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Rebooting your midlife mind

Hypnotherapy hacks for managing the mental and emotional impact of the menopause at work by Kerry Dolan.

Unexpected system freeze-ups, the endless vortex of the loading icon and interminably slow processing speeds: you might well recognise the signs that your computer is in need of a reboot. Over time, your PC will get clogged up with old programmes, random or unimportant memories and irksome bugs and glitches. Systems that go a long time without shutting down will not be operating at their best and women are much the same.

48% of the workforce as well as 75% of the world's unpaid labour is female so it's hardly surprising that many of us are showing up at midlife exhausted and depleted. Often, as menopause hits, we are still knee deep in our kids' hormones, caring for ageing parents and perhaps finally breaking through some of those glass ceilings at work. Suddenly, or so it seems, doubts creep in about our ability to complete everyday tasks. We worry about glitching in important meetings and our turbulent emotions can even make navigating the photocopier a challenge.

While teenagers entering puberty typically cocoon themselves in their duvets for their metamorphosis, women, experiencing this process in reverse, often find themselves with more responsibilities than ever before.

As I write this article, my mac urges me to close down while updates are installed, and I silence its cautionary pop-ups – I haven't got time for that now. Who among

us has time for menopause now? We are coping with more input than ever before in history. Like infinite open windows in a browser, we are paying attention to so many different things at once and often those tabs just do not get shut down.

The symptoms that crop up around menopause can just be our bodies urging us to reset. Menstrual mogul, Alexander Pope (author of 'The Wild Genie' and co-author of 'Wild Power') describes menopause as a 'report card': an invitation to make lifestyle adjustments and realign with dreams, which may have been put aside in favour of family, career or any of the many other demands that life can bring.

Taking a gap year, like some of our teenage counterparts, or retreating to an isolated cottage in the woods might seem tempting but, if they aren't a realistic or desirable possibility, there are other ways to refresh.

Make time for Regular reboots:

Updates and changes can't be made to systems whilst they are in use and in this age of efficiency our minds are pretty much constantly in use.

Finding regular opportunities to pause throughout your day can provide valuable processing time to clear the random, unimportant and temporary data which may be bogging us down and exacerbating brain fog:

- Recognise opportunities to pause between tasks throughout your day. Be mindful of the time between meetings and activities, take proper breaks, choose the scenic route to work, look up from your screen periodically and be present in those moments between all the 'doing'. Tune into your senses and attend to your needs: maybe you're thirsty or you're worried about something and you can take this moment to hydrate or give yourself the reassurance you need. Don't let your mind go galloping forward to the next thing.
- Check your plans to ensure that there are sufficient opportunities to stop, even for a short time. Create buffer zones so that you can take stock before embarking on the next set of tasks. Book these unstructured times in your diary. Use them to check in with yourself and don't be tempted to get anything achieved. These points will provide you with stepping stones to carry you calmly through life instead of drowning in commitments.
- Long before meditating was fashionable people daydreamed: allowing their gaze to rest softly on the view from the window, while washing up their office mug; staring absently into space whilst waiting for the kettle to boil or zoning out to the white noise of the workplace. Our minds are always busy processing the constant input of our lives but even the mind needs rest. Instead of finding ways to be 'productive' in these moments let go of thoughts and settle into your senses.
- Pause to breathe between items on your to-do list. Often when we are busy, we don't breathe properly. Choose something you do regularly, at least 8 times a day (maybe walking through a door, drinking water or going to the toilet), and breathe. Take a couple of deep, mindful breaths into your belly (to a count of four) and then breathe out slowly (to the count of 8) like a big sigh. Soon you will find that you do this automatically.

Clear Caches

The turbulent emotions we sometimes feel as our hormones stabilise can be tricky to manage, particularly in the workplace. Sometimes, the uneasy feelings from dealing with a tricky customer, broaching an uncomfortable conversation with a colleague or the lingering frustration of a difficult task can be difficult to shift. This Emotional Detox technique from hypnotherapists Kelley T. Woods and Michael Ellner is great to have in your menopause-management tool kit.

1. Close your eyes, take a deep breath and allow yourself to notice whatever it is that is bothering you. Become aware of the feelings in your body that are associated with this and as you do make a fist with your right hand, then release the fist.

2. Take another deep breath and open your eyes.

3. Now think of a time when you felt good. Picture it in your mind as though you were actually there, seeing what you saw, hearing what you heard, remembering any thoughts, feelings, even tastes that might be associated with the memory. As you do, notice the positive feelings in your body. Enjoy those feelings as you make a fist with your left hand and then release it.

4. And now for the magic: take another deep breath in and close your eyes. Make fists with both hands and try to find the emotions and feelings you had at the beginning of this exercise.

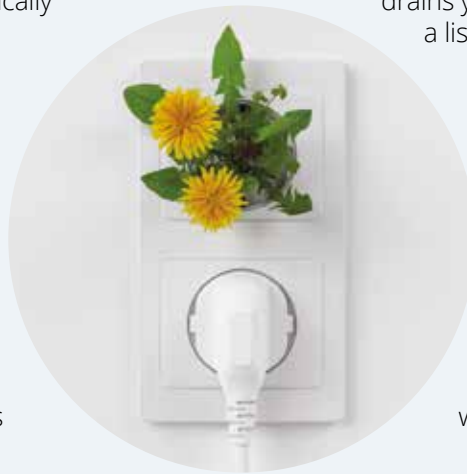
5. You will probably find them difficult to access now. If they are still there, run the process again. →



Plug into your power source:

As our minds and bodies start to protest about unsustainable workloads, we typically begin to shed those things that most nourish us. We spend less time with friends and family, exercising, making healthy meals, sleeping and indulging in our favourite hobbies in order to free up time and energy for work and chores. This is truly a false economy.

Entering the second half of your life, it is crucial that you become aware of what energises



and replenishes you and what depletes and drains you. You could do this by writing a list for each.

Now, look at your lists. Do they represent a good balance? Balancing your energy is an important component of your health and well-being. What adjustments can you make to your life to ensure that you are receiving enough energy? What could you let go of so that you wouldn't feel so depleted?



Delete old programmes

Over the years, we constantly evolve, updating our software. Our minds are complex. The very nature of our unconscious mind is that it is not easily accessed through conscious thinking and often software is still running that's outdated and clashing with the latest version.

The heightened anxiety that many of us experience at during our perimenopausal years can actually be quite helpful in helping us to identify the necessary updates.

Notice the thoughts that occur during bouts of anxiety. Often these reflect obsolete beliefs and ways of thinking that surface as your shifting hormones re-wire your brain. What are you focussing on? Do you agree with your thoughts? Are your thoughts compassionate (to you and others)? Are they helping you to move forward? Taking inventory in this way can help you make adjustments to your mind set and make choices about what you want to focus on.

Ask yourself, 'How am I thinking about this situation or myself that has me feeling this way?'

For example, perhaps I am thinking, 'I'm never going to finish this task!' and I notice that this thought makes me feel stressed and overwhelmed.

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Then, ask yourself, 'Can I know, absolutely, that this is true?'

Finally, invert the thought or find a truer/ more compassionate thought.

For example, 'I will get this task finished, it may just take a little more time.'

Notice how this new thought feels. You can tinker with it, until it feels better.

Kerry is a hypnotherapist, NLP Master practitioner, writer and speaker with a specialism in women's health. She works as part of the Norwich Natural Fertility Partnership, a team of holistic therapists working with women from puberty to menopause and beyond. Her 'Trance For Menopause' program supports women through around menopause using a variety of mind/body techniques to manage the physical and emotional symptoms as well as enabling you to reconnect or connect more deeply with yourself and your life. Find out more about her work at www.wombservice.co.uk or follow her on Instagram at [kerry.wombservice](https://www.instagram.com/kerry.wombservice)