

Nutrition and the menopause

What is the menopause?

Menopause is when your periods stop for 12 consecutive months and usually occurs between the ages of 45 and 55 years, but the menopause can affect younger women too. During the menopause, we produce less of a hormone called oestrogen, and this can lead to menopause symptoms and changes in our health in the short and long term.

What are the symptoms?

All women will experience menopause differently. Some may experience no symptoms at all, but many women will and for some they can be quite severe and have a significant impact on everyday life. The most common symptoms are **hot flushes and night sweats**. Other symptoms include mood changes (such as anxiety and depression), loss of memory and concentration, vaginal dryness, lack of interest in sex, reduced muscle mass, sleep disturbances and headaches.

How can I manage menopausal symptoms?

The good news is that there are ways of managing symptoms and there are some positive lifestyle changes such as eating a healthy, varied diet and building more exercise into your daily routine that can improve some menopausal symptoms.

These changes can also help to lower the risk of some of the longer-term health concerns linked with the menopause that we may not be so aware of including osteoporosis (a condition that weakens bones) and cardiovascular disease (such as heart disease and stroke).



Can a healthy, balanced diet help with menopausal symptoms?

Eating a healthy, balanced diet and exercising regularly can help to support a healthy weight and relieve some menopausal symptoms. Eat plenty of fruits, vegetables, high-fibre foods (such as wholegrains), dairy or dairy alternatives, a range of protein sources (especially beans, peas and lentils) and small amounts of unsaturated fats (such as olive or rapeseed oil).

You should be able to get the nutrients you need from a healthy balanced diet. There is no supplement that supplies the same nutritional benefits of a healthy balanced diet.

Healthy, balanced diets are not only important for your physical health but for your mental health and wellbeing. Mood changes, anxiety and problems with memory or concentration (brain fog) can be some of the common mental health symptoms of the menopause. Find out more about a healthy, balanced diet on [our website](https://www.nutrition.org.uk).

Managing menopausal symptoms

Supplements such as black cohosh, St John's wort, red clover	'Natural' doesn't always mean effective or safe. Several herbal or botanical remedies are marketed to help menopausal symptoms, but more scientific studies are needed to confirm their safety. They may vary in quality and can interact with other medications, so speak to your GP or pharmacist before taking.
Cut down on trigger foods that make your symptoms worse	Certain foods including caffeine, alcohol or spicy foods can trigger or worsen hot flushes and night sweats.
Soy and Soy products	There is some evidence that phytoestrogens (soy isoflavones) may help hot flushes but this is inconsistent and we are uncertain as to what dose or duration may be helpful. Eating foods like tofu and soybean can be part of a healthy, balanced diet.
Eat foods to support your heart health	Eat a diet rich in fruits, vegetables, high-fibre foods (such as wholegrains) and oily fish, whilst limiting foods high in saturated fat, sugar and salt.
Look out for vitamin D and calcium , important for bone health	Include sources of calcium (such as dairy products or fortified dairy alternatives) and vitamin D (such as oily fish, eggs and fortified breakfast cereals) in your diet. For more information read our <u>Calcium Counts</u> and <u>Vital Vitamin D</u> resources.
Be physically active	Try to cut down on long periods of sitting down and aim to be active for at least 150 minutes over a week including weight-bearing activities on two or more days.

If you need more help managing menopausal symptoms, ask your GP for advice on the best combination of approaches for you. This could include hormone replacement treatment (HRT), non-hormonal medications, cognitive behavioural therapy (CBT) and/or lifestyle approaches.



Patient Information Forum

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