

The Midlife Brainstorm Workbook™

Navigating ADHD & RSD During
Perimenopause / Menopause



Unqualified Opinion

01

Introduction

What are Perimenopause,
Menopause, ADHD and RSD?

What are Perimenopause and Menopause?

Menopause marks the natural end of a woman's menstrual cycles and reproductive years, confirmed after 12 months without a period. It usually occurs between ages 45 and 55, though timing can vary. During this transition, estrogen and progesterone levels drop, leading to physical and emotional symptoms.

The Stages of Menopause:

- | | |
|---|---|
| 1 | Perimenopause: The stage leading up to menopause, where hormone levels fluctuate and symptoms such as irregular periods, hot flashes, and mood swings may begin. |
| 2 | Menopause: The point at which menstruation has ceased for 12 months. Symptoms often intensify during this stage. |
| 3 | Postmenopause: The phase after menopause, when symptoms may start to ease, but long-term health considerations, such as bone health and heart health, become more prominent. |

Managing Menopause:

Lifestyle changes like regular exercise, a balanced diet, and stress management can help manage symptoms. Medical treatments, such as hormone replacement therapy (HRT), may be recommended based on individual needs.

Symptoms of Menopause

- | |
|---|
| Hot Flashes: Sudden feelings of heat, often accompanied by sweating. |
| Night Sweats: Excessive sweating during sleep, often disrupting rest. |
| Mood Changes: Increased anxiety, irritability, or episodes of depression. |
| Sleep Disruptions: Insomnia or frequent waking due to night sweats. |
| Fatigue: Persistent tiredness, which may be due to disrupted sleep patterns. |
| Changes in Libido: Shifts in sexual desire and vaginal dryness. |
| Weight Gain: Many women notice weight gain, particularly around the abdomen. |

Embracing the Transition:

Menopause is a time to prioritize self-care and focus on long-term health. With the right knowledge and support, this phase can be embraced with confidence and resilience.

What is ADHD?

Attention-Deficit/Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD) is a neurodevelopmental condition that affects millions of individuals worldwide. It is not just a matter of occasional distractibility or restlessness; it is a complex neurological condition that affects the brain's executive functioning.

The brains of people with ADHD are literally structurally different. And because of these structural differences, people with ADHD may have difficulty with inattention, hyperactivity, and impulsivity that can significantly impact various aspects of their life, including their executive functions.

What is RSD?

Rejection Sensitive Dysphoria (RSD) is a condition where individuals experience intense emotional pain due to perceived or actual rejection or criticism, and it's strongly linked to ADHD.

People with ADHD often struggle with regulating their emotions, and RSD can manifest as an extreme emotional reaction to perceived slights or failures, even if they are not severe.

While not a formal diagnosis in the DSM-5, RSD is widely recognized as a significant symptom of ADHD, particularly in adults.

It's not just "taking things personally."

It's more like:

- "They didn't text back... they hate me."
- "My boss raised an eyebrow... I'm clearly getting fired."
- "That tone in her voice? Yep. She thinks I'm worthless."

Emotional Control: People with ADHD often struggle to manage intense emotions, making emotional regulation challenging. As a result, those people (especially women) often live with RSD, and many don't even realize it has a name. We just think we're "too emotional," "too sensitive," or "too much."

Now throw Perimenopause / Menopause, ADHD, and RSD, into the blender. And that is where things get spicy.

02

Symptoms

What are the symptoms of
menopause and RSD?



Menopause Symptom:

Hot Flashes

Hot flashes are one of the most common menopause symptoms, marked by sudden waves of heat that can make you feel flushed and sweaty. They can last anywhere from a few seconds to several minutes and may occur at any time, often without warning.

Hot Flashes and RSD

Menopause-related hormonal shifts can worsen ADHD symptoms, including emotional dysregulation and RSD, while hot flashes add another layer of physical and emotional discomfort.

Helpful Tips for Managing This Symptom

Stay Cool: Dress in layers and use fans to cool your environment.

Avoid Triggers: Caffeine, spicy foods, and alcohol can make hot flashes worse.

Mindful Breathing: Slow, deep breaths can help reduce intensity.

Stay Hydrated: Drink plenty of water to regulate your body temperature.



Menopause Symptom:

Sleep Disturbances

Sleep disturbances during menopause often include trouble falling asleep, waking frequently, or not feeling rested. These disruptions can be triggered by night sweats, anxiety, or other menopause-related symptoms.

Sleep Disturbances and RSD

Menopause-related sleep disturbances can significantly worsen symptoms in individuals with ADHD due to hormonal fluctuations impacting brain chemistry and sleep quality. This can lead to increased daytime sleepiness, cognitive impairment, and a worsening of ADHD symptoms.

Helpful Tips for Managing This Symptom

Create a Routine: Keep a consistent bedtime and wake-up time.

Limit Stimulants: Avoid caffeine and heavy meals before bed.

Unwind: Practice relaxation techniques, such as light stretching or reading.

Stay Cool: Keep your bedroom cool to improve sleep quality.



Menopause Symptom:

Night Sweats

Night sweats are episodes of heavy sweating during sleep that can disrupt your rest and make you feel uncomfortable. These episodes are often linked to hot flashes and can lead to fatigue from poor sleep quality.

Night Sweats and RSD

Night sweats, can significantly impact sleep and exacerbate ADHD symptoms. The combination of hormonal changes and pre-existing ADHD challenges can create the "perfect storm," leading to increased emotional, mental, and physical exhaustion.

Helpful Tips for Managing This Symptom

Cool the Room: Use a fan or open windows to keep your bedroom cool.

Breathable Bedding: Use moisture-wicking sheets and light fabrics.

Sleepwear: Wear loose, lightweight pyjamas for comfort.

Stress Management: Practice relaxation techniques to reduce night sweats.



Menopause Symptom:

Mood Swings

Mood swings are common during menopause due to hormonal fluctuations. You may feel irritable, anxious, or sad, sometimes without a clear cause. These emotional shifts can happen quickly and may be difficult to manage.

Mood Swings and RSD

Menopause, particularly perimenopause, involves significant shifts in estrogen and progesterone levels. These changes can directly affect neurotransmitters like serotonin and dopamine, which play a crucial role in regulating mood and cognitive function (RSD).

Helpful Tips for Managing This Symptom

Mindfulness: Practice deep breathing or meditation to stay calm.

Physical Activity: Exercise helps improve mood and release stress.

Talk About It: Share your feelings with a trusted person or therapist.

Rest: Prioritize quality sleep to support emotional stability.

Why Does Menopause Make RSD So Much Worse?

Let's break this down, science-style... without the jargon.

RSD Symptom	Menopause Amplifier
Emotional sensitivity	Decreased estrogen/dopamine regulation
Fear of failure	Lower serotonin, more irritability & anxiety
Rejection spirals	Sleep deprivation + hormone fluctuations
People-pleasing or isolation	Low mood, low energy, high shame response
Outbursts or withdrawal	Nervous system dysregulation

These aren't character flaws. They're chemistry shifts. And when you already have a neurodivergent brain, those shifts hit harder.

Estrogen Drops = Mood Rollercoaster

Estrogen boosts serotonin and dopamine your brain's natural mood stabilizers. When estrogen levels drop, so do those happy chemicals.

For people with RSD, this means:

- Rejection feels even more catastrophic
- Criticism becomes soul-crushing
- Self-worth tanks on a dime

Sleep Deprivation = Emotional Fragility

Menopause often brings hot flashes, night sweats, and insomnia. Sleep deprivation makes RSD worse. Like, cry-in-the-bathroom-after-an-email worse. Because your brain can't regulate emotions without rest. It's like trying to drive a car with no brakes. Hello, meltdown.

Dopamine Deficiency = ADHD Mayhem

If you're neurodivergent, you already have lower dopamine. Menopause drops it even more. Suddenly, that "mild comment" feels like a personal attack. That social invite you weren't included on? Proof you're unlovable. Logic goes out the window. RSD takes the wheel.

03

Assessment

Good news: You're not powerless. This isn't just "how it has to be." You have options tools, strategies, and support systems that actually help.

Menopause & RSD Self-Assessment

This assessment helps you reflect on various habits and activities that can support your well-being during menopause.

For each item, consider how often you practice it and check the box that best reflects your current behavior.

Activity	Not at All	Sometimes	Regularly
I eat a balanced, healthy diet	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I exercise or engage in physical activity	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I drink enough water throughout the day	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I get 7-8 hours of sleep each night	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I take time for self-care and relaxation	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I manage my stress levels with mindfulness	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I meditate or practice breathing exercises	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I avoid processed or sugary foods	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I take vitamins or supplements as needed	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I maintain a healthy work-life balance	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I seek support from friends or loved ones	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I keep track of my menopause symptoms	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I focus on positive thinking	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I practice gratitude regularly	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I allow myself time to relax and unwind.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I engage in activities that bring me joy.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

**Review your responses. Are there areas where you'd like to improve?
Which habits would you like to focus on more consistently?**

Emotional Control Assessment

Emotional control is an essential aspect of executive function that involves managing and modulating your emotional responses effectively.

This assessment consists of 10 'yes or no' questions designed to help you gauge your emotional control.

		YES	NO
1	Do you often find it challenging to control your emotional reactions, such as anger or frustration?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
2	Are there times when you feel overwhelmed by your emotions, to the point where it affects your daily life?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
3	Do you tend to react impulsively to emotional triggers without taking a moment to think?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
4	Have you noticed that your emotional responses often seem disproportionate to the situation at hand?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
5	Do you find it difficult to calm down quickly after experiencing intense emotions?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
6	Are there instances where your emotional reactions have strained your relationships with others?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
7	Do you sometimes feel that your emotions are out of your control?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
8	Have you ever regretted something you said or did during an emotional outburst?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
9	Are there specific situations or triggers that consistently lead to intense emotional responses?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
10	Do you believe that improving your emotional control could enhance your overall well-being and relationships?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

If you've answered "yes" to the majority of these questions (6 or more), it may indicate that you face challenges in maintaining emotional control, and that you may face increased challenges managing your RSD symptoms.

04

Tips, Trackers, and Tools

Let's make managing RSD and
Menopause easier!

Daily Menopause Check-in

The Daily Menopause Check-In helps you assess how menopause is affecting different aspects of your day and where you might need extra care or support. Reflect on the questions below to gain insight into your well-being and identify steps to nurture yourself each day.

VERY
DISATISFIED

VERY
SATISFIED

How satisfied are you with your energy levels today?

1

2

3

4

5

6

7

8

9

10

How well did you manage any menopause symptoms today?

1

2

3

4

5

6

7

8

9

10

How satisfied are you with the quality of your sleep last night?

1

2

3

4

5

6

7

8

9

10

How well did you balance rest and activity today?

1

2

3

4

5

6

7

8

9

10

How satisfied are you with your mood and emotional well-being today?

1

2

3

4

5

6

7

8

9

10

How well did you handle stress or anxiety today?

1

2

3

4

5

6

7

8

9

10

How satisfied are you with the support you received or sought today?

1

2

3

4

5

6

7

8

9

10

How well did you prioritize self-care today?

1

2

3

4

5

6

7

8

9

10

My Symptoms Tracker

For the next 8 weeks, put a mark in the frequency box whenever you experience RSD, and try to identify a possible trigger (Poor sleep, hot flash)

At the end of each week, circle the overall severity of the episodes that week (1-5).

Once you have completed eight weeks, see if you can identify any possible common triggers, and determine if using the tools in this workbook helped to lessen the frequency and/or severity of your RSD symptoms.

Week	Severity					Frequency	Possible Trigger
1	1	2	3	4	5		
2	1	2	3	4	5		
3	1	2	3	4	5		
4	1	2	3	4	5		
5	1	2	3	4	5		
6	1	2	3	4	5		
7	1	2	3	4	5		
8	1	2	3	4	5		
Notes:							

Exercise:

Emotion Awareness Journal

The tracker is a good basic start to understanding your RSD. Journaling, however, is a much more powerful tool to deepen your understanding of your emotional experiences and patterns. Keeping a journal allows you to create a record of your feelings, reactions, and the situations that trigger them. Here's how to make the most of this exercise:

How to Get Started:

- 1 Choose a Journal:** Select a journal or notebook that you feel comfortable using, or use the journal template on the next page.
- 2 Set Aside Time:** Dedicate a specific time each day or week for journaling. This regular practice helps you build consistency.
- 3 Describe the Situation:** When you encounter an RSD moment, start by describing the situation that led to it. Be as detailed as possible. What were you doing? Who were you with? Where were you?
- 4 Express Your Feelings:** Once you've described the situation, delve into your feelings. How did you feel in that moment? Use descriptive words to capture the intensity and nuances of your emotions.
- 5 Reflect on Your Response:** After expressing your emotions, reflect on how you responded to them. Did you react impulsively? Did you take a moment to pause and consider your actions?
- 6 Look for Patterns:** As you continue journaling over time, review your entries periodically. Look for recurring themes, triggers, or emotional patterns. Are there specific situations or people that consistently lead to certain emotions?
- 7 Seek Insights:** Use your journal as a tool for self-reflection. What insights have you gained about your emotional responses? Are there strategies or techniques you can employ to manage your emotions better in similar situations?

My Journal

Date:

Step 1: Describe the Situation

Step 2: Express Your Feelings

Step 3: Reflect on Your Response

Tips for Better Sleep

Sleep disturbances are common during menopause, but there are simple strategies you can try to improve your sleep quality and wake up feeling more rested. This worksheet offers tips to help you manage symptoms like night sweats, insomnia, or anxiety that might be disrupting your sleep during menopause.



Boost Your Mood:

Easy Tips for a Brighter Day

Taking care of your emotional well-being is essential, especially during times of transition like menopause. Boosting your mood can be simple with a few mindful strategies that help uplift your spirits and promote a positive outlook. When you are happy and regulated, you are less likely to have RSD episodes.

Use these 16 tips to improve your mood whenever you feel down or need an emotional lift.

Get Moving:

Take a brisk walk or do light stretching to release endorphins and lift your spirits.

Breathe Deeply:

Pause and take a few deep breaths to calm your mind and reduce stress.

Connect with Nature:

Spend time outside, even for a few minutes, to enjoy the fresh air and greenery.

Stay Hydrated:

Drink plenty of water to keep your body and mind feeling fresh and energized.

Express Gratitude:

Write down three things you're grateful for today to focus on the positives.

Try a Creative Hobby:

Engage in something creative, like drawing, journaling, or knitting, to express yourself.

Limit Screen Time:

Step away from your phone or computer to reduce overwhelm and refresh your mind.

Plan Something Fun:

Look forward to a fun activity, even if it's something small, to lift your mood.

Take a Break:

Pause from your tasks and give yourself permission to rest and recharge.

Talk it Out:

Call a friend or loved one to share your thoughts and feel connected.

Declutter a Space:

Tidying up a small area can help clear your mind and create a sense of accomplishment.

Practice Kindness:

Do something kind for someone else, even a small gesture, to boost both their mood and yours.

Negative Thought Cycle

The negative thought cycle shows how negative thinking can become an ingrained pattern, especially during RSD episodes during menopause.

Recognizing this cycle is the first step to breaking it and promoting healthier, more balanced thinking. The cycle generally follows these stages:



By recognizing and addressing each stage of the negative thought cycle, you can start to break the pattern and replace negative thoughts with healthier, more empowering ones.

Challenge Your Thoughts

During menopause, it's common for negative thoughts to take hold if you are experiencing RSD, leading to self-doubt or feeling overwhelmed.

This worksheet is here to help you challenge those thoughts and develop a more balanced perspective.

Use the questions below to guide your thinking and transform self-doubt into something more manageable.

1	Is this thought based on facts or assumptions?
2	What evidence do I have that supports or contradicts this thought?
3	Am I expecting the worst to happen, and is that realistic?
4	How would I respond if a friend had this same thought?
5	What is a more balanced or realistic way to view this situation?
6	How can I turn this negative thought into a more constructive one?

Evidence-Based Thinking

When RSD takes over, it can feel overwhelming and hard to manage. This worksheet encourages you to approach those thoughts like a detective, examining the facts and evidence. By evaluating your doubts logically, you can gain clarity and reduce unnecessary self-criticism during your menopause journey.

The Concern: What specific RSD negative thought is on my mind?

Supporting Evidence: What facts or evidence do I have that suggest my thought may be true?

Challenging Thought: What facts or evidence do I have that suggest my thought may not be true?

Final Judgement: After reviewing all the facts, do I believe my RSD thought or worry is likely or unlikely to be true?

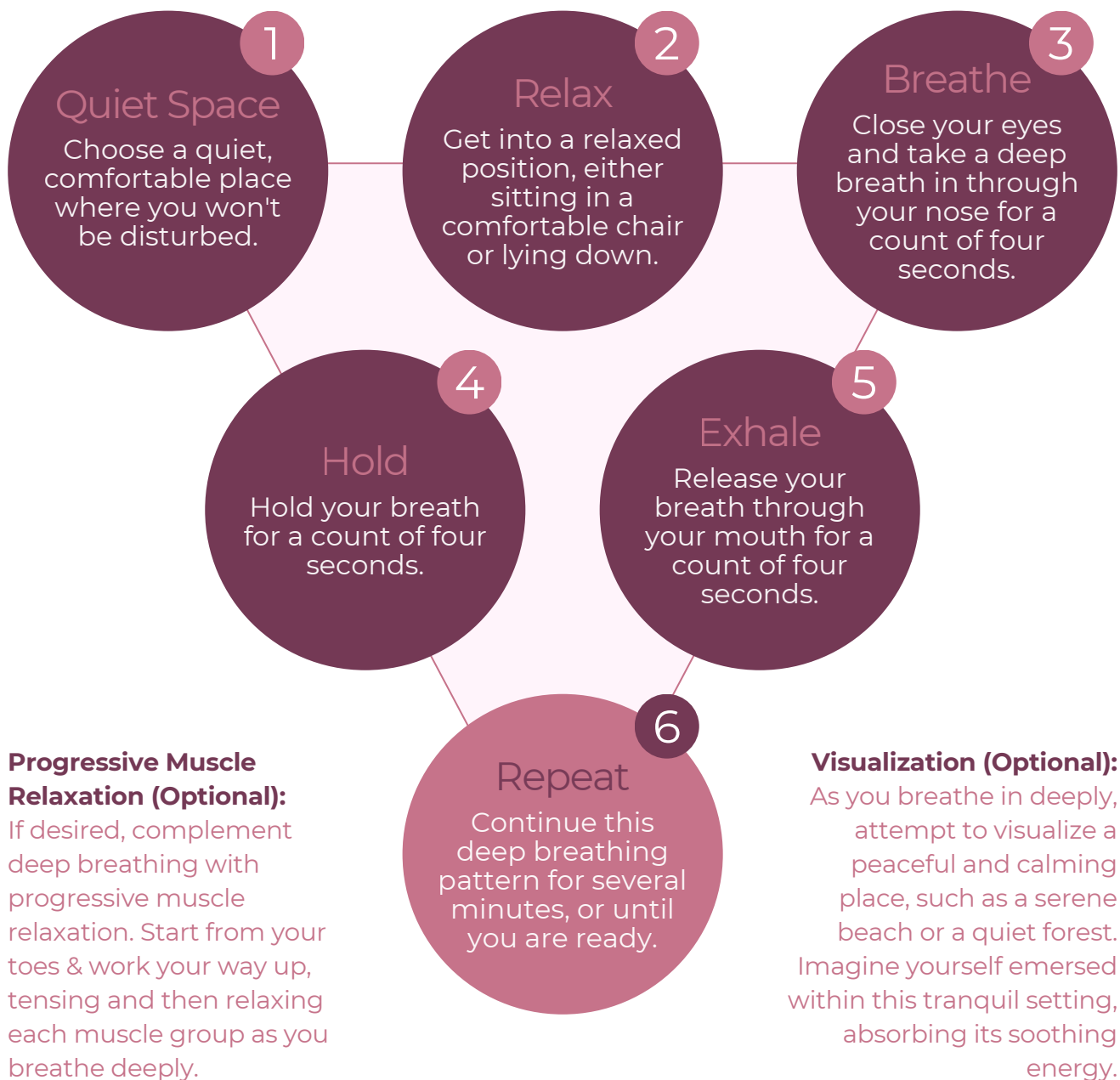
Creating a Positive Self-Talk Routine

In this exercise, you'll develop a daily routine to cultivate consistent positive self-talk. By focusing on encouraging affirmations each day, you'll gradually shift from negative thoughts to more supportive, empowering beliefs that help you navigate menopause and RSD with confidence.



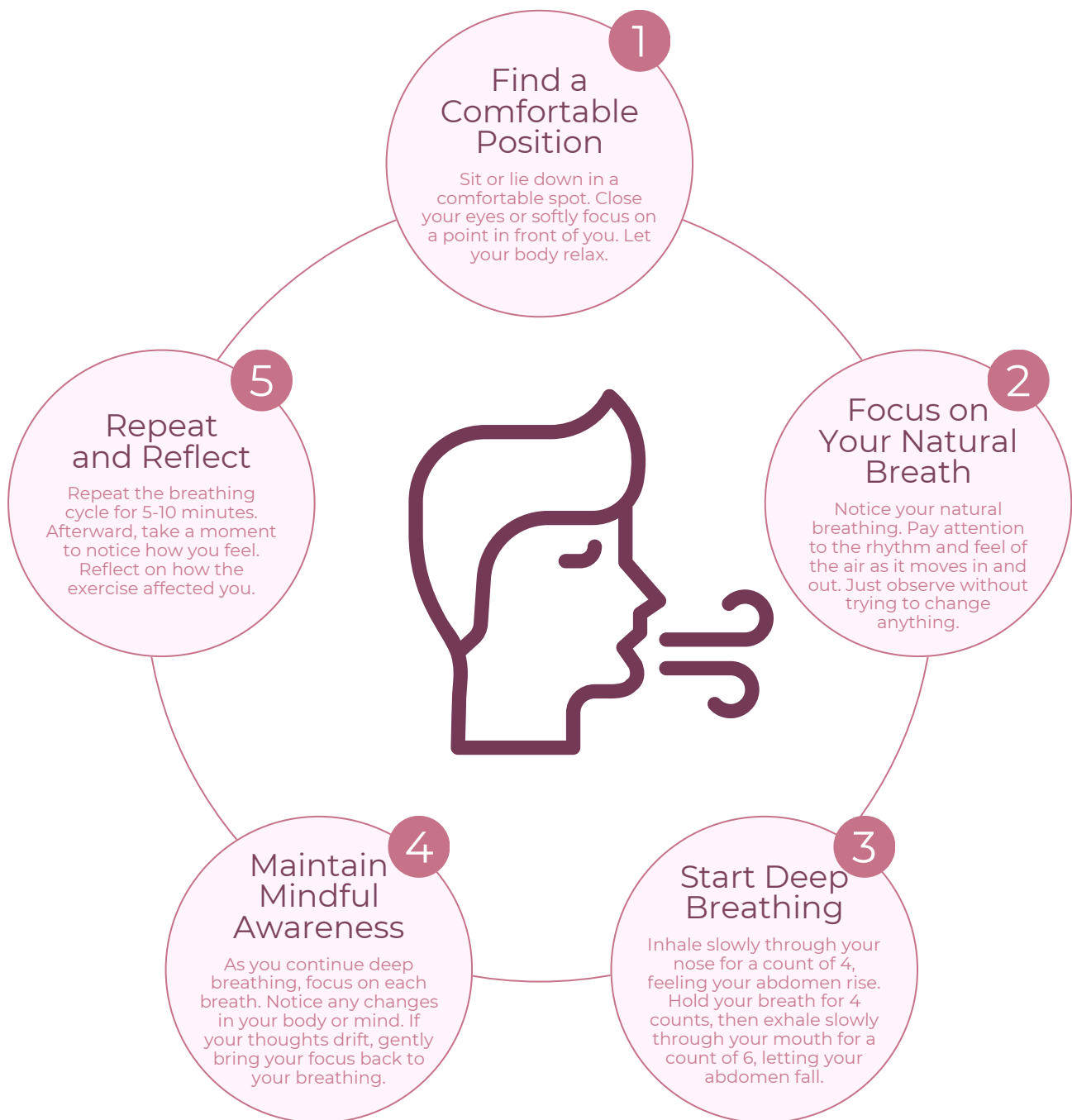
Deep Breathing & Relaxation Techniques

One effective way to cope with intense emotions, RSD, and impulsivity is through deep breathing and relaxation techniques. These exercises help you regain a sense of calm and control in the midst of emotional turmoil.



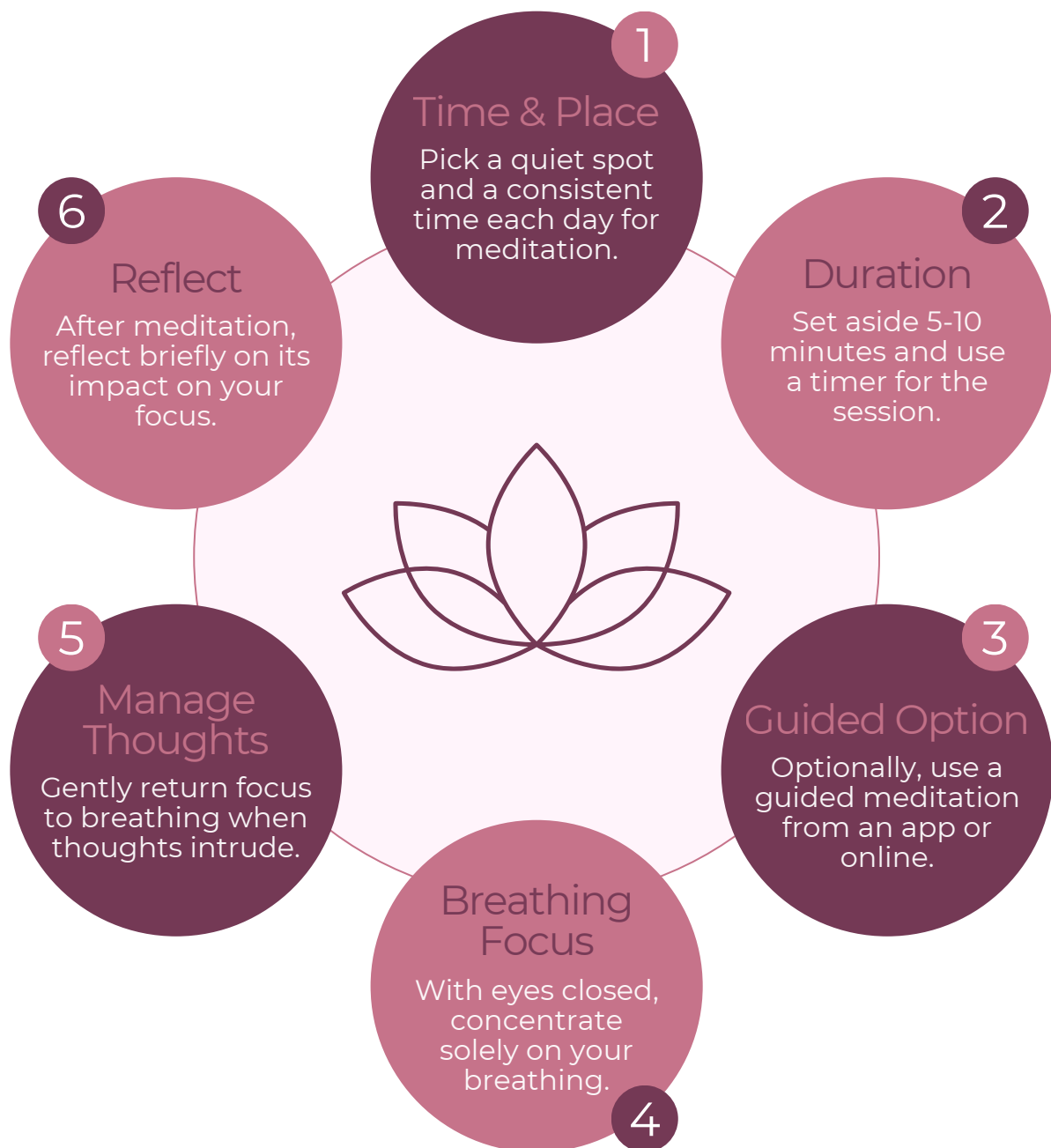
Mindful Breathing Practice

In this exercise, you'll practice Mindful Breathing, a simple but effective technique for reducing stress and anxiety, brought on by menopause and RSD. By focusing on your breath, you can anchor yourself in the present moment, helping you feel calmer and more in control.



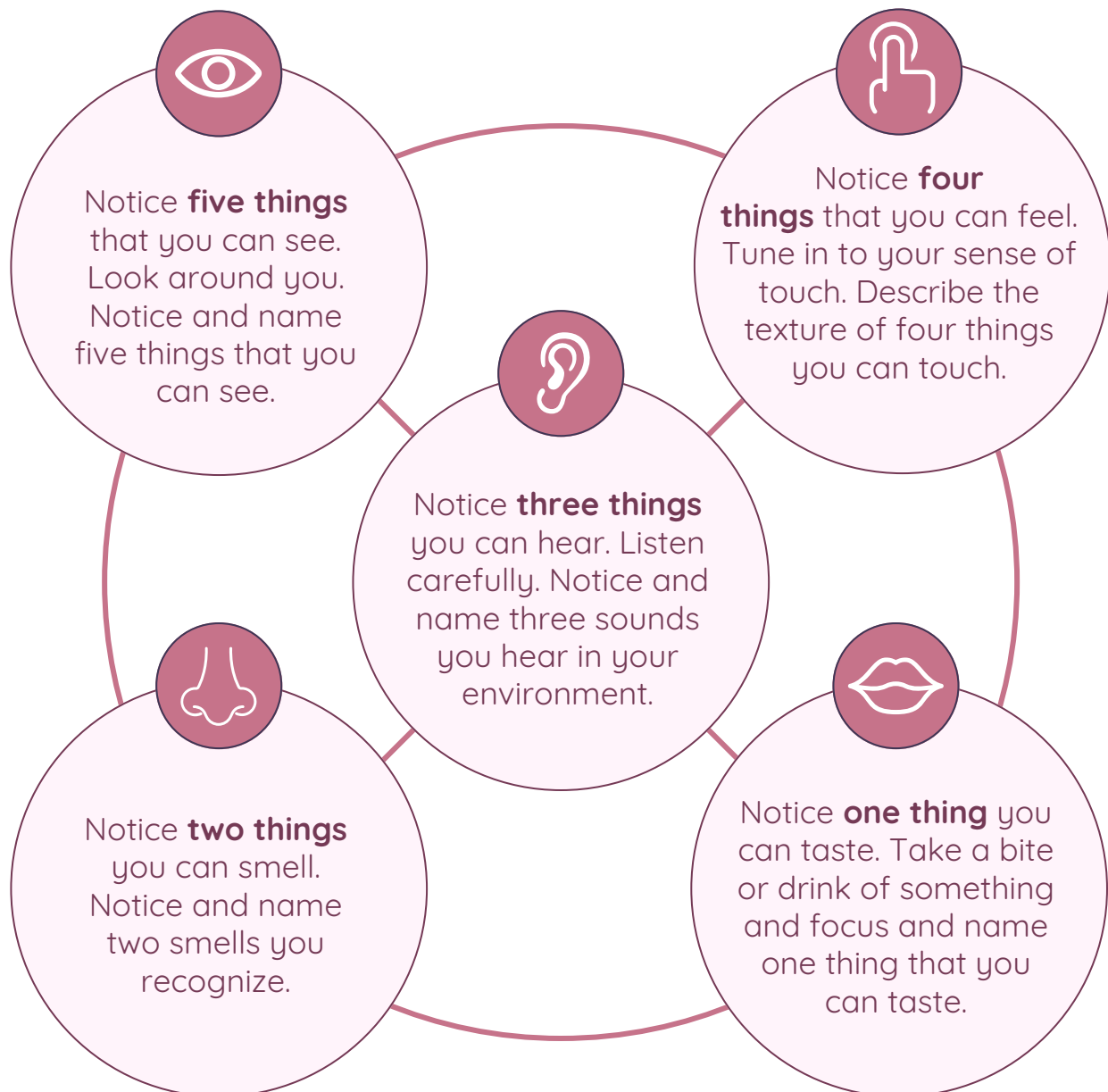
Daily Mindfulness Meditation

To enhance present-moment awareness and focus, crucial for individuals with ADHD in improving nervous system regulation, to lessen the frequency of episodes of RSD.



5-4-3-2-1 Grounding Technique

The 5-4-3-2-1 grounding technique is a simple yet effective way to bring yourself back to the present moment, especially when you're feeling overwhelmed or anxious after an RSD episode. By engaging your five senses, this exercise helps you refocus your mind, calm your nerves, and reduce stress.



Symptom Relief Strategies Worksheet

Now that you understand Menopause and RSD and have tracked your symptoms and read through all the tools that have been provided in the worksheet... your next step is to review patterns and track your successes! Which tips and tools helped most for RSD? What about dealing with sleep disturbances?

Track Everything!!!

Symptom	Strategies that Help:
	1.
	2.
	3.
	1.
	2.
	3.
	1.
	2.
	3.
	1.
	2.
	3.
	1.
	2.
	3.

Tip: Regularly update this worksheet to track new strategies and their effectiveness.

Mapping Your Support System

Having a reliable support system is essential during menopause. Take a moment to reflect on the people who provide support in different areas of your life. Write down the names of individuals who currently support you emotionally, practically, socially, and professionally. Use the space below to organize them by the type of support they offer.

Practical Support

Community Support

Emotional Support

Social Support

I really hope you have found this workbook helpful, and I wish you all the best in managing your menopause and RSD symptoms :)



Unqualified Opinion

The Midlife Brainstorm Workbook™

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