

**MENTAL  
HEALTH  
AND  
WELLNESS**

**For the  
Mature Woman**

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# Introduction

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It is said that things get better with age; however, just because it might improve with age doesn't mean you won't have to come across a few bumpy roads to get to the other side of growing older.

If you sense you're changing physically, mentally, and emotionally as you're getting older, you're not alone.

Entering your 50s is a significant time of change in your life. We'll be saying goodbye to old relationships and greeting new ones. And some of us are dealing with having to say goodbye to the body and image in the mirror we once knew and hello to an aging body. All of these things, and then some, can play a major role in our mental well-being.

In this ebook, we'll take a look at how *you* can play a major role in keeping your physical, mental, emotional, and cognitive well-being intact, to ensure you'll finish your years out strong and live your life full.

# Disclaimer

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Disclaimer: This ebook is for informational purposes only and is not intended as medical advice. Medical advice should always be obtained from a qualified medical professional for any health conditions or symptoms associated with them. Every possible effort has been made in preparing and researching this material. I make no warranties with respect to the accuracy and applicability of its contents or any omissions.

# What Happens to a Woman's Body After 50

Changes in the female body may play a significant role in mental wellness 50 and beyond. Here are a few changes you might encounter.

## INCREASE IN BELLY FAT



The ability to eat the foods you ate as a young woman under the age of 40 rapidly diminishes as hormones begin to plunge downward. As estrogen levels drop, the fat around our middle begins to accumulate, predisposing women to conditions such as heart disease, diabetes, and cancers—such as breast and colon cancer.

## OSTEOPOROSIS



Another problem for women after the age of 50 is brittle bones which can leave them susceptible to fractures. As we get older and reach menopause, our estrogen decreases. Because estrogen helps protect our bones, this decrease can increase the risk of osteoporosis. Women are four times more likely to develop osteoporosis than men. And Caucasian and Asian women are more likely to develop it than women of other nationalities.

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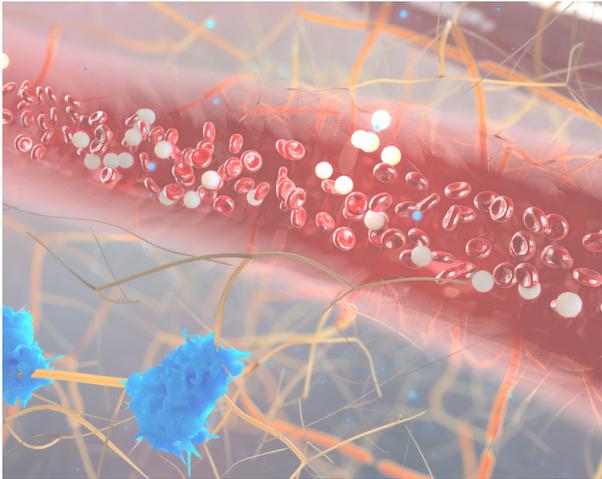
## SKIN CHANGES



Skin changes such as age spots, fine lines, and wrinkles begin to emerge around the age of 40 but become more prominent after the age of 50. The skin around women's arms, face, and neck start to sag due in part to poor collagen and loss of elasticity. Collagen is what supports our skin. It's what gives the structural integrity of the skin and as it declines, skin becomes looser, sags and wrinkles form. As we get older, the outer layer of our skin becomes thinner, so it's important that we're gentle when washing our faces. Moisturizing is more important now than ever.

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## INCREASE INSULIN RESISTANCE



Insulin resistance increases during this time, creating metabolic challenges for some women. The Centers for Disease Control estimates that more than 13 million women have type II diabetes and 25 percent of those women are over the age of 65. It can lead to many chronic health problems. This includes obesity, type 2 diabetes, and heart disease. It's also linked to high blood pressure, high cholesterol, thyroid problems, muscle loss, fat gain, fatty liver, breast cancer, endometrial cancer, and other cancers. Studies have also shown a linkage between insulin resistance and Alzheimer's disease.

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## WEAK PELVIC MUSCLES



As women age, particularly women who have had children or are obese, problems with incontinence or difficulty holding urine may arise, leaving them susceptible to embarrassing accidents. Overactive bladder is another common issue that affects women at this age, if you find yourself urinating more than eight times within a 24-hour period, you may be suffering from this. The worst-case scenario for weak pelvic muscles is pelvic organ prolapse—when the muscles and tissues supporting the pelvic organs (the uterus, bladder, or rectum) become weak or loose, causing one or more of these organs to drop or press into or out of the vagina. These can severely impact a woman’s quality of life. If you suspect any one of these pelvic floor dysfunctions, please make an appointment with your health care professional.

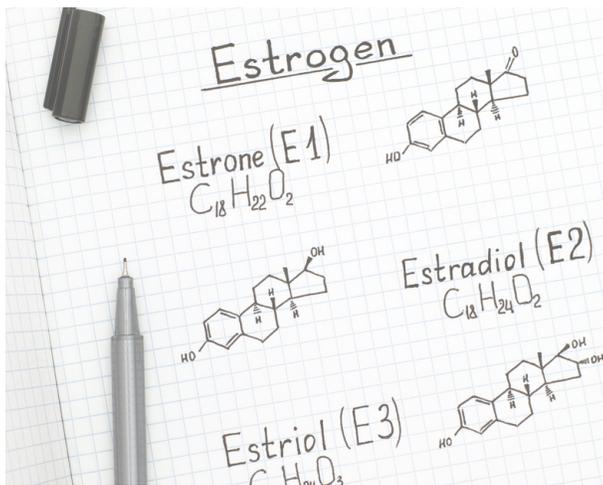
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## DIGESTIVE CHANGES



During this time, changes within your GI system can lead to an increased risk for vitamin B 12 deficiency which may contribute to low energy stores and a decrease in the absorption of calcium, which also leads to osteoporosis. Other medical issues that may arise due to digestive changes are diverticular disease and colorectal cancer. And if you suffer from conditions such as dyspepsia, irritable bowel syndrome, Crohn's disease, ulcerative colitis, celiac disease, and GERD, they can worsen due to changes in your digestive system. A well-balanced diet, exercise, and letting your healthcare provider know of any sudden changes in your digestion can all help in maintaining the healthy function of your digestive system as you age.

## MENOPAUSE



Menopause combined with all the other changes that come with getting older can wreak havoc on your mental wellness. Hormonal changes such as rapid decreases in estrogen and progesterone levels can have a significant effect on us.

During perimenopause—years preceding menopause—estrogen levels rise and fall, causing as many as 10 percent of women to experience symptoms of depression.

At the time of menopause, estrogen levels drop to extremely low levels, affecting various areas of our body's function and mental health. Couple that with the symptoms that commonly accompany menopause such as hot flashes, poor sleep habits, stress, sweating, and mood swings, and you have a recipe for a disturbance to your mental wellness. The good news is that once menopause passes, depression rates tend to decrease.



MENTAL

## *Mental Changes in Women in Their 50s*

As we enter our 50s, we become more predisposed to experiencing some of life's changes. Middle age triggers an increase in anxiety, fear, and stress for some women.

We endure changes in our hair color when it's replaced by gray or thinning hair, followed by wrinkles or lines in our skin, and a loss of skin hydration and skin elasticity.

Some of us may be entering a new career at this stage or may even be reaching the top of our career ladder. And some of us may find ourselves downsizing our homes or buying larger homes to accommodate family changes.

We may be picking up the responsibility of caring for our aging parents or taking over raising grandchildren. Each of these things has the potential to turn into a mid-life crisis.

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## Empty Nest Syndrome

Empty nest syndrome is not a cliché that impacts parents whose children move out or leave for college. It can occur at any time later in life.

According to *seniorliving.org*, empty nest syndrome often emerges on the heels of the death or loss of a spouse or partner, or it may even happen as one enters retirement. It is indicative of a void that occurs when our daily routine changes after several years.

## Feelings of Conflict

Many women report having feelings of conflict as it relates to wanting to start a new life or staying with the current life they have. For example, by the time we reach the age of 50, we have multiple commitments that we feel obligated to meet.

On the other hand, our past life experiences, wisdom, and capabilities incite us to want something different or even better—something for ourselves. This statement is particularly true for women who may have spent the last 20 or more years married and raising children. These emotions create a bit of conflict within women over the age of 50.

## A New Appetite for Life

As noted, some women may even choose to go back to school at this time for a new career to do something new and revitalize their life. Turning 50 can stimulate a longing for living a more exciting life.

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Statistics show that women in the 50 and older age bracket are leaving their marriages to build new relationships, start new careers, and travel.

Some women may choose to relocate to another part of the country or another country altogether, and others decide to get out of the house and travel more often, looking to see the world.

# Mental Health and Wellness

## Conditions That Commonly Impact Women After 50



Mental health consists of our overall social, psychological, and emotional well-being. How we behave and process our thoughts and feelings during times in which we cope has a lot to do with our mental wellness.

Think about how you respond during stressful times or how you interact with people of varying backgrounds or places in your life. All of these things play a significant role in your life.

Our early life experiences through adulthood formulate our mental health for the remainder of our lifespan.

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## **Mental Illness**

Mental illness may be short-term, or it may take place over an extended period. Statistics show that anxiety and depression are two of the most common conditions that affect women after the age of 50 and can cause distress, impairing the ability of women to interact with others on a physical or social level.

In general, women are 40% more likely to develop a mental health condition than men according to an Oxford University clinical psychologist.

Women are 75% more likely than their male counterparts to report depression symptoms. Also, they are 60 percent more likely to share that they are suffering from an anxiety disorder.

## **Depression**

Depression affects more than 15 million Americans each year and women are the primary victims of this illness. The CDC reports that women between the ages of 40 and 59 suffer the highest rates of depression. Unfortunately, only two-thirds of those who are experiencing symptoms common to depression get help.

Depression in women happens more often than we might think. Nearly one in four women experiences at least one major bout of depression during their lifetime. Depression may emerge for the very first time during our later years.

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Late-life depression or depression that occurs after the age of 65 impacts more than 6 million Americans but only 10 percent of this population seeks treatment for their symptoms. Perhaps this is because an assumption is made that their medication is affecting their mental illness.

Adults who experience depression after age 50 are not affected in the same way as young adults. Depression in older adults can increase your risk for other chronic conditions including heart disease, leading to a higher risk for early death. Many people experience difficulty in their workplace, at home, or engaging in social activities outside their homes.

When we think of depression, we often think of feelings of sadness as being the lead symptom of depression. However, there are other symptoms that may arise under a cloud of depression including:

- **Feelings of Restlessness.** You may find that boredom becomes a significant issue for you and that nothing is satisfying.
- **Hopelessness.** You may feel like there is no hope and that only bad things will continue to happen when experiencing depression.
- **Difficulty Getting Quality Sleep.** Depression can cause you to struggle to fall asleep or remain asleep long enough to replenish your energy and cognitive levels.
- **Difficulty Focusing or Concentrating.** Many people report not being able to focus on tasks entirely and may even make multiple mistakes on things that are typically easy for them to do or perform.
- **Feelings of Guilt or Worthlessness.** You may feel like your life is worthless and spend your time concentrating on your failures instead of celebrating successes or focusing on your strengths.

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- **Anxiety.** You may have a heightened feeling that things will only deteriorate with time.
  - **Pain with No Clear Origin.** Some people report pain they cannot tie back to a specific injury or illness in their body.
  - **Frustration or Angry Outbursts**
  - **Poor Appetite**
  - **Loss of interest.** No desire to participate in pleasurable activities including sex, or other things you previously found enjoyable.
  - **Unstable Frame of Mind.** Overwhelming thoughts of hurting yourself or suicidal thoughts

**In addition to aging and hormonal changes, there are a few other factors that may leave you more vulnerable to developing depression including but not limited to:**

**Pain**

**Stroke**

**Stress**

**Family history**

**Heart attack**

**Hip fractures**

**Bypass surgery**

**Medical problems**

**Loss of a loved one**

**Poor social network**

**History of depression**

**Macular degeneration**

**Alcohol or drug abuse**

**Imbalance of chemicals in the brain**

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Depression negatively affects our health but those who experience an injury or suffer from a usually short-term illness may find that it takes them longer to heal or recover from sickness or overcome what is often a brief disability.

Depression increases the chances that you might consider suicide or even act on it. The suicide rate doubles for adults in their 80s.

Difficulty sleeping may arise as a side effect of depression. Some women over 50 may even be diagnosed as having insomnia. Some physicians may go as far as to prescribe melatonin hormone or a low dose of a sedating antidepressant.

It is important to note that although these hormonal changes increase the risk of women over 50 experiencing mood swings and disorders, depression is not a standard part of aging according to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. In other words, do not assume that when you reach the age of 50, you will automatically experience depression. However, your risk will increase as a result of multiple factors.

## **Treatment for Depression**

If you suspect you are experiencing depression it's important that you seek treatment as soon as possible. Untreated depression can be dangerous and lead to tragic outcomes including suicide, according to the National Alliance on Mental Illness. Treatment for depression in women over 50 may come in a variety of forms depending on the original cause of the condition.

For example, if menopause is at the heart of depression symptoms, estrogen replacement therapy in the form of a patch or pill may be necessary to deliver relief.

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## ***Drug Therapy for Depression***

Your doctor may elect to prescribe antidepressant medications to help you cope with the changes in your life.

## ***Counseling***

In addition to antidepressant drug therapy, your provider may also suggest you speak with a therapist who can provide you with the necessary strategies to better cope with these life challenges. Family therapy is another option for those who have family issues that contribute to their symptoms of depression.

## ***Anxiety***

Anxiety is another condition that may affect women at this age. Women are twice as likely to develop anxiety than men. However, 90 percent of men and women in this age bracket are not expected to report it. *Womenshealth.gov* describes anxiety as a feeling or a sense of fear or worry. It can potentially affect your daily life to the point it prohibits your ability to function.

## ***Anxiety Treatment***

Anxiety treatment is available in a variety of forms including counseling or psychotherapy, medication (i.e., benzodiazepines, beta-blockers, or selective serotonin reuptake inhibitors), or a combination of the two approaches.

Cognitive-behavioral therapy may prove especially useful for helping you cope with situations that trigger feelings of anxiety.

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## Emotional Well-being

In addition to mental wellness, emotional well-being has a significant impact on our overall health. As one major component of mental wellness, our emotional health is the glue that enables us to cope with many of life's curve balls including those changes that accompany reaching the age of 50.

Emotional wellness allows us to endure feelings such as anger, frustration, stress, and sadness.

Emotional wellness serves as a powerful foundation and protectant that enables us to bear the weight of negativity within ourselves and from others.

It also provides us with an internal sensor for when it is time to seek help.

Our emotional well-being is not necessarily a given asset that we naturally possess. It commands us to manage it carefully and nurture it or risk losing it as a result of neglect.

## Cognitive Health

Our cognitive health can also affect our mental wellness. Our cognitive fitness enables us to problem-solve and navigate tricky situations. It allows us to be creative and apply logic and dedicate ourselves to tackling challenging scenarios with focus. According to *Women's Health Matters*, impaired cognitive skills commonly accompany mental illness.

*Improving*

## Mental Health and Wellness in Your 50's

Finding mental wellness in your 50s is an absolute must for women seeking to preserve their well-being and eliminate some of the concerns in life that may occur at this age.

### **How to Improve Your Mental Wellness after 50**

You can take control of your mental wellness. Improving your mental wellness includes addressing all aspects of your mental health including your social, physical, and emotional well-being.

Here are a few steps you can actively pursue to improve your mental wellness.

#### **Get Help**

Get professional help, find a support group, or seek the support of friends and family members. But if you need immediate help, call 1-800-273-TALK (8255) to reach a 24-hour crisis center, text MHA to 741741, call 911, or go to your nearest emergency room.



## **Monitor Your Emotional Response**

One vital step you can take in managing your emotional responses to others and various situations and circumstances is to pay close attention to multiple triggers of your feelings. Record the following in a journal or notebook. What are the events that generate feelings of sadness? What frustrates or angers you? How might you handle each of the episodes better? When you can pinpoint what triggers you, you're better prepared to have a game plan in place to cope with/combat them.

## **Keep Your Mind Active**

Many people choose to go back to school or learn something new during this time. Use this time as an opportunity to pick up new knowledge. I'm a proponent of learning something new every day. It keeps your mind sharp and grows those brain cells! Also, do crossword puzzles, play board games, adult coloring books, or start journaling.

## **Practice Positivity**

Use each day to practice positivity. Positivity is the act of engaging in activities and focusing on positive thoughts or using affirmations that help us generate positive feelings that allow us to feel happy.

It enables you to handle negative thoughts and emotions more efficiently no matter the situation, may aid in the prevention of developing mental disorders, and can also help us manage existing ones.

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## Rebuild Your Nest

The nest may be empty, but that doesn't mean it has to stay that way. Pets can be an excellent asset to replace loneliness. Pets help us to increase our activity which can help to improve our exercise habits.

Pets are good for promoting relaxation, relieving feelings of loneliness, and can be useful in treating depression and anxiety. Pets can help you connect with other pet owners, thereby increasing socialization.

## Exercise

Exercise may seem like an ugly 8-letter word for some of us, but there is power in physical training and a wealth of benefits for your mental health.

One study found (Exercise for Mental Health, Sharma, et al) that aerobic activities like gardening, walking, dancing, spinning, and running, each contribute to reducing symptoms that may accompany anxiety or depression. Also, physical fitness can:

- ✓ Improve your mood
- ✓ Boost energy levels
- ✓ Support stress relief
- ✓ Improve your sleep experience



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Exercise has a natural way of boosting cognitive function and self-esteem. Participate in 30 minutes of exercise 3 days a week at a moderate level of intensity. You have the option of combining your exercises into a single 30-minute event or into 10-minute increments which work well for the busier person.

### **Do Not Ignore Stressors**

Do not assume because you are older, you'll not encounter stress. With age, we have wisdom, and the way we respond to stress is vastly improved than how we might have at the age of 20. However, do not assume that your wisdom serves as a barricade to the other noises that can increase your stress levels. Identify which relaxation techniques work best for you.

After 50, our body's ability to respond to stress drops significantly, and is not able to recover in the same way.

### **Celebrate Successes**

Celebrating big wins in your life is an absolute must-have for mental health. Whether your wins are small, family-based, personal, or professional, you must set aside time to acknowledge the success. Take yourself out to dinner, buy yourself a small gift, etc.

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## Get Your Sleep

As we age, settling for a few hours of sleep each night won't cut it. It won't be useful to your physical or mental health. Instead, you will need to stick to the suggested seven to eight hours of sleep for the good of your health. Turn off the television and put away all electronics. It's never a good idea to do work from your bed. It's good practice to have a designated place and time to do office work and use your laptop.

## Coping Mechanisms

Coping mechanisms are a conscious effort on our part to handle life stressors and painful events that generate difficult emotions. It is up to you to create and practice using strategies to manage stressful events that bring about these feelings. According to *goodtherapy.org*, examples of coping mechanisms include:

- ✓ Evoking humor
- ✓ Practicing relaxation
- ✓ Using problem-solving skills
- ✓ Engaging in physical activity
- ✓ Identifying your support system





## **Take An Active Role In Your Mental Health**

Your mental wellness requires you to take an active role in managing it. There are multiple things you can do to proactively maintain your mental health, including each of the tips that are on this list, but if you are under the treatment of a professional, make an effort to adhere to their protocol.

If under medication management, do what you can to stay compliant, and if the side effects of the medication are too difficult to endure, tell your healthcare provider so you can determine what other options are available.

## **Become The CEO Of Your Physical Health**

Your physical wellness is critical to your mental health. Chronic conditions such as diabetes, COPD, high blood pressure, and other diseases may trigger depression in some individuals. If you currently have a condition that affects your mental health, stay on top of managing your physical and mental state by seeking professional help, complying with medication regimens, and utilizing alternative methods of treatment.

## **Make Time For Yourself**

Set aside time for yourself. Whether you are a mother of school-age children, teenagers, or a grandmother who is actively involved in your grandchildren's lives,

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carve out time for yourself. Find positive ways to spend time alone doing those things that only please you. Use this time to find your purpose and meaning.

**Remember, self-care is not selfish, it's a necessity!!**

## **Volunteer Your Time**

Once you identify your purpose, take the time to pay it forward and share it with others. Sharing your purpose will help to shape your long-term goals and plans for change. Volunteering also allows you to be social and meet new people.

## **Meditate**

Research indicates that meditation and mental health is extremely beneficial. It reduces symptoms of anxiety and depression. Meditation teaches us breathing and relaxation techniques that we can use during and outside of challenging moments. This is the perfect time to incorporate praying. And if you're a Spirit-filled believer, praying in the Spirit is our number one way to bring peace and calm into our lives.

## **Stay Socially Active and Build Meaningful Relationships**

You must schedule and spontaneously make time to connect with family and friends. Regularly connecting with others is a great way to stay socially active. Your outings don't have to be big and elaborate. Instead, it can be as simple as going out for lunch, strolling in the park, or joining groups that share similar interests.

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## Eat Well

Food does have a place in the realm of mental wellness. As we age, it is necessary to consume healthier foods simply for the fact that our bodies are more prone to developing heart disease, type 2 diabetes, high blood pressure, and high cholesterol if we consume the wrong foods.

Your brain depends on those foods that will enable it to regulate chemicals and hormones in our body. For example, did you know that probiotics can help you take control of stress and anxiety?

Studies show that those who consume a traditional diet such as the Mediterranean or Japanese diet can lower their risk for depression by as much as 25 to 35 percent.

# Resources

Below I've listed a few scriptures to encourage you on your journey to maintaining your mental health and wellness.

- 1 1 Peter 5:7
- 2 John 14:27
- 3 2 Corinthians 10:5
- 4 Matthew 11:28–30
- 5 Ephesians 4:23
- 6 Proverbs 17:22

# Thank You!



In the end, your ultimate goal should be to take control of your mental wellness as you enter your 50s. Women are especially at risk of experiencing depression and/or anxiety due in part to hormonal changes, life events, and changes to their physical health.

Entering your 50s can be a time of ups and downs and knowing how to handle them is essential. Women over 50 can prepare for this journey by taking advantage of tools, resources, physicians, and counselors, and creating a stable support system to guide them through this season.

Women should not be afraid to ask for help where possible and accept that their experience during this time is not something they should fear or be ashamed of.

Turning 50 can be the best time of your life as you open the door for change and embrace new opportunities. Start taking an active role in your physical, mental, emotional, and cognitive well-being. Remember to make time for yourself, uncover your purpose, and find the right balance that works for you. All these play a vital role in you sustaining mental wellness—50 and beyond!