

## Supporting Women's Well-being Through Physical Health Challenges

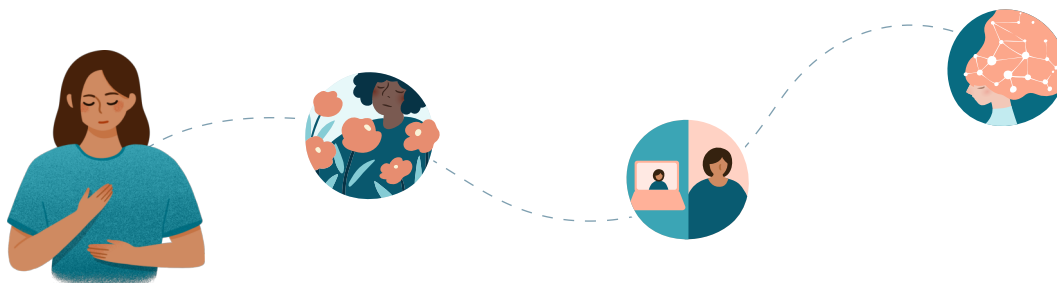
Many life-shaping moments for women are outward and visible, even to colleagues. Often, these moments stand at the intersection of physical and mental health and can be positive, such as welcoming a new child to the family, or painful, such as the postpartum depression that sometimes follows.

Less visible health conditions like osteoporosis, diabetes, and even cancer—all of which can be more common in women depending on the diagnosis—can also influence how women define themselves and can affect their mindset on a daily basis.

This guide reviews the challenges some women face at these intersections and shares ways to support women whose physical health may be affecting their emotional well-being, including creating safe and supportive spaces.

### A word of encouragement

If these are your experiences, know that there are many paths to recovery, including seeking professional care. In this guide, find six strategies for supporting your mental health, or check out the self-guided resources in Lyra Essentials.



# Where women's physical and mental health meet

## Infertility

Experiencing infertility—difficulty getting pregnant—is a profound emotional experience that can cause feelings of guilt, insecurity, or low self-esteem. Unfortunately, this distress can be compounded when emotional pain is dismissed or when medical concerns are invalidated.

This experience may be even worse for women of color, who already face bias and discrimination in the health system. Because womanhood is often associated with motherhood, women experiencing infertility may sometimes feel ashamed or insecure.

But data shows that infertility may be more common than we think. In the United States, about one in five women who haven't given birth experience infertility, according to the [Centers for Disease Control and Prevention's](#) reproductive health statistics.

Another common misunderstanding is that infertility is only a women's issue. However, it's possible for either partner to affect fertility, regardless of their sex or gender. Around 15 percent of couples in the United States have difficulty conceiving; in over half of these cases, there is a male fertility issue, as noted by [Yale School of Medicine](#). If you or your partner are experiencing infertility, know that you're not alone. Emotional support resources are available, including the six strategies below.

## Pregnancy loss

A miscarriage is a pregnancy loss that generally happens before the 20th week, though most occur before 12 weeks. Miscarriages can result from any number of complications that are not the fault of any parent; in fact, 10 to 20 percent of known pregnancies end in pregnancy loss, according to the [Mayo Clinic](#) resource on miscarriage.

Pregnancy loss is often emotionally and physically devastating. As with any loss, those who experience miscarriage may feel shocked, stunned, guilty, cheated, angry, or extremely sad. For women already living with a mental health condition, miscarriage can make coping even harder.

For some, a pregnancy loss can trigger significant emotional distress. For instance, a [BMC Psychiatry study](#) found that about 34 percent of patients who miscarried showed signs of depression. Of those patients, around 33 percent had thoughts of self-harm.

## Postpartum depression

Feeling sad, empty, or lonely is common after childbirth. For some women, these “baby blues” go away within a few days. But for others, they stick around. Having negative feelings for over two weeks could be an indicator of postpartum depression (PPD), a mental health condition that can appear days or months after welcoming a newborn. Around one in seven women experience PPD, according to the [American Psychological Association’s](#) resource on postpartum depression.

[Postpartum depression symptoms](#) present differently for everyone and could include any of the following:

- Severe mood swings
- Difficulty bonding with your baby
- Withdrawing from loved ones
- Feelings of worthlessness, guilt, or shame
- Severe anxiety or panic attacks
- Thoughts of harming yourself or your baby

If you’re experiencing PPD, professional care is essential.  
If you want help connecting to a therapist, Lyra can assist you.

[Learn more about Lyra, today >](#)

## Menopause

Many people use the term “[menopause](#)” to describe the entire transition out of the reproductive years, but in reality it includes three distinct stages:

**Perimenopause**  
usually begins in the mid-40s and lasts between eight and 10 years

**Menopause**  
12 months after a woman’s last period and typically occurs around age 50

**Postmenopause**  
stretches from the moment of menopause to the end of life

The symptoms of perimenopause in particular—such as hot flashes, night sweats, and emotional changes—can be uncomfortable and difficult to manage. Because menopause signals the end of the childbearing years, it can also cue complex emotions. Some women celebrate the transition; some grieve. Others experience more anxiety than usual.

## 6 ways to balance emotional and physical health

Women's health challenges can be much more complex than many realize. Coping skills can't insulate women from change and loss, but they can provide some relief and comfort.

- 1 Share your story with loved ones.**

Though most people go through painful experiences, many women don't always talk about them. Being open with others can lessen the feelings of guilt, shame, and fear that can be hard to bear.
- 2 Consider opting out when necessary.**

Some events, such as baby showers and Mother's Day, can be especially difficult. Evaluate your stress level and limit your participation if needed (e.g., attend but leave the planning to others, or attend for a shorter time).
- 3 Practice asking for what you need.**

Your loved ones may not know how to support you, even when they want to. Being honest can help. Try: "I'm really upset. Can you distract me?" or "The medical stuff was awful today. I need to cancel dinner and rest."
- 4 Try a mindful activity.**

Any activity can be a mindfulness practice by paying close attention to the present moment. For example, you can try "mindful doing" by asking yourself intentional questions during a routine task: "Can I feel my breath? What do I see? What do I hear?"
- 5 Gently point out when someone says something unhelpful.**

Whether you're going through menopause or having migraines, people may say things that hurt—and it's okay to say so. Consider: "I appreciate your concern, but I don't think my miscarriage was 'meant to be.' It would help me more to hear you say you're sorry this happened."
- 6 Explore options for personalized support.**

Asking for help doesn't make you weak or less capable than others; in fact, a therapist can be a crucial guide in finding tools that are right for you.

## A note to managers

The workplace may not be the preferred setting for disclosing deeply painful experiences. In many cases, it's not appropriate to ask others to open up about matters they consider to be personal. But there are steps you can take to establish a safe, inclusive, and supportive environment for your team.



**Review company information about mental health.** Doing this together has several benefits: It lessens the burden on those affected, it increases health literacy, and it helps normalize conversations around physical and mental health.



**Create a space for sharing.** For example, leaders can devote time in a meeting for people to reflect on ways that hidden mental health stressors show up in their lives. The goal is to help each other embrace their full, authentic, and complex selves.



**Normalize seeking mental health support.** If a colleague is comfortable, allow them to share their process of seeking care to demystify the experience for those who want to do the same.

## Get access to the right kind of care

Women's health experiences are often quiet, private, or invisible. But together, we can take steps to make them known and help the individuals feel seen.

Working with a Lyra mental health provider can be a great way to access the support you need and to take control of your mental health.

[Get started with Lyra, today](#)