

Lifestyle Diet & Exercise

Eating a well balanced diet and having a healthy lifestyle has an astounding amount of health benefits during the perimenopause, menopause and into the future, even if you're taking HRT.

Often women throughout this phase of their lives have a decrease in mental and physical well being as well as their confidence so prioritising health and wellness is important.

Having a healthy diet can lift your mood, combat fatigue and boost your energy levels. A great example of a healthy diet is low in processed products, meat, dairy, salt and sugar. It would consist mainly of whole foods, vegetables, nuts and seeds, beans, whole grains, fermented dairy, seafood (or other sources of Omega 3 oils) and unsaturated fats such as avocados and extra virgin olive oil.

Lowering the consumption of refined white carbohydrates such as in white bread, white rice, pasta and white potatoes, is beneficial too as they cause a rapid release of blood glucose resulting in more severe mood swings. Swapping these for wholegrain bread, brown rice, pulses, beans and sweet potatoes and other low GI vegetables such as cabbage, salad and greens will help maintain stable blood sugar levels.

Recent research shows us it is the variety of plant-based foods that really benefit your gut microbiome and have a positive ripple effect on your whole health. While it's important to still have foods from the five main food groups (fruit and vegetables, carbohydrates, beans and pulses, dairy and alternatives, and proteins) it is the plant-based foods where variety is key. These are your vegetables, whole grains, beans, pulses, nuts and seeds.

Something often overlooked when looking at the menopause is the importance of gut health. This plays an integral part in your energy levels, immune system and weight management. Poor gut health can result in hormones being reabsorbed, resulting in a larger hormone imbalance and increased symptoms. Fibre is crucial to maintain gut health. Foods recommended to help with gut health include: garlic, onions, leeks, asparagus, chicory, ginger, cabbage, beetroot, bananas, blueberries, apples, kefir, live yoghurt, kombucha, sauerkraut and apple cider vinegar.

As your oestrogen levels drop the density of your bones also starts to decrease. This naturally occurs anyways during your late thirties. It is important we maintain our bone strength vitamins and minerals such as calcium, vitamin D, iron and magnesium, are great for this.

Vitamin D should be made a priority! Women with higher vitamin D levels have expressed they had fewer hot flashes and other symptoms than women with lower levels. Vitamin D can also protect against depletion of serotonin, which plays a role in regulating body heat, as well as showing positive effects on low mood and cognitive performance.

Calcium is the main vitamin that gives your bones strength. Supplements are a great way to increase your calcium levels however I would recommend starting with some calcium rich foods such as dairy products, leafy green vegetables, other vegetables such as broccoli, nuts, seeds, dried fruit, pulses and tofu.

Forming healthy habits

Start with small changes, as it needs to be realistic and sustainable! Small changes add to up to big results.

It is often the case that during the peri menopause and menopause women struggle with motivation. Despite your best efforts, you feel as though you could always do better. To help this it is important to try set out what you would like to achieve, setting small achievable goals. To help achieve these, set a positive environment to increase productivity and minimise pressure.

Exercise with friends.

As discussed before having a healthy balanced diet is incredibly beneficial. It's common to gain weight around the menopause, due to a change in metabolism as well as lifestyle habits. While a healthy weight is important, don't focus on restricting yourself because this can become quite negative, choose a variety of foods to get the full range of nutrients and improve your gut health.

Looking after your lifestyle

Drinking a lot of alcohol can weaken your bones and lead to heart disease. It can affect your mood, sleep, and menopausal symptoms too. Try to stay within the recommended 14 units of alcohol per week – that's about a small glass (2/3rds full) of wine per day, one pint of beer or cider, or a single measure of spirit. Plus, have days throughout the week where you don't drink at all.

Smoking raises the risk of broken bones and heart disease and affects your menopause symptoms. If you reduce/give up smoking your risk of breaking a bone begins to return to normal.

Exercise maintains muscle mass, helps you stay a healthy weight, and improves your heart health, bone health and mood. It is recommended to take part in regular exercise that bears your own weight. It can also increase your confidence, which it is important to feel good, healthy and strong. It should not be used as a punishment but as an opportunity to move your body. It is about enjoying movement and improving your overall health, rather than an image at "face value".

Getting a good night's sleep affects all aspects of your health. I would highly recommend taking steps to get a good sleep routine.