

HOW TO HAVE A HOLISTIC MENOPAUSE



What Happens During Menopause?

Menopause becomes official once you've gone a whole year without a period.

In the years building up to menopause, the changes that you'll notice are linked to perimenopause.

Most women find that their periods become less regular and eventually, they stop completely. This is the result of changes in hormones, namely female sex hormones such as estrogen and progesterone.

As egg production slows down, it has an effect on menstruation and fertility. The pituitary gland produces more follicle stimulating hormone (FSH) as part of its efforts to pull follicles from the ovaries. Over time, this can mean longer menstrual cycles and longer gaps between periods. Not all of these cycles will involve the release of an egg.

Changing hormone levels are linked to a wide range of menopause symptoms, from hot flushes and night sweats to dry, thinning hair and vaginal dryness.

These changes typically start in your 40s but can happen earlier. A lot of women start to experience perimenopause years before they finish menstruating completely.

These hormonal changes can have lasting effects, even in the post menopause years.

After menopause, you can become more likely to develop certain health problems. Bone density is a big concern for many women and osteoporosis can develop in the post menopause years. Cardiovascular disease and stroke can also be a little more likely.

There is some good news though! Even if you don't want to use hormone replacement therapies, taking a holistic approach to managing menopause symptoms can help to reduce their intensity and severity and reduce your risk factor for problems further down the line.

And that's exactly what we'll be discussing in this guide. Read on for tips on how you can take have control during menopause through tools such as your diet, exercise regime, supplements and self care.

Can Your Diet Improve Menopause Symptoms?

The usual advice about following a healthy diet definitely applies during menopause but beyond this, there are some nutrition tips that become particularly important at this stage of your life. Menopause is a hugely stressful time for the body and this can deplete certain nutrients.

Improving bone health: Calcium and vitamin D are hugely important for keeping your bones strong and healthy - especially when falling estrogen levels are a factor. The change in estrogen production can decrease bone density - sometimes by as much as 20% in the years following menopause. Dairy products, leafy green vegetables and tinned fish (with bones) can all provide calcium.

Vitamin D production tends to [decline](#) as you get older and changing estrogen levels may also have an effect on how much is produced by the body. Aside from sunlight, vitamin D can be fatty fish and some fortified foods.

Magnesium also has a role to play in bone health. Over half of the body's magnesium is stored in the bones and there is evidence from animal studies that low levels of magnesium may be a risk factor for developing osteoporosis further down the line.

Good dietary sources of magnesium include dark leafy greens, nuts, seeds, avocados and whole grains. Magnesium also supports calcium absorption - another great reason to make sure that you get plenty of this nutrient through diet or supplementing.

Vitamin K is another important nutrient for bone health. It's involved in regulating calcium levels, particularly with regards to how much calcium is taken from the bones. In one large scale study, getting plenty of vitamin K was [linked](#) to a lower risk of hip fractures. Good dietary sources include egg yolks, beef and liver.

Healthy fats are important too as they support hormone production. Salmon (and other fatty fish), nuts, seeds, avocados and olive oil are all great sources of healthy fats.

Eating for a healthy heart: Eating a diet that contains lots of fruits and vegetables and little in the way of processed foods, salt and sugar can cut the risk of cardiovascular disease after menopause. Getting plenty of healthy fats helps too. After menopause, you can be more likely to put on extra weight, especially around the midsection, and this is another risk factor for cardiovascular problems.

[Phytoestrogens:](#) Phytoestrogens can mimic the effects of estrogen and are often put forward as a way to reduce menopause symptoms. They have the same chemical structure as estrogen and are treated in much the same way as naturally produced estrogen once they are consumed. Because they don't bind to estrogen receptors, they don't have the same effects as estrogen and there is mixed evidence as to whether phytoestrogens can improve menopause symptoms. A 2014 study suggested that phytoestrogens can [help](#) with hot flashes.

Using Herbal Supplements in Menopause

Phytoestrogen supplements can increase estrogen levels. Because they mimic the effects of estrogen, they can potentially help to make some menopause symptoms less severe. Many herbal remedies haven't been widely researched and a lot is yet to be discovered about side effects and safety. For this reason, it's recommended that you seek medical advice before you take any herbal supplements.

Here's a little bit of what we do already know about herbal supplements and menopause symptoms.

Some herbal remedies have shown promise in reducing some menopause symptoms:

- Black Cohosh has been [linked](#) to a 26% reduction in mild menopause symptoms, including hot flashes.
- Licorice root can [reduce](#) the intensity and severity of hot flashes.
- Dong quai has been [linked](#) to a decrease in hot flashes when it has been included as part of a herbal blend.

Hormone regulating supplements can also balance hormones that are lacking during perimenopause and menopause. Their main role is to encourage the endocrine system to produce hormones by itself.

A few examples include:

- **Evening primrose oil:** According to anecdotal evidence, evening primrose oil may be able to reduce hot flashes.
- **Ashwagandha:** A 2012 study revealed that ashwagandha can counteract Interleukin-8, a protein that is produced when estrogen levels decrease.

If you're taking any medication or have any pre existing health conditions, speak to your doctor before you take any supplements.

Can Other Supplements Help During Menopause?

Calcium and vitamin D can help to prevent bone loss. This is a big concern for many women during menopause as bone density often drops in the post menopause years.

According to research, it can be harder for the body to maintain healthy calcium levels after menopause and when levels are low, it can mean that more calcium is taken out of the bones to use for other functions in the body. If this isn't replaced at a later date when calcium levels are higher, it can lead to weaker bones. If you're not getting a lot of calcium from your diet, supplementing can help to make this less likely.

And with relatively few natural dietary sources of vitamin D, it can be hard to get enough of this nutrient through food alone.

Magnesium levels are [depleted](#) during menopause, especially if you're struggling with hot flashes and night sweats! Lack of magnesium can also affect sleep patterns during menopause.

Good dietary sources include dark leafy greens, nuts, seeds, avocados and whole grains. If your diet doesn't include lots of these foods, you may decide to supplement once you start to enter perimenopause and menopause to counteract the natural depletion of magnesium at this stage of your life.

It's a fine balancing act though as too much magnesium can bring on side effects such as diarrhea and changes in heart rate and blood pressure. If you're on medication for heart disease or high blood pressure, speak to your doctor to see whether magnesium supplements are suitable.

Vitamin E has also shown some promise, particularly for [reducing](#) the intensity and length of hot flashes and night sweats. In some studies, vitamin E has also helped breast pain during perimenopause, especially when it's linked to fluctuating hormones during the menstrual cycle.

Vitamin C is yet another supplement that can improve some menopause symptoms. In combination with bioflavonoids, vitamin C supplements helped to [reduce](#) hot flashes and night sweats by as much as 88%.

Omega 3 fatty acids can have hormone balancing effects. If you don't eat meat or fish, you can still get omega 3 fats from sources such as nuts and seeds and products that are fortified with omega 3. If you don't eat a lot of these, supplements could help.

Collagen supplements can improve the condition of hair, nails and skin during menopause. Collagen production tends to naturally decrease with age and many women find that they experience thinner, drier and more brittle hair and nails, and dry skin, which can sometimes be addressed through collagen supplements. Studies have shown that collagen supplements can [encourage](#) women with thinning hair to start to reverse the situation. In other studies, it has [shown](#) good promise for encouraging nail growth and improving the condition of brittle nails.

Silicon is another nutrient that can deplete with age, which can also affect the condition of your hair, nails and skin. Silicon supports the body's production of collagen. It's found naturally in some foods, namely seafood, grains and a few vegetables.

Taking supplements that contain silicon is an option for women who are struggling with very dry and brittle hair. Choline-stabilized orthosilicic acid is a bioavailable form of silicon that can help to [support](#) silicon and collagen production and is often included in hair, nails and skin supplements aimed at menopausal women.

Biotin can also support healthy hair, nails and skin during menopause. In one study, women with thinning hair took a supplement containing biotin twice per day for 3 months. They had digital images of their scalps taken before and after the study and hair shedding was examined after hair washing.

The group taking the biotin supplements [had](#) less hair shedding and a greater degree of hair growth than the placebo group.

In another study, taking 2.5mg of biotin per day [improved](#) the condition of brittle nails by up to 63%.

Many women find that they struggle to sleep as they get older, often as a result of the body not producing as much melatonin.

Lower levels of neurotransmitters such as serotonin and GABA can also affect your sleep patterns. Changing levels of estrogen can cause a drop in serotonin levels and this can have negative effects for sleep. Supplements aimed at regulating levels of key neurotransmitters can help to improve sleep.

Exercise and Menopause

Exercise can be a secret weapon when it comes to managing menopause symptoms. It may not be top of your to-do list, especially if you're struggling with fatigue, but regular exercise can be hugely important when you're going through menopause.

In a study involving more than 3,500 women, there was a link between the amount of exercise they did and the severity of their menopause symptoms. The more active women tended to have less intense symptoms.

Regular exercise can help you to keep your weight healthy. After menopause, many women find that they put on weight more easily, particularly around the middle.

Some types of exercise can help to improve bone health and prevent bone loss. Given that this is more of a risk factor after menopause, the right kind of exercise can help to strengthen your bones. It can also increase muscle mass, which typically starts to decline after the age of 30. Strength and resistance training is often recommended for this.

Exercise can also reduce your risk factor for developing diseases that are more likely to occur after menopause, including cardiovascular disease and type 2 diabetes.

It's not just physical symptoms that can be reduced; some emotional side effects of menopause can be managed through exercise too. Low mood can be improved through production of "feel good" endorphins that are released during exercise.

So, what kind of exercise is best? Low intensity activities that don't push your body too far can be a good bet. This doesn't have to be purely cardio/aerobic work. In fact, a combination of workouts can be a lot more beneficial.

Yoga has also been shown to reduce hot flashes. In a study from the University of California, weekly yoga classes decreased hot flashes by up to 31%.

Even walking can be great for improving heart health, according to research from the American College of Cardiology. Walking for a minimum of 40 minutes a few times per week can [reduce](#) the risk of post menopausal heart disease by as much as 25%.

Mindfulness and Menopause

Self care can become even more important during menopause, not least because your body is under stress. It's also a time of big change that can encourage a shift in attitude for many women.

One of the ways that you can look after yourself emotionally is through mindfulness.

According to studies, mindfulness can help to reduce anxiety and mood swings ... two menopause symptoms that plague many women.

It can also be beneficial for women who are experiencing hot flashes. In one study, 110 women who had been experiencing an average of at least 5 moderate to severe hot flashes each day participated in 8 Mindfulness Based Stress Reduction (MBSR) classes. Afterwards, they noted that their hot flashes were less intense.

Mindfulness isn't a miracle cure for menopause symptoms but research suggests that it could help to reduce their impact.