



# THE PERIMENOPAUSE SURVIVAL GUIDE

What your doctor hasn't told you —  
and what you can do about it



## INSIDE THIS GUIDE:

- ✓ 10 signs you might be in perimenopause
- ✓ The 4 hormones driving your symptoms
- ✓ Nutrition & supplement strategies that work
- ✓ Scripts to advocate for yourself at the doctor



You deserve answers.  
You deserve to feel like  
YOU again.



# Welcome, Friend

I know what it's like to feel like your body is betraying you. One day you're fine — the next, you're waking up at 3am soaked, snapping at people you love, and wondering why your jeans don't fit even though nothing has changed. And when you ask your doctor, you're told: **"Your labs look normal. That's just part of aging."**

I'm Courtney Mericle — certified life coach, breathwork facilitator, personal trainer, and EllieMD Brand Partner. I'm also a woman in the thick of this season, and I built The Shift Project because I believe you deserve better answers.

This guide is your starting point. It's not a substitute for medical care — but it IS the conversation starter, the clarity, and the confidence to walk into your next appointment knowing exactly what to ask. You deserve to feel like yourself again. Let's figure out where to start.

— Courtney | @courtney.mericle

## WHAT'S INSIDE

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Section 1

# 10 Signs You Might Be in Perimenopause

*Perimenopause can begin as early as your mid-30s — often years before your period stops. Here are the signs that are easy to overlook or dismiss:*

- 1 Irregular Periods**  
Your cycle is shifting—longer, shorter, heavier, lighter, or skipping months. This is one of the earliest signs your hormones are fluctuating.
- 2 Sleep Disruptions**  
Waking at 3–4am, struggling to fall asleep, or sleeping through the night but waking exhausted. Progesterone is your sleep hormone — when it drops, sleep suffers.
- 3 Hot Flashes & Night Sweats**  
Sudden waves of heat, flushing, or waking drenched. Estrogen fluctuations disrupt your body's temperature regulation system.
- 4 Mood Changes & Anxiety**  
Feeling more irritable, anxious, tearful, or unlike yourself emotionally. Estrogen and progesterone both directly influence serotonin and GABA.
- 5 Brain Fog**  
Forgetting words, losing your train of thought, or feeling mentally slow. Estrogen supports cognitive function and neurotransmitter production.
- 6 Low Libido**  
Decreased desire or sexual discomfort. Testosterone decline combined with estrogen shifts affects both drive and physical sensation.
- 7 Weight Gain (Especially Belly)**  
Storing fat around the midsection despite no change in diet or exercise. Hormonal shifts change how your body distributes and stores fat.
- 8 Joint Pain & Muscle Aches**  
Stiffness, aching, or new joint pain. Estrogen has anti-inflammatory properties — as it declines, inflammation can increase.
- 9 Hair & Skin Changes**  
Thinning hair, dry skin, or new sensitivity. Hormone shifts impact collagen production and hair growth cycles.
- 10 Fatigue That Sleep Doesn't Fix**  
Bone-deep tiredness that doesn't improve with rest. Cortisol dysregulation and disrupted sleep cycles both play a role.

**Note:** You don't need all 10 to be in perimenopause. Even 2–3 of these, especially alongside cycle changes, is worth exploring with a hormone-literate provider.

Section 2

# The 4 Hormones Behind Your Symptoms

*Your symptoms aren't random — they're signals. Here are the four hormones most involved in perimenopause and what happens when they shift:*

## ESTROGEN

The master hormone — involved in mood, cognition, heart health, bone density, skin, and sexual function.

- Irregular or heavy periods
- Hot flashes & night sweats
- Brain fog & mood changes
- Vaginal dryness
- Bone loss over time

## PROGESTERONE

Your calming, sleep-supporting hormone. Declines earlier than estrogen — often the first to go.

- Insomnia & poor sleep quality
- Anxiety & irritability
- Heavy or irregular cycles
- PMS that's getting worse
- Feeling 'wired but tired'

## TESTOSTERONE

Yes, women need testosterone too. It drives libido, muscle mass, energy, and confidence.

- Low sex drive
- Difficulty building/maintaining muscle
- Low motivation or drive
- Increased body fat
- Brain fog

## CORTISOL

Your stress hormone. When it's dysregulated (too high or too low), it disrupts every other hormone.

- Belly weight gain
- Fatigue that doesn't resolve with sleep
- Afternoon energy crash
- Waking at 3–4am
- Feeling overwhelmed easily

**The bottom line:** These four hormones work as a team. When one is off, the others compensate — and that cascade is what creates your unique symptom picture. Addressing one without considering the others is why so many women feel stuck.

# 5 Nutrition Strategies to Support Your Hormones

*Food is information for your hormones. These aren't diet rules — they're tools. Start with one and build from there.*

## 1

### Prioritize Protein at Every Meal

Protein supports muscle preservation (critical as estrogen declines), helps stabilize blood sugar, and provides the amino acid building blocks your body needs to produce hormones.

#### Action items:

- Aim for 25–35g of protein per meal
- Prioritize whole food sources: eggs, chicken, fish, Greek yogurt, legumes
- Add a protein-rich snack before bed to support overnight muscle repair

## 2

### Stabilize Blood Sugar

Blood sugar swings worsen every perimenopause symptom — especially mood, energy, sleep, and belly fat. Estrogen normally helps regulate insulin; as it declines, you become more insulin-sensitive.

#### Action items:

- Pair carbs with protein or fat at every meal
- Avoid eating carbs alone or skipping meals
- Consider a 10-minute walk after meals to lower glucose response

## 3

### Support Your Liver

Your liver is responsible for clearing used estrogen. When it's overburdened, estrogen recirculates — worsening symptoms like heavy periods, bloating, and mood swings.

#### Action items:

- Eat cruciferous vegetables daily (broccoli, cauliflower, kale, Brussels sprouts)
- Limit alcohol — even 1–2 drinks nightly significantly impairs estrogen clearance
- Consider DIM supplement (Diindolylmethane) — see Section 4

# 4

## Eat for Gut Health

Your gut microbiome contains something called the 'estrobolome' — a collection of bacteria that helps regulate estrogen metabolism. A disrupted gut = disrupted hormones.

### Action items:

- **Include fermented foods daily: sauerkraut, kefir, kimchi, yogurt**
  - **Eat 25–35g of fiber per day from whole food sources**
  - **Minimize ultra-processed foods that disrupt microbiome diversity**
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# 5

## Don't Undereat

This is the most common mistake I see in active women. Undereating — especially when combined with heavy training — spikes cortisol and suppresses progesterone. Your body reads restriction as stress.

### Action items:

- **Calculate your true needs (contact me for a personalized guide)**
  - **Eat within 1 hour of waking to support cortisol rhythm**
  - **If you're training hard, eat MORE — not less**
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Section 4

## Supplements: What's Worth It (and What to Skip)

*The supplement aisle is overwhelming. Here's what the research actually supports — and what you can probably leave on the shelf.*

### THE GREEN LIST — Worth Considering

- ✓ **Magnesium Glycinate**  
Supports sleep, stress response, muscle recovery, and mood. Most women are deficient. Start with 200–400mg before bed.
- ✓ **Vitamin D3+K2**  
Critical for bone density, immune function, and mood. Get your levels tested. Most women need 2,000–5,000 IU daily.
- ✓ **Omega-3s (Fish Oil)**  
Reduces inflammation, supports brain health, and helps regulate cortisol. Look for 1–2g EPA+DHA daily.
- ✓ **DIM (Diindolylmethane)**  
Supports healthy estrogen metabolism and liver clearance of excess estrogen. Especially helpful for heavy periods or estrogen dominance symptoms.
- ✓ **Ashwagandha**  
Adaptogenic herb shown to reduce cortisol, improve stress resilience, and support sleep. Works best taken consistently over 4–8 weeks.
- ✓ **B-Complex**  
Supports energy production, nervous system health, and hormone synthesis. B6 and B12 are especially important in perimenopause.

### THE RED LIST — Proceed With Caution

- ✗ **Generic 'Hormone Balance' Blends**  
Vague formulations with proprietary blends. Look for third-party tested single ingredients instead.
- ✗ **Soy Isoflavones**  
Can be helpful for some women but problematic for others — especially those with thyroid issues or certain estrogen-sensitive conditions. Don't start without guidance.
- ✗ **Maca (High Doses)**  
Low doses may help libido for some women, but high-dose maca can worsen anxiety or mood instability in perimenopause.
- ✗ **Iron (Without Testing)**  
Supplementing iron without a confirmed deficiency can cause harm. Always test ferritin before supplementing.

**Always:** Work with a hormone-literate provider before starting any supplement protocol. This list is educational — not a prescription.

## Section 5

# How to Talk to Your Doctor

*Many women leave appointments feeling dismissed. Here's how to walk in prepared — and advocate for the care you deserve.*

## Labs to Request

- FSH(Follicle-Stimulating Hormone) — elevated FSH is a key marker of perimenopause
- Estradiol (E2) — measures your primary form of estrogen
- Progesterone — best tested on day 19–21 of your cycle if you're still cycling
- Total & Free Testosterone — often skipped for women; fight for this one
- DHEA-S — adrenal hormone that declines with age and affects energy and libido
- Cortisol (AM draw) — assess adrenal function
- Thyroid panel (TSH, Free T3, Free T4) — thyroid symptoms mimic perimenopause
- Ferritin — iron stores; low ferritin causes fatigue, hair loss, and poor recovery
- Vitamin D — critical for bone density, mood, and immunity
- Fasting insulin & glucose — assess metabolic health

## Exact Scripts to Use

### When your doctor says 'your labs are normal':

*"I understand my labs fall within the standard range, but I'm experiencing significant quality-of-life changes. Can we talk about what 'optimal' looks like versus just 'normal,' and whether there's a functional approach worth exploring?"*

### When you want to discuss HRT or hormone support:

*"I'd like to discuss whether hormone therapy might be appropriate for me. Can you walk me through the current evidence and help me understand my options?"*

### When you feel dismissed:

*"I want to be clear that these symptoms are significantly affecting my daily life — my sleep, my mood, my ability to function at work and with my family. I'd like us to take this seriously and build a plan together."*

### When requesting a referral:

*"Would you be able to refer me to an endocrinologist or a menopause specialist? I'd like a second opinion from someone who focuses specifically on hormonal health."*

Section 6

# Your 4-Pillar Action Checklist

*The Shift Project is built on four pillars of whole-person wellness. Here's where to start taking action in each area:*

NOURISH	MOVE
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>▪ Eat 25–35g protein at each meal</li><li>▪ Pair carbs with protein or fat — always</li><li>▪ Eat within 1 hour of waking</li><li>▪ Include cruciferous veggies daily</li><li>▪ Limit alcohol to support hormone clearance</li><li>▪ Stay hydrated (aim for half your body weight in oz)</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>▪ Prioritize strength training 3x/week (non-negotiable)</li><li>▪ Add 20–30 min of Zone 2 cardio most days</li><li>▪ Take a 10-min walk after meals</li><li>▪ Avoid chronic high-intensity without adequate recovery</li><li>▪ Stretch or do yoga 2x/week for cortisol regulation</li><li>▪ Track recovery — HRV or subjective readiness</li></ul>
REGULATE	LEARN
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>▪ Practice breathwork or meditation 5–10 min daily</li><li>▪ Protect sleep: consistent bedtime, dark/cool room</li><li>▪ Limit screens 60 min before bed</li><li>▪ Journal 3 things you're grateful for each morning</li><li>▪ Set ONE boundary this week to protect your energy</li><li>▪ Say no to one thing that drains you</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>▪ Request a full hormone panel at your next appointment</li><li>▪ Track your symptoms for 2 weeks (mood, energy, sleep, cycle)</li><li>▪ Follow one hormone-literate creator or resource</li><li>▪ Read one article or chapter on perimenopause this week</li><li>▪ Consider booking a Peptide Clarity Call with Courtney</li><li>▪ Share this guide with one woman who needs it</li></ul>

## Reflection Prompts

*Take 10 minutes with these questions. Your answers will guide where to focus first.*

→ *Which symptoms from Section 1 resonated most with you?*

→ *What area of the 4-pillar checklist feels most neglected right now?*

→ *What's one thing you've been telling yourself is 'just aging' that you want to investigate further?*

→ *What support do you need that you haven't given yourself permission to ask for?*

## Ready to Go Deeper?

If this guide opened your eyes to what might be happening in your body — and you're ready for personalized support — I'd love to connect with you on a **Peptide Clarity Call**.

### On our call, we'll explore:

- Where you are right now — symptoms, history, and what you've already tried
- What you're hoping to feel like (because that matters most)
- Whether peptide therapy through EllieMD might be a fit for your goals
- Next steps you can take immediately, regardless of whether we work together

DM me the word **PEPTIDE** on Instagram or reach out at [courtneymericle.com](https://www.courtneymericle.com) to book your call.

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## About Courtney

Courtney Mericle is a certified life coach, breathwork facilitator, personal trainer, and EllieMD Brand Partner based in Colorado. She co-owns Surge Athletics gym with her husband Brandon and founded The Shift Project to help women 30–50 break free from diet culture, reclaim their health, and feel like themselves again.

Her four-pillar wellness philosophy — Physical, Mental, Emotional, Spiritual — guides everything she creates, from nutrition coaching to breathwork to peptide therapy education. She believes every woman deserves access to the truth about her body.

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*This guide is for educational purposes only and is not intended as medical advice. Always consult a qualified healthcare provider before making changes to your supplement protocol or health regimen.*