also fluctuates like crazy while progesterone is dropping. This imbalance causes many of the hormone symptoms you're probably feeling.
- **Testosterone** isn't just for men. Women feel their best with healthy levels of testosterone. During perimenopause, testosterone levels gradually decline because the ovaries and adrenal glands slowly start producing less of it as we age.



TIP

Cortisol changes as well during midlife. Declining and fluctuating estrogen and progesterone levels make it much harder for your body to regulate and manage stress, which can cause chronically high levels of cortisol. Many of the symptoms that come from declining estrogen and progesterone — such as sleep disruption, blood sugar shifts, and lower energy levels — also lead to cortisol irregularity. Chapter 21 gives you ten practical habits for managing stress during perimenopause.

Changes to these hormones can also have a down-regulating effect on other hormones, such as insulin and thyroid hormones. It makes sense that with all these hormonal changes, you're going to need to do things differently when it comes to nutrition, exercise, and lifestyle management to feel your best. Chapter 14 explains how nutrition supports estrogen, progesterone, cortisol, insulin, thyroid hormones, and more.

Exploring common perimenopause symptoms

All those hormonal changes that I just talked about are likely leaving you feeling all sorts of ways. You're completely normal if you're experiencing any of the following things:

- Irregular periods
- Hot flashes
- Night sweats
- Vaginal dryness

- More urinary tract infections (UTIs)
- Mood swings
- Anxiety or depression
- Insomnia
- Brain fog
- Weight gain
- Stubborn belly fat
- Low libido
- Joint and muscle aches
- Low energy
- Midday exhaustion
- Low confidence
- Simply not feeling like you

If you're feeling any of these things or feeling a variety of other ways, I've got you. This book is dedicated to you. It's dedicated to helping you feel your best, mitigate these symptoms, and learn how to use exercise and nutrition to get your confidence back. Chapters 3 and 4 explain why old diet and exercise approaches may stop working and why playing it too safe can also hold you back.

Why Does Life Feel So Hard Right Now?

One or two of these symptoms may be manageable and may not affect your life too much, but you're likely feeling several of them at the same time. Together, they can make your entire life feel overwhelming. Your hormones regulate everything. When they fluctuate, they affect your energy, sleep, appetite, mood, metabolism, digestion, stress response, and more. No wonder you feel different. This isn't in your head. This is real.

You may wonder why changes are happening to your body when you haven't changed anything. It's because your body is changing, and you need to do things differently at this stage of life to feel your best. Chapter 3 explains why the diets and workouts that worked before may no longer produce the same results.

And to make matters even harder, perimenopause occurs at a very stressful time of life. During midlife, many women are raising teenagers or college-age kids, taking care of elderly parents, managing demanding careers, experiencing changes in their marriages, or dealing with financial stress. Not only are you carrying hormonal stress, but you're adding a lot of life stress on top of it. And more stress means less capacity for other things. Things that used to feel easy now feel exhausting. Your nervous system has less wiggle room before you transition into fight or flight. A poor night's sleep affects you more than it used to. A stressful day at work affects your life more than it did when you were younger. Chapter 21 offers stress-busting practices you can start using right away.



REMEMBER

Your body needs a different kind of support. Instead of more restriction, punishment, or exercise, you need nourishment, strength, recovery, and consistency. Perimenopause, in and of itself, doesn't mean that you can't feel healthy, strong, and confident. It simply changes what your body needs from you to feel that way. Chapters 8 through 11 cover strength training, ready-to-use workouts, cardio, and restorative movement. Chapters 12 through 17 cover nutrition, weight management, muscle support, and hydration.

How exercise and nutrition ease this transition

The rest of this book is dedicated to helping you with this exact topic. Chapter 8 explains how lifting weights and building strength benefit your hormones, metabolism, and longevity, and Chapter 9 gives you done-for-you workouts. Chapter 10 explains different types of cardio, how they can help you, and what type of cardio is best to avoid in midlife. Chapter 11 covers walking, yoga, and mobility and how they help manage stress and optimize hormones. Chapters 12 and 13 show you how to use macros or simpler non-tracking methods to meet your nutrition needs. Chapter 14 dives into how your food choices and overall nutrition strategy support estrogen, progesterone, cortisol, insulin, thyroid hormones, and more. Chapters 15 and 16 tailor those nutrition strategies to weight management and muscle building, and Chapter 17 explains hydration. Chapters 18 and 19 help you put all these pieces together into an actionable plan for your week and a lifestyle you can sustain.

There's a lot to go over on this subject, so for now, just know that the type of exercise you do and the nutrition strategy you use can absolutely help optimize your hormones, digestion, and metabolism so that you can feel your best in midlife. Chapter 20 also clears up ten common perimenopause myths that may otherwise complicate your approach.

The power of strength, stress management, and consistency

Strength training is one of the most important things a woman can do during perimenopause to feel her best and improve her longevity and independence through the rest of her life. If you don't do anything to prevent it, muscle naturally declines with age. Strength training is one of the most important ways to build and maintain muscle. Having that muscle supports your metabolism, bone density, mobility, and everyday function. Chapter 8 teaches you the fundamentals of weightlifting, and Chapter 9 gives you done-for-you programs to get started.

In midlife, although you can't completely eliminate stress, you can change how your body responds to it. Midlife is a stressful time, and these hormone changes can make you feel even more sensitive to that stress. High levels of chronic stress affect your sleep, cravings, recovery, mood, digestion, and weight. At this stage of life, stress management isn't a luxury; it's part of your plan. I talk about practical ways to manage stress throughout this book, and Chapter 21 gives you ten stress-busting habits specifically for women in perimenopause.

When it comes to a plan that will actually work for you, the best plan is one you can stick with consistently. Perfection isn't required. It's the small actions you can repeat daily over time that create the most impactful results and really change your life. Healthy habits should fit into your life all the time, not only when life feels easy. Success doesn't come from a number on the scale or even pounds lifted in the gym. It comes from showing up more often than you don't. Chapters 5 through 7 help you set realistic goals, manage expectations, and track wins beyond weight loss. Chapter 18 helps you create a weekly routine you can follow long-term, and Chapter 19 explains how to adjust that routine during different seasons of life. You may feel as though you know how to eat, lift weights, and manage your stress, but that knowledge doesn't matter if you can't act on it consistently over time.

How to thrive in midlife

My goal with this book is to teach you exactly this. Perimenopause doesn't have to be a time when you shrink. When I was going through my weight-gain struggles, my clothes didn't fit, I was hiding behind my kids in family photos, and I wasn't confident enough in myself and my career to show up authentically. It's my life's mission to help you avoid feeling the way I did.

Perimenopause isn't the beginning of the decline of your life, even though it may feel that way sometimes. It's the beginning of a new season that gives you new opportunities and new challenges to grow from. Over the next many chapters

together, you learn how to understand your hormones, build muscle, fuel your body, improve your energy and digestion, reduce stress, and create habits that actually last. If that feels intimidating, just know that you don't need to overhaul your life, be perfect, or start everything tomorrow. You focus on one habit, one meal, one workout, and one walk because these small actions are what become lasting change. Start with Chapter 2 to understand what's changing inside your body, and use Chapters 18 and 19 when you're ready to turn what you learn into a routine that fits your life.

I want you to ask yourself this: What if this isn't the beginning of the end? What if this is actually the beginning of one of the strongest, healthiest, and most confident seasons of your life? You've already taken the first step by buying this book, and now you just have to dig in!