SESSION TRANSCRIPT · THE MISSING PIECES OF PERIMENOPAUSE

The Midlife Mood Manual

with Crystal Berg · Day 4, Thursday, October 29 · The Unfamiliar Feelings

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Hey there. Welcome to The Midlife Mood Manual, a no-bullshit guide. Hi, I'm Crystal Berg, and I build tools for people whose brains and bodies don't run on the factory setting. Today we're going to talk about the feelings that show up in perimenopause and don't feel like yours. Things like rage, anxiety, crying over a pet food commercial, or snapping at someone you love who didn't do anything wrong.

I'll start with a recent afternoon at my desk. This happens probably at least once a week right now. I had a task that should have taken about 20 minutes, and instead it took three hours, because the file wouldn't upload. Then it uploaded wrong because I didn't change the file name. Then the thing I fixed broke something else. And after an hour or two, I wasn't frustrated anymore. I was just totally freaking out. My day is being wasted. I'm not going to get anything done. My heart is pounding, my jaw's clenched, and I'm ready to throw my mouse across the room over a progress bar, if it didn't cost so damn much to replace. Then my cat showed up, walked across the keyboard, sat down on it and started purring at me. So I couldn't work anymore. So I stopped. I sat there petting the cat for a while instead of shooing her off and putting her on the floor. And the freakout just drained right out of me. And at the time, I had no idea whether that freakout was hormones or just stress.

So I'm AuDHD, with some OCD in there too. That's autism and ADHD in the same brain. Rage and anxiety have been part of my life forever. Forever and ever. Focus is hard for me, and it definitely feels impossible since midlife has kicked in. Reading complicated things is hard. Trying to read a book is impossible these days. I'm tired a lot, and I've spent years learning how to reshape my days so things still get done. But now I'm starting to notice moments where I can tell the hormones are in on it. The rage shows up a whole lot faster. The anxiety has a way sharper edge to it. And when you're standing in the moment, I just can't tell which part is my wiring, which part is my life and which part is my estrogen. And if you're thinking "same," this talk is absolutely for you.

I just want to preface that it's the end of October 2026 here. I had all of my bloodwork done, a huge panel, in January, and my hormone levels were fine. They have just now started to tank in the last three months, where I'm having wacky periods and everything is all over the place. That's why it's getting a little harder to tell what is what. But I notice there's been a big dip between when I was definitely okay and now, when I'm not. And I'm 49 and a half right now.

So when women in perimenopause bring up rage, anxiety or crying, we usually get one of two bullshit answers. It's just hormones, or it's just stress. Both answers come with zero tools. "Just hormones" means wait it out. "Just stress" means relax. And most likely, this is coming to you from someone of the male species, most likely your significant other, and you just want to Norman Bates his ass once he's done saying stupid things like that to you. Neither one tells you what to do in the middle of the afternoon when you're about to lose your shit on your kid, your partner or your printer, or after you've lost your shit on all of the above.

Your unfamiliar feelings are telling you something about your body, your life, or both. And once you can read them better, you can stop white-knuckling every mood shift and start responding to what's actually going on. So we're going to do this in three parts: Name It, Claim It and Tame It. Name It is what's happening in your brain, and how to tell hormonal from situational. Claim It is why so many of us hide these feelings and what hiding costs you, because it does cost. And Tame It is three things you can use this week.

Okay, so Name It. I'm keeping the science short, because my brain just wants to zone out even having this slide up here. The point is for you to stop thinking that you're losing your mind. You're not, even when it feels like it. Estrogen does a lot of work in your brain. It helps keep serotonin steady, which affects your mood. It supports GABA, the chemical that calms things down. It helps manage cortisol, which is your stress hormone. And it influences the part of your brain that decides whether something is a threat or not.

In perimenopause, estrogen doesn't drop in a straight line. It swings high one week and crashes the next, and every one of those systems swings with it. The calming chemical has less backup, and the threat detector gets jumpy. So a slow website or a loud chewer lands like a murderous offense. That's why the reaction feels too big for the moment. To your brain, in that moment, it was an emergency.

So when a big feeling hits you, it's coming from one of three places, or a mix of them. Hormonal will line up with your cycle, or with nights of bad sleep and sweating through the sheets, and it shows up even when life is fine. Situational has a real cause: a boundary you haven't set, or one someone's broken. Caregiving with no backup. A job that asks for more than you have. A partner who leaves every dish in the sink and doesn't even rinse them out. And then both: a real situation landing on a brain that has less cushion than it used to have. In midlife, that's very common.

And if you're neurodivergent like me, which I know a lot of you are, there's a thread running through all three: your wiring. Sensory overload, interrupted focus, and a 20-minute task that eats your whole afternoon. Those will set off rage and anxiety in a woman of any age.

This next part took me the longest to accept. In the moment, you usually can't tell which one it is. The good thing is that you don't need to. The reset I'll show you in a few minutes works on all of

them. You calm your body first and sort out the cause later.

The sorting happens over time. Every time a big feeling hits, write down four things: the date, the feeling, how you slept and what set it off. It should take you 30 seconds to a minute if you keep a little notebook handy. You're going to do that for six to eight weeks to fully track what's going on through your hormonal cycle, and then you're going to look back at it. You may start to notice patterns earlier than that, and that's great, but you want to do it for this longer stretch to really get the flow, because your stuff is probably not "normal" right now.

If your bad days cluster in the week before your period, or after nights of bad sleep, that's your hormones talking. If they cluster around the same person, the same chore or the same night every week, that's most likely situational. And if it's both, you'll see pieces of each. If your periods are irregular now, which is common in perimenopause, log the days you bleed anyway. The pattern still shows up. If your periods have stopped, sleep and hot flashes become your markers.

This log is also the best thing you can bring to a doctor. Saying "I've had 11 rage episodes in the last eight weeks, and nine were in the five days before my period" will get a very different response from your doctor than "I've been kind of moody lately."

So, Claim It. A lot of us were raised to just be fine. I'm fine. Fine at work. Fine at home. Fine when anyone asks how we're doing. And if you're the person who holds everyone else together, the caregiver for kids, for aging parents, for a partner, for a whole office, being fine was part of your unwritten job description. So when the rage shows up, your first move is to hide it, swallow it, apologize for it and push through.

A swallowed feeling does not disappear. It comes out later, and not in a great way. Usually on someone who didn't earn it. Or it turns inward and shows up as exhaustion, headaches, or that tight feeling in your chest that never fully goes away. Or no desire to leave your couch for three days, watching everything on Netflix you can, which is not going to make your situation any better at the end of it. Pretending you don't have feelings is the whole problem.

Claiming a feeling sounds like this. "I'm really irritable today, and it isn't about you." Or, "I need ten minutes before we talk about this." Or, "I'm not okay right now, and I'm working on it. So back off."

If you're caregiving, this part is for you. Rage in a caregiver is very often a signal that you've been giving with nothing coming back for too long. It doesn't make you a bad daughter, a bad mom or a bad partner. It means the load is uneven and somebody else needs to step up, and your body is finally filing a complaint. A complaint like that needs a real answer, and the answer is usually asking for specific help, or setting a limit you've been putting off and sticking to it.

So there are three tools in Tame It: the reset, the feelings triage, and one boundary this week.

Tool number one is the 60-second reset. You're going to use it when the feeling hits and you have no idea where it's coming from. Breathe in through your nose. At the top of it, take one more short sip of air through your nose. Then breathe out slowly through your mouth, longer than the breath in, like you're fogging up a window. That's always really hard for me. I can never get all the air out, and I'm sure I'm not the only one. That's one round. Do it five or six times, and that's about a minute. The double breath in opens your lungs back up, and the long breath out slows your heart rate. It's one of the fastest ways to bring your body down from a spike.

If breathing feels impossible, run some cold water over your wrists or splash it on your face. The cold helps interrupt the cycle. Or pull an ice pack out of the freezer, because at this point you probably have four of them in there, and put it on the back of your neck or the top of your head for a minute or two. And sometimes the reset is just stopping what you're doing. For me, that was the cat. Go pet a cat. Go walk around. I like to physically shake stuff out sometimes. I'll get up and wave my hands around, pace back and forth, do some lunges, just to physically get that shit out of there.

Number two is the feelings triage. Once you've reset, ask yourself three questions. What am I feeling? Give it a plain name: rage, panic, dread, tears, overload. What set it off? The actual freaking thing. Your upload failed. He interrupted you again. The dishwasher. And where am I in my month, and how did I sleep? You don't need an answer to that one, but if you're noticing it and logging it, it will help you in the moment, because you'll be able to identify it. It doesn't take many entries before "I'm a mess" turns into "oh, it's day 24 and I only slept four hours last night. I forgot about that already."

And number three is one boundary this week. That's the new thing, right? Everybody says do one thing and one thing only. And one boundary can make a big-ass difference, as long as you stick to it. Look at your situational triggers, pick the one that shows up the most, and set one limit around it.

Here are some scripts you can borrow. "I can't take that on right now." "I'll answer that tomorrow." I've been loving that one. I really use it, and it's hard for me, because anybody on my mailing list knows that when I get an email, I usually answer it before it even feels delivered. So that one's for me, and I love it. If you're one of those people, "I'll answer that tomorrow." You'll thank me later.

Or, "I need you to handle dinner two nights a week." And if he starts crying, just smack him in the back of the head. Or if you have teenage children, they can do dinner one night a week. They'll survive. And if you haven't taught your kids how to make dinner, now's the fucking time. They're going to go to college soon, and they need to be prepared for this stuff.

Or, "I'm stepping out for ten minutes. I'll be back." And one of my other favorites: "I'm not discussing this today." And you don't owe anyone an explanation. This is another one I've been

catching myself on, because I am an over-explainer. I feel like I have to give people 52 reasons why I didn't do something, instead of just saying, "I can't do this today, but I'll do it tomorrow." I'm getting a lot better at that. And if someone pushes back, just say it again. "I understand you're frustrated. It's not the answer you wanted, but my answer is still the same."

Okay. You're getting a free gift as part of this presentation, and somewhere around it, above, beside or below, you'll find a link. It's called the Right Now Tool. You can open it on your phone or any device, but I make my tools super handy to use on your phone. You open it when a feeling hits and tap what's happening: rage, panic, can't think, wiped out, crying, or everything's too loud, because that one is me. It walks you through a 60-second reset with a timer and gives you a script you can copy. And it tells you plainly when something is worth calling your doctor, 911 or a therapist about, because I am none of those things.

The pattern log is built in, too. One tab saves the date, the feeling, your sleep, where you are in your cycle and what set you off, right there on your phone. It's not an app. It's more like a widget, delivered on a web page you can bookmark. As long as you always open it on the same device, like your phone, which is why I'm pitching it that way, it'll store your data. If you clear your cookies, it won't. After a few weeks, it will start to show you your pattern, which helps compared to logging on paper. But it's not a bad idea to do both.

All right, that's it. Thank you. Go pet your cat or your dog, or whatever your version of that is, and have an amazing day.