



The Science of Autism & Women Course #5

with Dr Rachel Moseley

Stream: 5pm | Talk Starts: 5:05pm

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WHO WE ARE

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We want you to come to our events and plant a seed. A seed that will grow with you, so you can enhance your wellbeing, health or simply discover a new fascinating subject to delve into!

Seed Talks was founded in London in late 2021. We are an independent events company dedicated to sharing interesting and worthwhile knowledge around the areas of Science, Psychedelics, Neurodiversity, Wellness, Philosophy, Psychology and Neuroscience.

Our speakers are carefully selected and vetted by a team with over seven years experience in public education. You can rest assured that you are learning from a trusted professional at our events.

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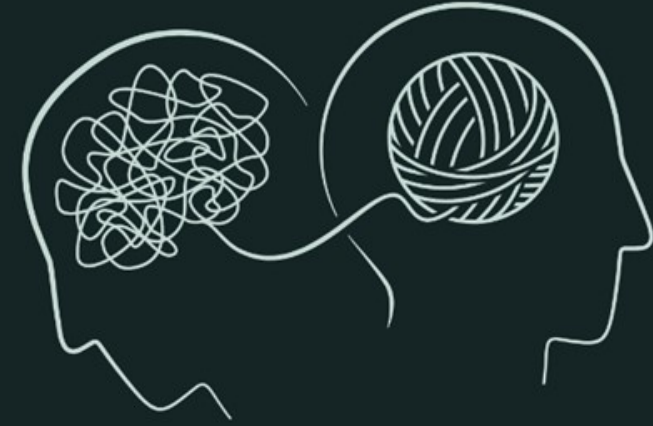
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Whether it's in marketing or event management, our team is always expanding.

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CONTENT IDEAS



Mental Health

- Anxiety
- Burnout
- Happiness
- Depression
- Trauma
- Psychedelics

Self Improvement

- Emotional Intelligence
- Communication
- Alcohol & Addiction
- Stoic Philosophy
- Building Resilience
- Money Management

Neurodiversity

- ADHD
- OCD
- Autism
- Neurodiversity & Mental Health
- Neurodiversity in the Workplace
- Women & Neurodiversity

Health & Wellness

- Our Gut Microbiome
- Healthy Eating
- Women's Health & The Workplace
- The Power of Kindness
- How the Mind Heals the Body
- Hormonal Contraception

The logo for SEED TALKS is located in the top left corner. It consists of the words "SEED" and "TALKS" stacked vertically in a bold, white, sans-serif font. Above the word "SEED" are three stylized white leaves. The entire logo is set against a circular orange background.

**SEED
TALKS**



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LIFESPAN DEVELOPMENT AND
REPRODUCTIVE TRANSITIONS

Autism & Women: A six-week course
Dr Rachel Moseley

A QUICK INTRO FROM YOUR HOST



Dr Rachel Moseley (she/her)

PhD in cognitive neuroscience;

Principal Academic in Psychology;

Late-diagnosed autistic with a spicy
psychiatric background



TODAY'S SESSION

Week 1: The Many Faces of Autism

Week 2: Autism in Girls, Women and People Assigned Female at Birth (AFAB)

Week 3: Health and wellbeing in autistic people

(1 week break!)

Week 4: Autism and Emotions

Week 5: Lifespan Development and Reproductive Transitions

Week 6: The Paths and Pitfalls of Seeking an Autism Diagnosis

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THIS TALK WILL COVER:

- Why should we care about lifespan development?
- The significance of the three ps
- How do autistic people experience **p**uberty...
- ... **p**regnancy...
- ... and **p**erimenopause?

- What about the bigger picture: midlife and beyond?

- Ageing well and coping with menopause

THIS TALK WILL COVER:

Slides, papers
and resources
available at the
end! :)

- Why should we care about lifespan development?
- The significance of the three ps
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**Trigger warning:
sensitive topics,
in places**

... about the bigger picture:
... life and beyond?

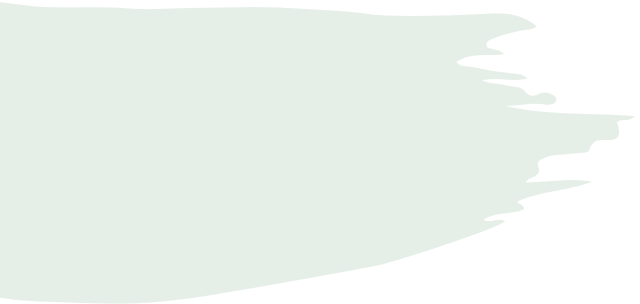
Ageing well and coping with
menopause



There's a very
simple reason why
we need to talk
about **lifespan**
development...



NEURODIVERGENT
CHILDREN GROW UP...
INTO **NEURODIVERGENT
ADULTS!**



“I suddenly realised, oh shit, my husband could die, in fact my husband IS going to die before me probably, and I'm going to be on my own”

Moseley (2021)

“Many of us, autistic people, wonder how our old age will look like... I ask, who will look after me if I need care?”

Cos Michaels (2016): Why we need research about autism and ageing.

Priority #3: 'The importance of continued support **throughout the autistic person's life**, not just focusing on autistic youth'.

"How can services be designed or adapted to be more person-centred and high quality for autistic people **across the lifespan...?**"

Cage
et al.
(2024)

1. Understanding co-occurring conditions
2. Adult transition
3. **Lifespan issues**
4. Health and wellbeing

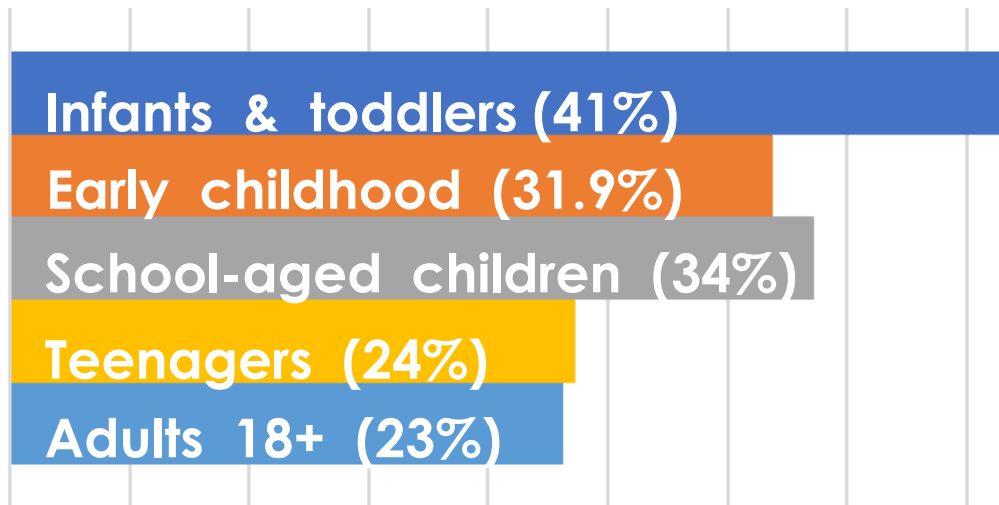
Frazier et al. (2018)

1. Skills development & training **from childhood into adult employment**
2. Physical and mental health & wellbeing
3. Availability and accessibility of services **across the lifespan**

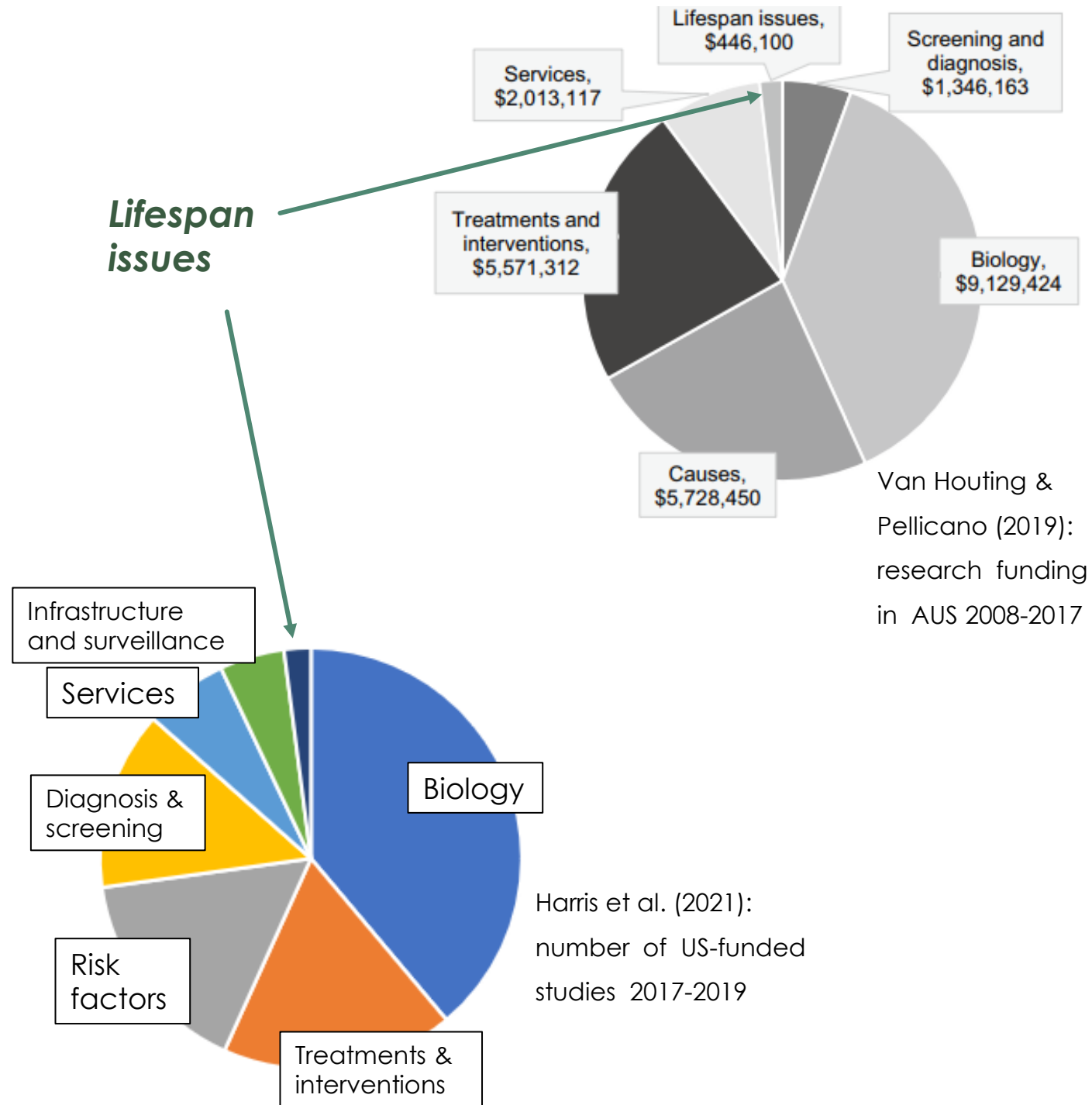
Roche et al. (2021)

AND YET...

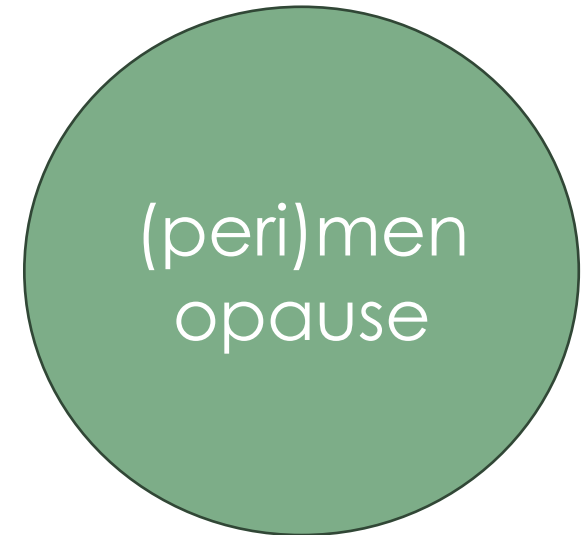
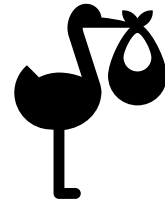
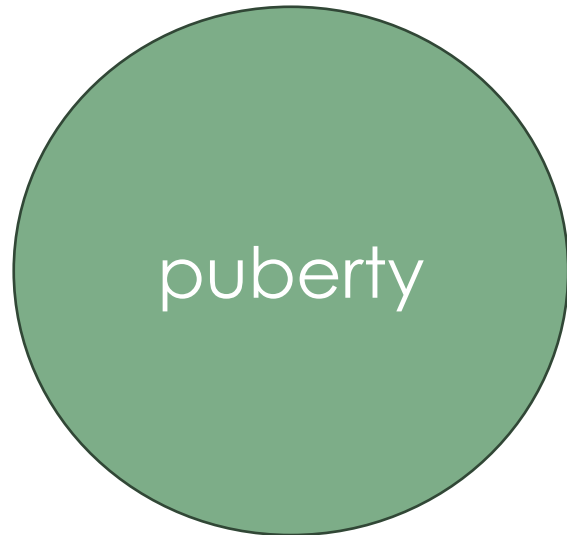
Cervantes et al. (2021): NIH funding across 2008-2018



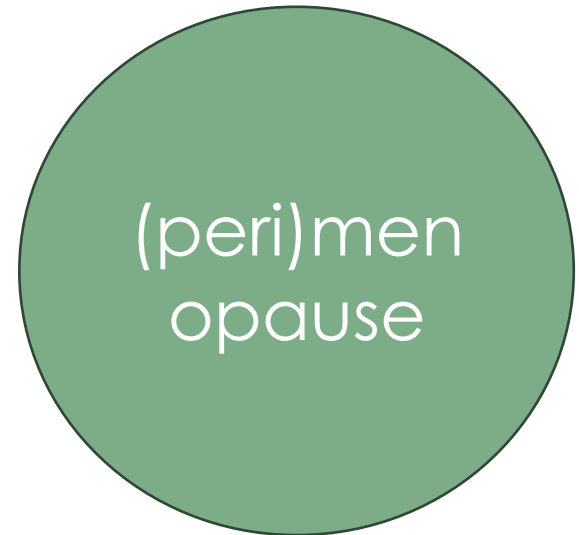
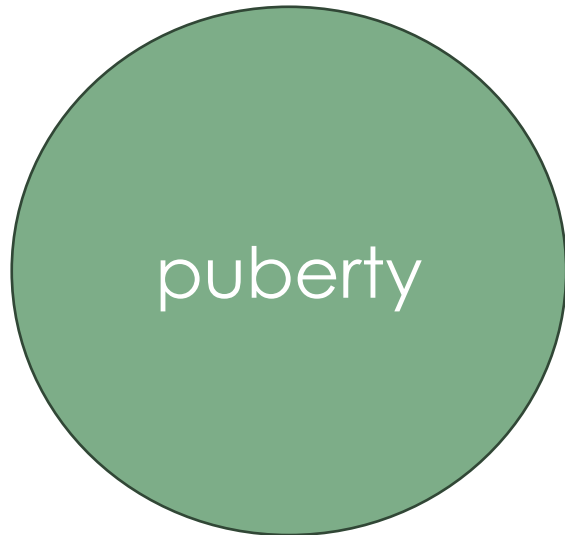
Lifespan issues



WITH THIS IN MIND... WE HAVE THE THREE PS



THESE ARE ALSO TIMES OF IMMENSE SOCIAL AND PSYCHOLOGICAL CHANGE...





puberty

1. It can start earlier.

(Tsai et al., 2024;
Groenman et al.,
2024)



puberty

2. An earlier start
might spell trouble.

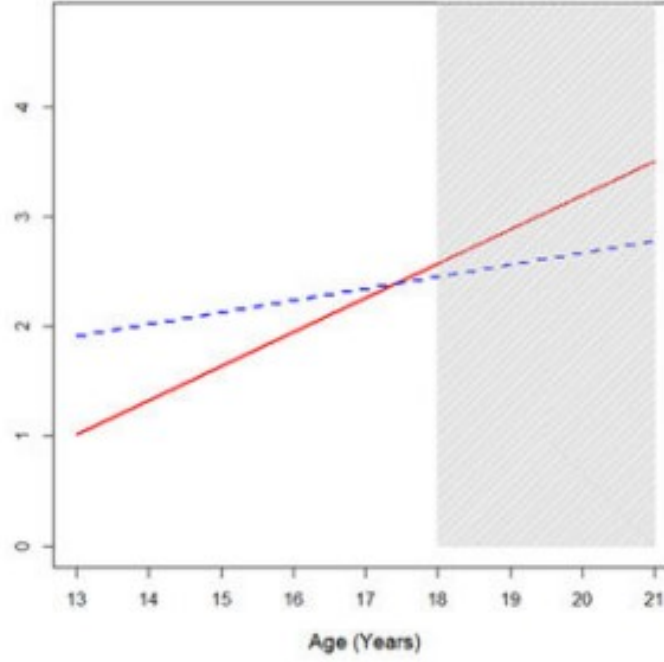
(Groenman et al.,
2024)



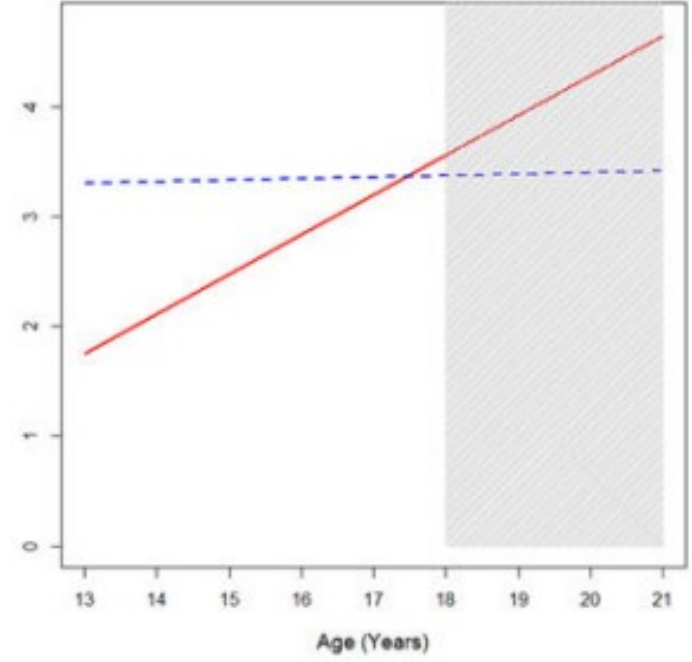
puberty

— Female
- - - Male

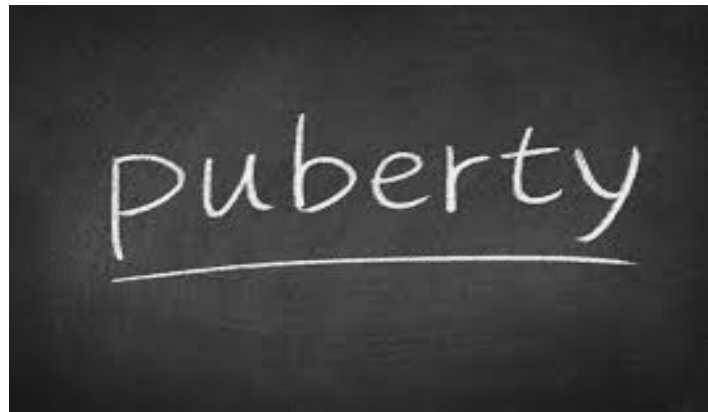
Anxiety



Depression



(Gotham et al., 2015)



Very bad, would not recommend.

An inside view...
autistic thinking
style vs.
menarche

“puberty and autism,
well undiagnosed
autism, doesn't really
mix very well”

puberty



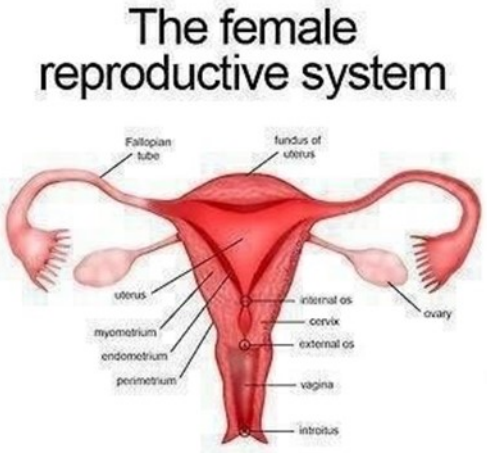
Very bad, would not recommend.

“Puberty was horrible. From that
point on, up to my early 20s, was
hell, absolute hell . . . It was pretty
awful, and I remember it being a
really emotional time . . . with the
huge emotions. I blocked it out.”

Others seem to
confirm this!

“autism does play a role. It can become much more overwhelming and harder to maintain control of the things that already take a lot of effort for us to keep on top of, during a period”

What about periods... generally?



Makes sense.

(Steward et al., 2018)

“I feel like when I experience things in my body, I experience it quite intensely... things like period pain and all of that, I think can have quite an impact on my mood and my anxiety because something is happening within my body and its sort of out of sorts, I struggle to remove my focus from it... it becomes a focus for me until it is done”

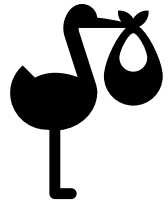
“I feel like I feel everything that is happening, and I feel like it’s just a lot of overwhelm. It might not be the worst pain ever, but I can’t get my mind of of it. Just feeling every bit of bloating, feeling everything, my clothes don’t fit right, and, you know, the skin changes, everything...”

“I think having periods as an autistic person is really overstimulating... it takes so much energy... period pain, and the bloating, and the back pain, and the breast pain, and the joint aches, it’s just super overstimulating.”

(Gray et al., 2024)



There's a way
you can avoid
having periods –
for 9 months!



'some things that I would be able to cope with normally, I wouldn't be able to cope with or would stress me out even more. Just general things like the supermarket and stuff'

'When he (baby) started moving inside me it was unbearable...I used to describe it as having an alien in me'

'with my body changing shape, my centre of gravity changing, my balance changing, it feels like, OK, I've had 30 years to get used to this body and now it's different, the rules have changed. I have to figure out new ways of moving and being in my body'

Let's talk about the birthing experience...

(Grant et al., 2025; Moore et al., 2024)




<https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCbYa89-P5shUH40AC-yhufA>

Videos by the amazing Dr Aimee Grant

The postnatal period also appears to be challenging for autistic people.

(e.g. Grant et al., 2024; Thom-Jones et al., 2024; Hernandez Gonzalez et al., 2024)





OUR EXPERIENCES DURING THESE
TRANSITIONS AFFECT OUR
EXPERIENCE DURING THE NEXT -
MENOPAUSE

LET'S TAKE A BREAK...

ADHD & WOMEN COURSE

6 Weeks, Online

Now available on-demand at seedtalks.co.uk

Hosted by

Dr Anneka Tomlinson

Clinical Academic Psychiatry
Fellow at the University of
Oxford specialising in ADHD.

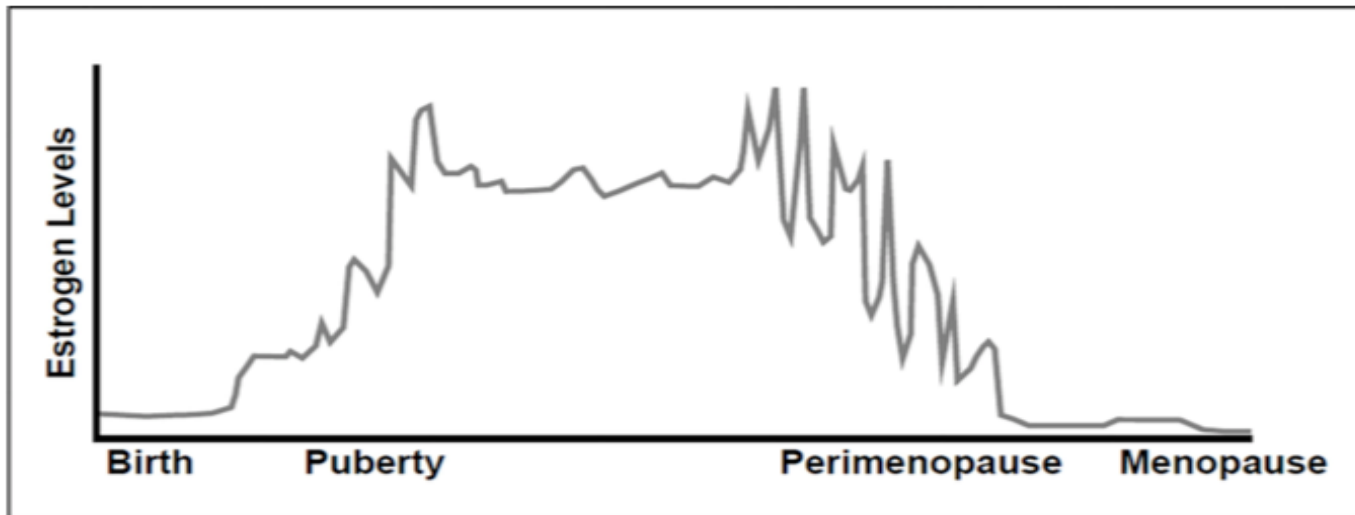
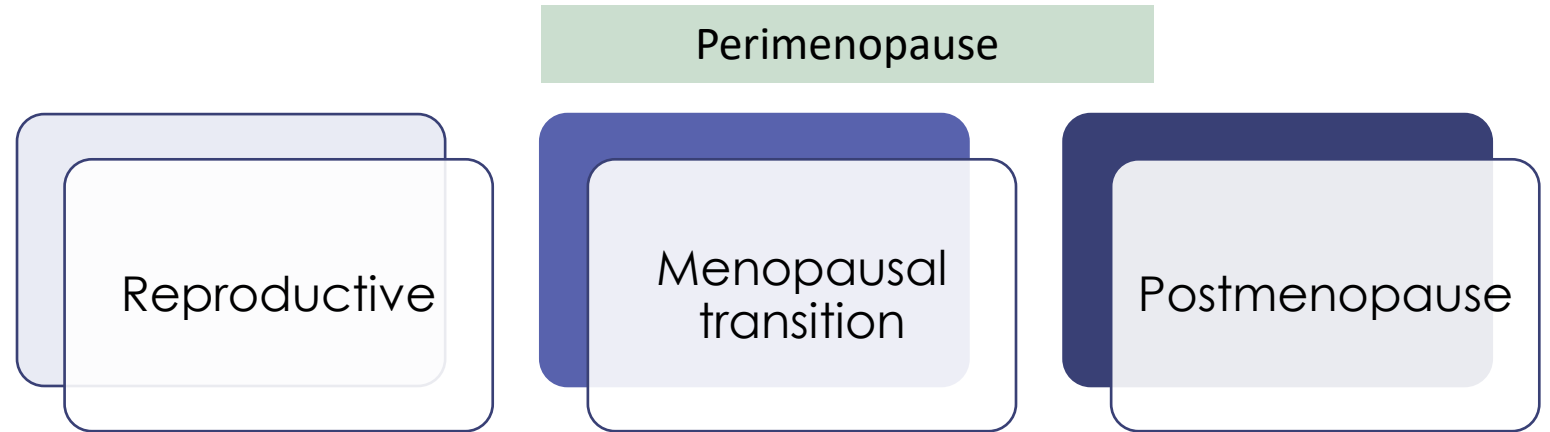


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COMING SOON

Three epochs of the reproductive cycle for people assigned female at birth...



Oestrogen levels across the lifecycle in people assigned female at birth
(Hoyt & Falconi, 2015)

And those symptoms...?

- Symptoms start a few months or years before periods stop
- On average, most symptoms stop about 4 years after last period
- 1 out of 10 women experience symptoms for up to 12 years

Change in normal pattern of periods

Hot flushes/flushes

Night sweats - night-time hot flushes

Difficulty sleeping - daytime tiredness & irritability

Reduced libido (sex drive)

Problems with memory and concentration

Vaginal dryness

Headaches

Mood changes - low mood or anxiety

Palpitations

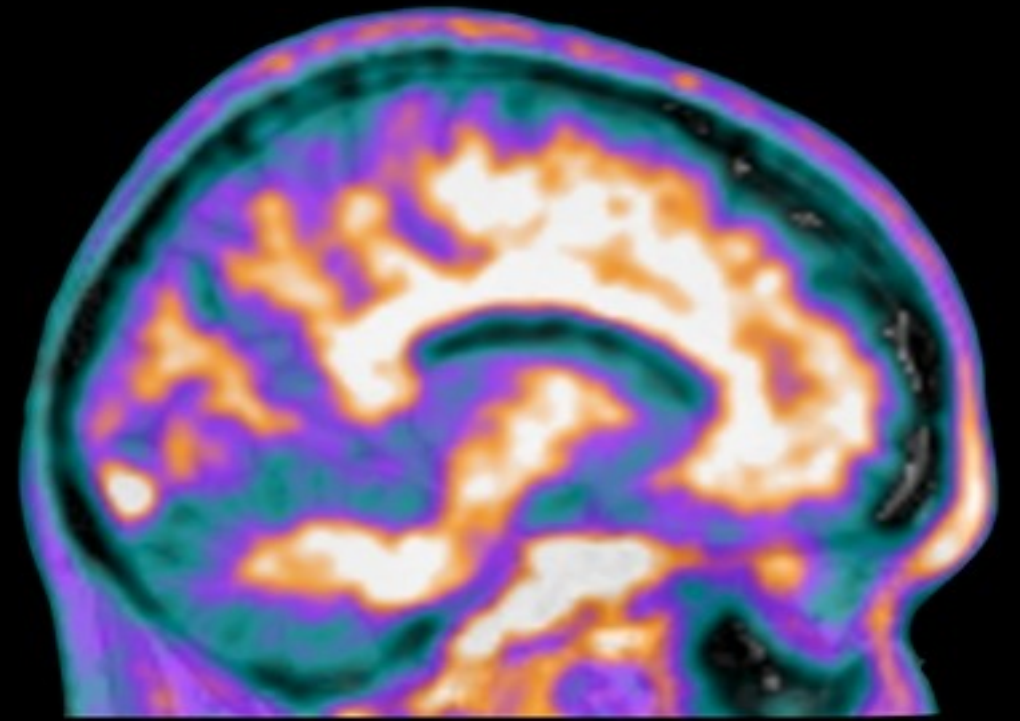
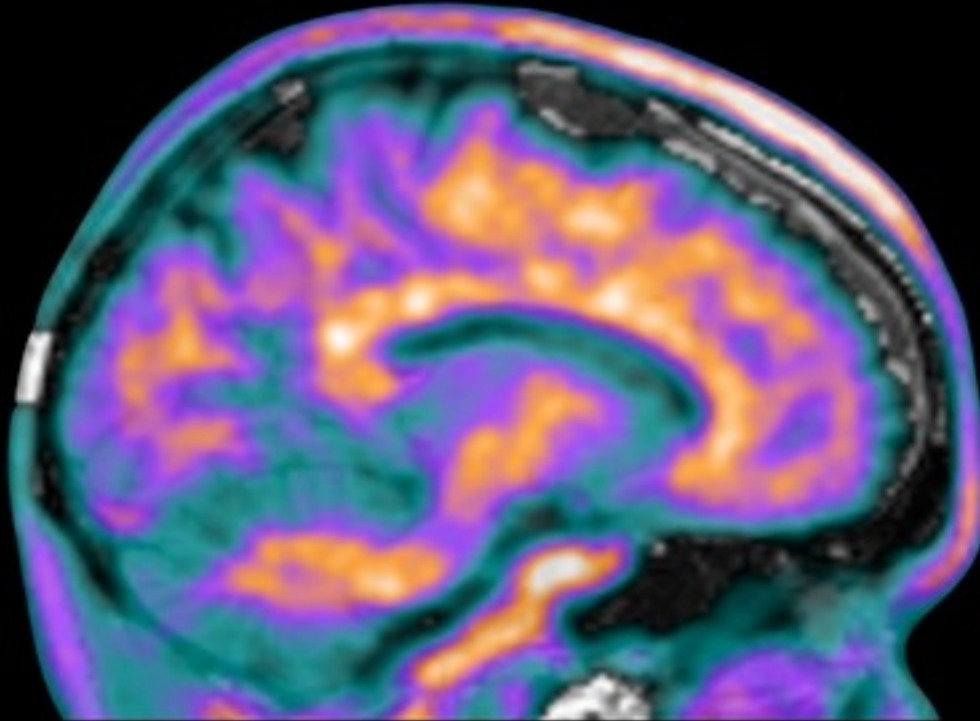
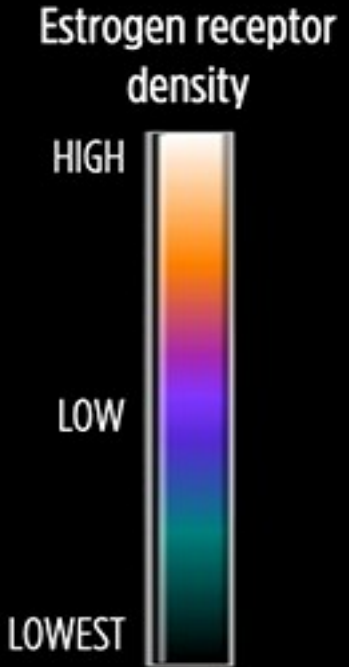
Joint stiffness, aches and pains

Reduced muscle mass

Urinary tract infections

BEFORE MENOPAUSE

AFTER MENOPAUSE



MENOPAUSE AS A NEUROLOGICAL TRANSITION

BAD NEWS FOR AUTISTIC (NEURODIVERGENT) PEOPLE BECAUSE...

- We have a high burden of mental and physical illness by the time we're in our 40s.
- We are more likely to have traumatic/stressful histories.

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- We are more likely to have traumatic/stressful histories.
- Your body and mind change in *unpredictable* and often *uncontrollable* ways
- You already differ in your emotions, sensory experiences, cognitive processes – all areas which stand to be affected.

BAD NEWS FOR AUTISTIC (NEURODIVERGENT) PEOPLE BECAUSE...

- Less likely to have social support from close friends – may affect social transmission of information
- Less likely to have good healthcare support
- More likely to have minority sex/gender identities

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- Less likely to have social support from close friends – may affect social transmission of information
- Less likely to have good healthcare support
- More likely to have minority sex/gender identities
- **More likely to go into menopause not knowing they are neurodivergent**

Moseley, R. L., Druce, T., & Turner-Cobb, J. M. (2020). 'When my autism broke': A qualitative study spotlighting autistic voices on menopause. *Autism*, 24(6), 1423-1437.

Moseley, R. L., Druce, T., & Turner-Cobb, J. M. (2021). Autism research is 'all about the blokes and the kids': Autistic women breaking the silence on menopause. *British Journal of Health Psychology*, 26(3), 709-726.

Brady, M. J., Jenkins, C. A., Gamble-Turner, J. M., Moseley, R. L., Janse van Rensburg, M., & Matthews, R. J. (2024). "A perfect storm": Autistic experiences of menopause and midlife. *Autism*, 28(6), 1405-1418.

Jenkins, C. A., Moseley, R.L., Matthews, R.J., Janse van Rensburg, M., Gamble-Turner, J.M., & Brady, M.J. "Struggling for Years": An International Survey on Autistic Experiences of Menopause. Under review, *Neurodiversity*.

OUR RESEARCH SO FAR
(+ BOOK ONGOING,
JESSICA KINGSLEY
PUBLISHERS)...

Moseley, R. L., Druce, T., & Turner-Cobb, J. M. (2020). 'When my autism broke': A qualitative study spotlighting autistic voices on menopause. *Autism*, 24(6), 1423-1437.

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Brady, M. J., Jenkins, C. A., Moseley, R. L., Matthews, R. J., Janse van Rensburg, M., Gamble-Turner, J. M., & Brady, M. J. (2022). Experiences of menopause in midlife. *Autism*, 26(1), 1-15.

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**Major caveat –
people with boring
menopauses don't
want to talk about
them!**

OUR RESEARCH SO FAR
(+ BOOK ONGOING,
JESSICA KINGSLEY
PUBLISHERS)...

IF YOU COULD DESCRIBE YOUR EXPERIENCE OF MENOPAUSE IN ONE WORD:



A word cloud of terms describing menopause experiences. The words are arranged in a cluster, with 'change' being the largest and most central word. Other prominent words include 'anxiety', 'hell', 'sweat', 'crazy', 'nightmare', 'soul-destroying', 'challenging', 'awful', 'traumatic', 'overwhelming', 'bewildering', 'enlightening', 'exhausting', 'confusing', 'bloody', and 'confusing'.

change

anxiety

hell

sweat

crazy

nightmare

soul-destroying

challenging

awful

traumatic

overwhelming

bewildering

enlightening

exhausting

confusing

bloody

confusing

WE FOUND THAT:

1. People often go in unprepared.

“On my own with my
body and feelings”

“I thought I was
going mad.”

WE FOUND THAT:

2. Menopause amplifies *neurodivergent difficulties*, and *neurodivergence* amplifies menopause.

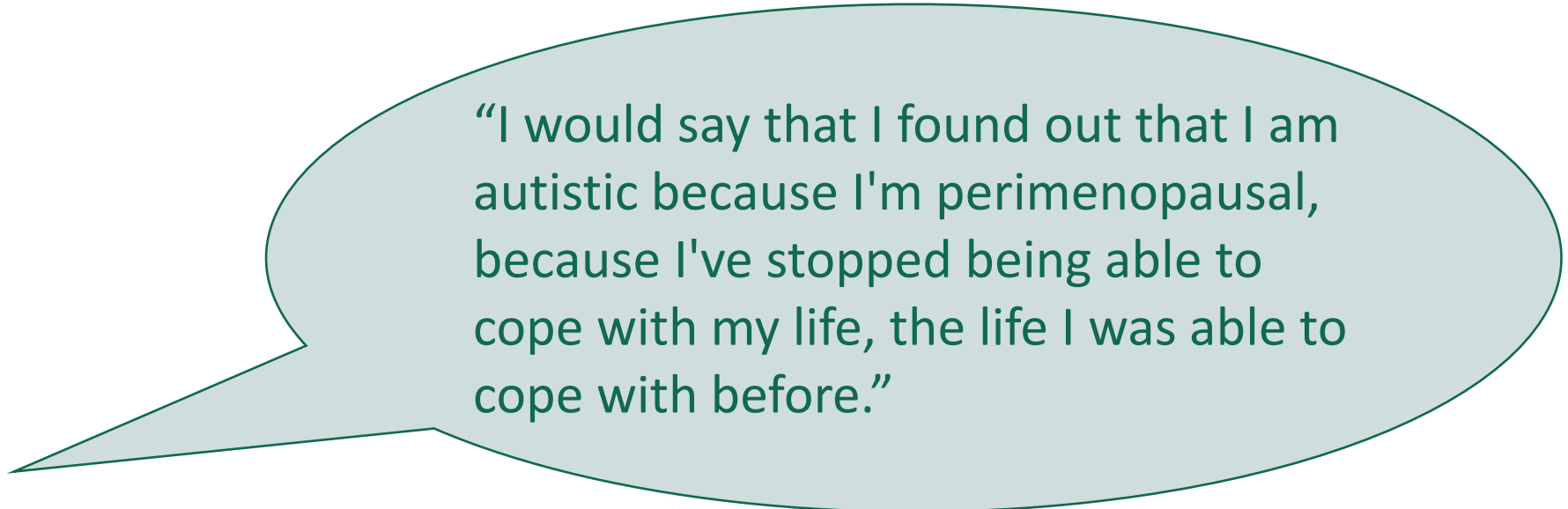
“The experience I had was very abrupt from being quite capable... to being unrecognisable as that person... being autistic can be a challenge but it does give us skills... My most noticeable thing was that I lost my skills [at menopause]... [how do others cope with] being robbed of their skills?”

“My ADHD is broken, it's got lots of D's in it, the deficit and the disorder. Before that I didn't feel it to be that way ... you could have these wonderful gifts.”



WE FOUND THAT:

2. Menopause amplifies *neurodivergent difficulties*, and *neurodivergence* amplifies menopause.

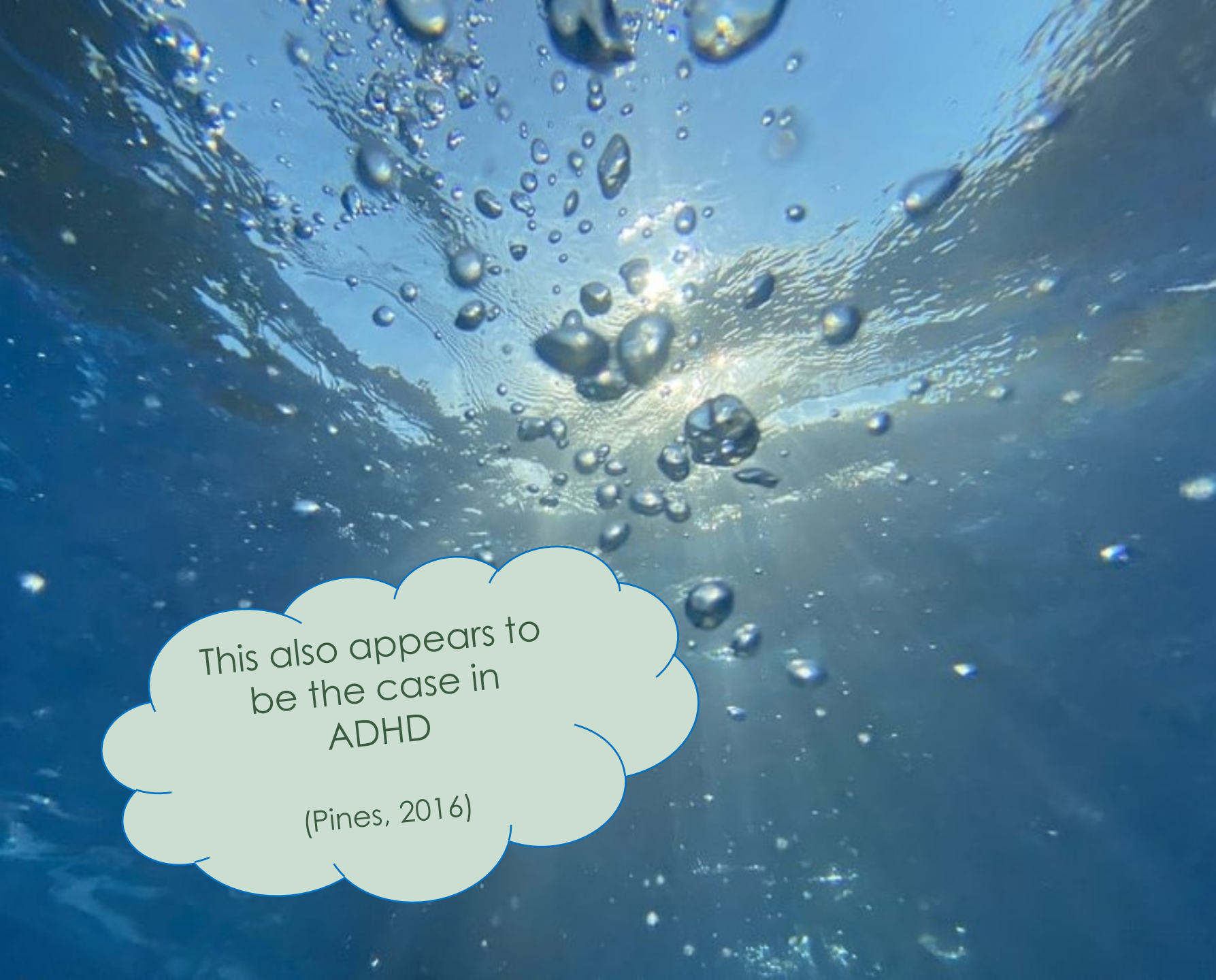


“I would say that I found out that I am autistic because I'm perimenopausal, because I've stopped being able to cope with my life, the life I was able to cope with before.”



“There is something in those hormonal shifts that brings [autism] to the surface ... that makes it more prominent”

(Participant,
Karavidas & de Visser, 2021)

An underwater photograph showing a dense field of bubbles rising from the bottom. Sunlight filters through the water, creating bright rays and illuminating the bubbles. The water is a deep blue color.

This also appears to
be the case in
ADHD

(Pines, 2016)

“Life felt like a gargantuan juggling act. Since childhood I have had on loop in my head the question, ‘what is wrong with me?’

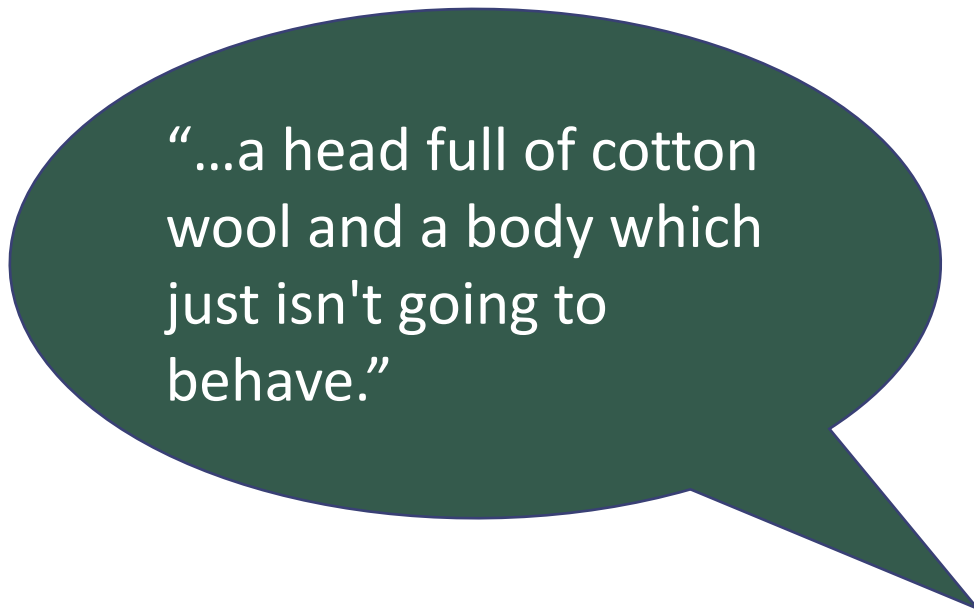
[at menopause] I felt I was deteriorating cognitively...
[many] women say peri/menopause is the period in which ADHD had the greatest overall impact on their lives. For a lot of women with ADHD, perimenopause is a brutal and life changing experience.”

([Margaret's story](https://www.balance-menopause.com), balance-menopause.com)

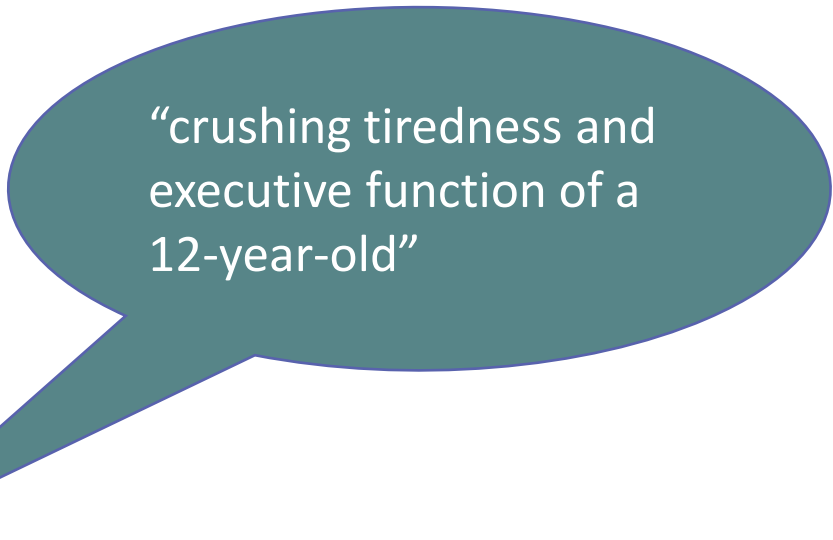


WE FOUND THAT:

3. Menopausal symptoms have wide-reaching impacts.



“...a head full of cotton wool and a body which just isn't going to behave.”



“crushing tiredness and executive function of a 12-year-old”

WE FOUND THAT:

3. Menopausal symptoms have wide-reaching impacts.

“They say ...
menopause, it's not
life threatening,
but it bloody is, it's
life threatening”

“Whereas previously I'd
be a little bit grumpy - I
was psychotic, like ... my
emotions have been
turned up a notch”

WE FOUND THAT:

3. Menopausal symptoms have wide-reaching impacts.

“I suspect that GPs etc thought that the symptoms weren't that bad because I wasn't breaking down and crying or giving any emotional detail. ... When you can't describe what's going on, you can't really ask for help.”

“I couldn't talk to him about it because I just didn't have words for these things”

We found that:

3. Menopausal symptoms have wide-reaching impacts.

“A major dominating, incredible, awful, debilitating thing”

“Things which usually manifest in autistic children...would now for the very first time in my life, manifest in me. And I ended up ... sitting in a corner naked, and rocking and bashing my head against a wall.”



QUANTITATIVE STUDIES SHOW THAT AUTISTIC PEOPLE *DO* REPORT SIGNIFICANTLY
MORE NUMEROUS (/SEVERE) MENOPAUSE SYMPTOMS THAN NON-AUTISTIC PEOPLE


Groenman et al., 2022; Charlton et al., 2025; ours forthcoming by Eunhee Kim!

“I didn't really know what was happening”

“Will it happen today? ... It feels like, is it gonna come back?”

““I think I've felt more happier today because I've talked about it””

WHAT ABOUT THOSE
WHOSE VOICES HAVEN'T
BEEN REPRESENTED?



**An essential
question: why do
some people struggle
more than others?**

“A VENN DIAGRAM OF CHAOS”:
THE BIGGER PICTURE OF MIDLIFE... AND
BEYOND





WHAT DO LATER YEARS LOOK LIKE FOR AUTISTIC PEOPLE?

*“There are not very many over
50s who even have diagnosis
and very few over 70. So how are
we even supposed to know what
happens when we get older?”
(Aitken et al.)*



WHAT DO AUTISTIC PEOPLE NEED TO AGE WELL?

- Knowledge about what to expect (autistic role models)
- Understanding your autism
- Having adaptive coping strategies
- Independence and autonomy (“first time in my life I can actually do what I want to do”)
- Peer support
- Social relationships
- Formal/informal support: “practical solutions to sensory needs, emotional recognition, and support with proactiveness”

(Ommersen et al., Aitken et al., preprints; Viner et al., 2024)

1. Be prepared
2. Remember it won't last forever,
and better times will come again
3. Be kind to yourself
4. Find coping skills that work for you
5. Learn as much as you can
6. Consider medical options and
alternatives
7. Be prepared and prepare your
advocates for healthcare
appointments
8. Find social support – especially
from your tribe



AND FOR
MENOPAUSE...?

Our book, forthcoming

NEXT WEEK

Week 1: The Many Faces of Autism

Week 2: Autism in Girls, Women and People Assigned Female at Birth (AFAB)

Week 3: Health and wellbeing in autistic people

(1 week break!)

Week 4: Autism and Emotions

Week 5: Lifespan Development and Reproductive Transitions

Week 6: The Paths and Pitfalls of Seeking an Autism Diagnosis

THANK YOU SO MUCH FOR LISTENING

I'D LOVE TO TAKE YOUR QUESTIONS!

Slides, resources and feedback at:
www.scienceonthespectrum.net/talknotes

rmoseley@bournemouth.ac.uk



https://bu.padlet.org/rmoseley4/autistic_wellbeing

UPCOMING EVENTS ONLINE

MAR

10

**The Psychology of
Identity**

with Rachel Sparrow

MAR

16

**The Neuroscience of
Emotions**

with Barbara-Anne Robertson

MAR

17

**ADHD & Premenstrual
Dysphoric Disorder**

with Hayley Barker-Smith

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