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FOGSI Focus

Mental Health in Midlife Women

MAN MADHU MITTI



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CHAPTER 1

Man, Madhu, Mitti: Restoring Balance in Midlife Women

Archana Dwivedi, Saraswathi Kondapalli

"The second spring of a woman's life begins when she learns to nurture her mind, nourish her body, and reconnect with nature."

INTRODUCTION

Midlife is a pivotal phase in a woman's journey, often marked by profound biological, emotional, social, and spiritual transformations. Traditionally, menopause has been viewed largely through the lens of estrogen deficiency and symptom management. However, contemporary understanding recognizes menopause as a complex bio-psychosocial transition that extends beyond hormonal changes.

Women today spend nearly one-third of their lives in the postmenopausal period. With increasing life expectancy, the focus has shifted from merely surviving menopause to thriving through it. The challenge for healthcare professionals is not only to alleviate symptoms but also to help women achieve optimal physical, mental, and emotional well-being.

The Indian philosophy of "Man, Madhu, Mitti" provides a meaningful framework for understanding holistic health in midlife.

- *Man (Mind)* symbolizes emotional resilience, mental wellness, and inner balance.
- *Madhu (Honey)* represents nourishment, vitality, sweetness, and mindful nutrition.
- *Mitti (Earth)* signifies grounding, connection with nature, sustainability, and physical well-being.

Together, these three pillars offer a comprehensive approach to restoring harmony during the menopausal transition and beyond.

UNDERSTANDING MIDLIFE: MORE THAN MENOPAUSE

The menopausal transition generally occurs between 45 and 55 years of age and is characterized by fluctuating ovarian hormone production before the eventual cessation of menstruation. During this period, women may experience:

- Vasomotor symptoms (hot flashes and night sweats)
- Sleep disturbances
- Mood fluctuations

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- Anxiety and irritability
- Cognitive complaints
- Weight gain
- Sexual dysfunction
- Musculoskeletal discomfort
- Increased cardiovascular and metabolic risks

The prevalence of menopausal symptoms among Indian women ranges from 50 to 80%, with vasomotor symptoms, fatigue, sleep disturbances, and joint pains being particularly common. Yet, symptom severity alone does not determine quality of life. Emotional health, family support, nutritional status, physical activity, and environmental factors often exert an equally significant influence.[1]

A holistic framework such as Man, Madhu, Mitti allows clinicians to address these interconnected dimensions of health.

MAN: CULTIVATING MENTAL AND EMOTIONAL WELLNESS

The Sanskrit word "Man" refers to the mind—the center of thoughts, emotions, perceptions, and consciousness. Midlife often coincides with major life events such as caring for aging parents, launching children into adulthood, career transitions, and changes in marital relationships. These responsibilities frequently intersect with hormonal fluctuations, creating a unique emotional landscape.

The Invisible Burden of Midlife

Many women report feeling emotionally overwhelmed despite appearing physically healthy. Sleep deprivation, chronic stress, and hormonal changes may manifest as:

- Reduced concentration
- Memory lapses
- Mood swings
- Anxiety
- Reduced self-esteem
- Social withdrawal

Research from the Study of Women's Health Across the Nation (SWAN) has demonstrated increased vulnerability to depressive symptoms during the menopausal transition, particularly among women with previous mood disorders or significant life stressors.[2]

Menopause and the Brain

Estrogen influences several neurotransmitter systems, including serotonin, dopamine, and norepinephrine. Declining estrogen levels can affect:

- Mood regulation
- Sleep architecture

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- Cognitive performance
- Emotional resilience.

Although menopause itself does not cause major neurocognitive disorders, many women experience temporary difficulties with attention, verbal memory, and mental clarity.[3]

Mindfulness: The Science of Presence

Mindfulness has emerged as one of the most effective nonpharmacological interventions for menopausal symptom management.

Mindfulness practices help women:

- Reduce perceived stress
- Improve sleep quality
- Enhance emotional regulation
- Reduce symptom distress
- Improve overall quality of life

Randomized controlled trials have shown significant reductions in menopausal symptom bother among women participating in mindfulness-based stress reduction programs.[4]

PRACTICAL MINDFULNESS STRATEGIES

Gynecologists can Encourage Women to Adopt

- Five minutes of mindful breathing daily
- Guided meditation
- Yoga
- Journaling
- Gratitude practices
- Digital detox periods

These simple practices can foster psychological resilience and self-awareness.

Social Support as Medicine

Human connection remains one of the strongest determinants of well-being.

Women with Robust Social Networks Demonstrate

- Lower stress levels
- Better coping abilities
- Reduced depressive symptoms
- Greater life satisfaction

Community support groups, women's circles, menopause clinics, and family engagement can significantly improve emotional health during midlife.[5]

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MADHU: NOURISHING THE BODY WITH WISDOM

In Indian tradition, honey—or Madhu—symbolizes sweetness, vitality, healing, and nourishment. It represents the broader concept of mindful nutrition, which is fundamental to healthy aging.

The Menopausal Transition is Frequently Associated with

- Increased abdominal fat accumulation
- Reduced lean muscle mass
- Insulin resistance
- Dyslipidemia
- Increased cardiovascular risk

Therefore, nutrition becomes a cornerstone of preventive health.

The Midlife Metabolic Shift

Declining estrogen levels influence energy balance and fat distribution. Many women notice weight gain despite maintaining similar eating patterns.

Studies indicate that women may gain approximately 0.5–1 kg annually during midlife, with preferential deposition around the abdomen.[6]

Abdominal obesity contributes to:

- Type 2 diabetes
- Hypertension
- Cardiovascular disease
- Fatty liver disease

This underscores the need for dietary modifications tailored to midlife physiology.

Building a Midlife Plate

An ideal nutritional approach should emphasize:

Protein

Adequate protein intake preserves muscle mass and supports healthy aging.

Recommended intake:

- *1.0–1.2 g/kg/day*
- Higher amounts for physically active women

Sources include:

- Pulses
- Dairy products
- Eggs
- Fish
- Lean meats
- Soy products

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Fiber

High-fiber diets improve:

- Satiety
- Glycemic control
- Gut microbiome diversity

Women should aim for 25–30 grams of dietary fiber daily.[7]

Healthy Fats

Omega-3 fatty acids help reduce inflammation and support cardiovascular health.

Sources Include

- Fatty fish
- Flaxseeds
- Chia seeds
- Walnuts
- Micronutrients

Particular Attention Should be Paid to

- Calcium
- Vitamin D
- Magnesium
- Vitamin B12
- Iron (during perimenopause)

Honey: Ancient Food, Modern Science

Honey has occupied a special place in traditional medicine systems for centuries.

Modern research attributes several biological properties to honey:

- Antioxidant effects
- Anti-inflammatory activity
- Antimicrobial properties
- Potential cardiometabolic benefits

Honey contains flavonoids and phenolic compounds that may reduce oxidative stress, an important contributor to aging and chronic disease.[8]

However, clinicians should emphasize moderation. Honey remains a concentrated source of sugar and should be viewed as a healthier alternative to refined sugar rather than a therapeutic agent.

Bone Health: Protecting the Framework

One of the most significant consequences of menopause is accelerated bone loss.

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During the first 5–10 years after menopause, women may lose up to 20% of their bone mass due to estrogen deficiency.[9]

Strategies for Preserving Skeletal Health Include

- Calcium intake of 1000–1200 mg/day
- Vitamin D supplementation
- Resistance training
- Weight-bearing exercise
- Fall prevention

Early screening and fracture-risk assessment are crucial components of menopause care.

The Gut-microbiome Connection

The gut microbiome is increasingly recognized as an important regulator of health.

The "estrobolome," a collection of gut bacteria involved in estrogen metabolism, influences:

- Hormonal balance
- Immune function
- Metabolic health
- Inflammation

Diets rich in fermented foods, yogurt, fiber, fruits, and vegetables support microbial diversity and may contribute to healthier aging.[10]

MITTI: RETURNING TO NATURE

Mitti, or Earth, represents grounding, stability, and our connection with the natural world.

Modern life has increasingly distanced women from nature. Urbanization, prolonged screen exposure, sedentary occupations, and indoor lifestyles have disrupted natural rhythms that evolved over millennia.

Reconnecting with nature offers profound benefits.

Nature as Therapy

Studies consistently demonstrate that exposure to green environments improves:

- Mood
- Stress levels
- Cognitive function
- Cardiovascular health

Even brief interactions with nature can reduce cortisol levels and improve psychological well-being.[11]

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Simple Practices Include

- Morning walks in parks
- Gardening
- Outdoor yoga
- Nature retreats
- Spending time near water bodies

Sunlight and Circadian Health

Sleep disturbances affect nearly half of postmenopausal women.[12]

Morning sunlight exposure plays a critical role in synchronizing circadian rhythms by regulating melatonin production.

Benefits Include

- Better sleep quality
- Improved mood
- Enhanced metabolic health
- Greater daytime energy

Healthcare providers should encourage women to spend at least 20–30 minutes outdoors during morning hours whenever feasible.

Green Exercise: Combining Movement and Nature

Physical activity remains one of the most effective interventions for healthy aging.

When performed outdoors, exercise offers additional psychological benefits.

Green Exercise has been Associated with

- Reduced anxiety
- Greater enjoyment
- Better adherence
- Enhanced self-esteem

Activities may Include

- Walking
- Hiking
- Cycling
- Outdoor fitness sessions
- Community wellness programs

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INTEGRATING MAN, MADHU, MITTI INTO CLINICAL PRACTICE

The concept of Man, Madhu, Mitti aligns perfectly with the modern shift toward lifestyle medicine.

A comprehensive midlife consultation should evaluate:[13]

- Menopausal symptoms
- Mental health
- Sleep quality
- Nutrition
- Physical activity
- Bone health
- Cardiovascular risk
- Social support

Instead of focusing solely on symptom relief, clinicians should empower women to develop sustainable habits that promote lifelong wellness.

A PRACTICAL DAILY PRESCRIPTION

For Man

- Ten minutes of mindfulness
- Social engagement
- Stress management

For Madhu

- Protein-rich meals
- Seasonal fruits and vegetables
- Adequate hydration
- Reduced processed foods

For Mitti

- Morning sunlight exposure
- Thirty minutes of outdoor activity
- Nature connection
- Sleep hygiene

CONCLUSION

Menopause is not an endpoint but a transition into a new phase of life rich with possibilities. The philosophy of Man, Madhu, Mitti reminds us that health is not merely the absence of disease but a state of harmony between mind, body, and environment.

As gynecologists, we have the opportunity to move beyond symptom management and guide women toward flourishing in midlife. By nurturing

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the mind, embracing nourishing nutrition, and reconnecting with nature, women can navigate menopause with strength, resilience, and grace.

In an era increasingly dominated by technology, stress, and chronic disease, the timeless wisdom of Man, Madhu, Mitti offers a simple yet powerful prescription for healthy aging—a pathway that is deeply rooted in Indian tradition while being firmly supported by modern scientific evidence.

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FOGSI Focus Mental Health in Midlife Women MAN MADHU MITTI

Menopause is not merely the end of menstruation—it is a significant transition that touches a woman's body, mind, emotions, relationships, and sense of self. Yet, the mental and emotional dimensions of menopause often remain unspoken, misunderstood, or overlooked. *"Man Madhu Mitti"* is an effort to bring the conversation about mental well-being during menopause into the light. It explores concerns such as mood changes, anxiety, irritability, sleep disturbances, loss of confidence, emotional vulnerability, and changing relationships, while emphasizing that seeking help is a sign of awareness and strength. This book aims to empower women to understand their minds, recognize their needs, and navigate midlife with knowledge, compassion, and confidence. It also encourages families and healthcare professionals to listen without judgment and support women through this important transition. Because menopause is not a pause—it is a new chapter of life, and mental well-being is at its heart. *Man Madhu Miti* is a reminder that every woman deserves not only to age well, but to feel well, live well, and flourish well.



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Archana Dwivedi MB DGO FICOG CIMP FIMS is a leading voice in the field of gynecology and women's midlife health. She serves as the Director of Sterling Hospitals, Manav Hospital, Vadodara, Gujarat, India. With decades of clinical and academic experience, she has championed initiatives to bring menopause and midlife issues to the forefront of medical discourse. She has led national programs that promote awareness, research, and holistic care in women's health. Her commitment to patient advocacy and physician education is reflected in every chapter of this book. An empathetic clinician, a passionate educator, and a visionary leader, she brings both expertise and heart to Me-No-Pause—a book that invites every woman to honor her evolution, not fear it.



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