



EAT WELL throughout MENOPAUSE and beyond



The food you eat can help reduce symptoms of menopause and make for a smoother midlife transition. Nutritionist Anita Bean shares her best advice

Anita Bean pic needed



During the menopause, hormone levels (particularly oestrogen) drop, which can cause hot flushes, headaches, anxiety, difficulty sleeping, irritability and joint pain. Registered dietitian Dr Linia Patel of Bloom Health Hub says: 'Hormone levels fall and fluctuate during the perimenopause and menopause. This can trigger changes in your body that impact bone health, heart health and brain health. Menopausal changes are linked to weight gain, a decline in bone density and muscle mass and an increased risk of heart disease.'

But the good news is that alongside lifestyle changes, simple diet tweaks, such as a Mediterranean-style one based around fruit, vegetables, pulses, wholegrains, olive oil, nuts, seeds and fish can make this important transition easier. 'These anti-inflammatory foods help counter stress in the body during perimenopause and menopause,' explains Emma Bardwell, co-author of *The Perimenopause Solution*. 'Inflammation usually follows stress, and it is widely accepted that inflammation is the precursor to many chronic diseases and autoimmune conditions.'

Studies say that following a Mediterranean diet during menopause can help reduce the risk of weight gain and heart disease and improve menopausal symptoms.

disease, with the greatest benefits at two or more 30g servings per day.

ADD SOYA. Soya-based foods, such as tofu, tempeh, edamame beans and soya milk/yogurt, can reduce blood cholesterol. Heart UK recommends 2-3 servings a day. (1 serving = 100g tofu or 80g edamame beans or 250ml soya milk).

GO NUTS. Eating a 30g portion (a small handful) a day helps reduce cholesterol levels.

REDUCE SALT. Your daily salt intake should be less than 6g. As recommended by Dr Sarah Jarvis on p78, this is also important for healthy kidneys.

KEEP YOUR BONES HEALTHY

Up to 20% of bone density can be lost in the five to seven years after the menopause. This reduction in bone density is due to falling levels of oestrogen, which helps protect bone strength. 'Alongside regular weight-bearing exercise, the right amount of calcium, vitamin D, protein, magnesium, phosphorus and vitamin K can help to slow that loss,' says Emma.

CALCIUM. The NHS recommends 700mg of calcium a day, achievable by consuming three servings of any of the following: 200ml dairy or fortified plant milk; 30g hard cheese; 150g dairy or fortified plant yogurt; 100g calcium-set tofu; 60g tinned sardines;

4 ready-to-eat dried figs or 6 tbsp cooked kale. Supplements are generally not needed on top of a healthy balanced diet.

VITAMIN D helps the body absorb calcium from food and can be found in oily fish, eggs and fortified plant milks. The NHS recommends a 10mcg supplement, especially from October to March when we can't make enough vitamin D from sunlight.

COMBAT WEIGHT GAIN

A weight gain of 2-2.5kg (5lb) (over three years) is typical during the menopause. 'This is partly due to changes in hormone levels but also due to changes in eating habits and activity levels,' explains Dr Patel. 'As we get older, we tend to become less active and we lose muscle, which results in a slower metabolism. Also, when you gain weight, it's more likely to go to your midsection, which carries an increased risk of heart disease and type 2 diabetes.'

MANAGE BLOOD SUGAR LEVELS: 'Keeping blood sugar levels balanced and avoiding fluctuations is key to preventing midlife weight gain', says Dr Patel. Eat wholefoods (that only contain one ingredient) and keep processed foods to a minimum.

PROTEIN HELPS YOU STAY FULLER FOR LONGER and also helps retain muscle. Older women need more protein than younger women, around 1-1.2g per kg body weight a day, to combat age-related muscle loss. This means having 20-30g protein a meal. Try 200g Greek-style plain yogurt, or 1 salmon fillet or ½ tin (200g) of beans on 2 slices of toast.



PROTECT YOUR HEART

Because oestrogen is cardioprotective, low levels during and after menopause increase your risk of heart disease significantly. A reduction in oestrogen also causes levels of LDL cholesterol (the 'bad' type) to rise more rapidly. But a healthy diet can reduce these risks and help protect your heart.

REPLACE FOODS HIGH IN SATURATED FAT (red and processed meat, butter, full-fat dairy products, cakes and biscuits) with foods high in unsaturated fats (olive oil and other vegetable oils, avocados, nuts and seeds).

INCLUDE AT LEAST ONE WEEKLY SERVING OF OILY FISH, such as salmon, sardines and mackerel.

UP YOUR FIBRE INTAKE - it helps lower cholesterol so include a good variety of fruit, vegetables, wholegrains, pulses, nuts and seeds. Oats and barley provide beta-glucan, which may help reduce LDL cholesterol. Aim for 3g of fibre per day, equivalent to 30g oats + 250ml oat milk + 3 oatcakes.

HAVE AT LEAST FIVE PORTIONS OF FRUIT AND VEG A DAY. Fresh, frozen, dried or juiced, all provide vitamins, minerals, fibre and phytonutrients (plant nutrients) that help protect your heart.

INCREASE WHOLEGRAINS - wholegrain, bread, oats, breakfast cereals, rice and pasta can reduce the risk of heart

COMBINE WITH EXERCISE
Aim for at least 150 minutes of activity a week (including brisk walking), and include two sessions of muscle-strengthening exercise each week, such as Pilates, power yoga or weight training, to help maintain muscle mass.



EAT TO BEAT...

HOT FLUSHES

Plant-based foods that contain isoflavones (phytoestrogens/plant oestrogens) work in the body like a weak form of oestrogen. For this reason,

soya-based foods such as chickpeas, beans, lentils, ground flaxseed, berries and sesame seeds may help reduce the severity and frequency of hot flushes for some (but not all) women. US researchers found that women who cut out animal products and upped their intake of pulses – including half a cup of cooked soybeans daily – suffered 84% fewer hot flushes 12 weeks later.

Dr Patel recommends consuming 1-2 servings of phytoestrogen-rich foods a day: 1 serving = 80g edamame beans; or 100g tofu or tempeh; or 250ml soya milk; or 200ml

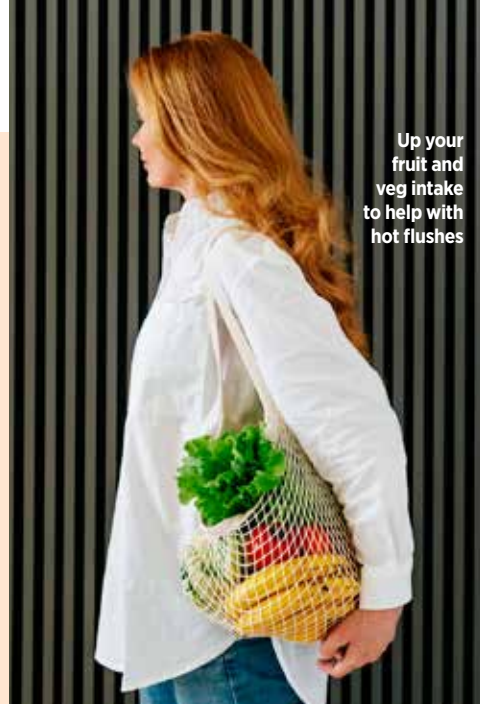
Greek-style soya yogurt. Caffeine and alcohol can make hot flushes worse, so opt for caffeine-free drinks and reduce alcohol to a minimum. A study of more than 17,000 menopausal women found those who ate more fruit and vegetables experienced a 19% reduction in hot flushes and night sweats.

LOW MOOD

It's estimated that 90% of your 'happy hormone' serotonin lives in the gut. So, if your gut health is off-key, your mood and emotions could be, too. To increase these beneficial microbes, eat a varied diet rich in fibre, including prebiotic foods such as onions, leeks and lentils and probiotic foods, such as yogurt, kefir and sauerkraut. Incorporate berries, nuts and seeds – they contain polyphenols that help 'good' bacteria thrive.

Research has shown that omega-3 fatty acids reduce depressive symptoms for women transitioning into menopause, so aim for a least one serving of oily fish a week. Don't like fish? You can supplement with fish oil; or for veggies or vegans, an algae-based omega-3 supplement.

Up your fruit and veg intake to help with hot flushes



ANXIETY

Frequent fluctuations in blood sugar can make anxiety and mood swings worse. It also increases the risk of insulin resistance and type 2 diabetes.

To keep blood sugar levels stable, Emma suggests starting your day with a breakfast of eggs or Greek yogurt (or Greek-style soya yogurt) instead of cereal, and snacking on nuts and fresh fruit between meals. □



YOUR MENOPAUSE MENU

Take inspiration from this three-day plan, with meals made from ingredients scientifically shown to help with menopausal symptoms and menopausal health. Adjust the recipes to your own taste, and feel free to mix and match.

	BREAKFAST	LUNCH	DINNER	SNACK
DAY 1	<p>BANANA AND BERRY PORRIDGE</p> <p>50g oats + 300ml soya/dairy milk + handful of berries + 1tbsp almonds + 1 banana, sliced.</p>	<p>RICE AND EDAMAME SALAD</p> <p>Mix together ½ pouch (125g) cooked wholegrain rice + 80g edamame beans + ½ diced red pepper + 1 sliced spring onion + 2tsp French dressing.</p>	<p>SALMON + COUSCOUS</p> <p>1 salmon fillet + squeeze lemon juice (fried in splash olive oil) + 200g roasted veg (eg peppers, butternut squash, courgettes) + 125g cooked wholegrain couscous.</p>	<p>4 dried, ready-to-eat figs.</p>
DAY 2	<p>YOGURT BOWL WITH GRANOLA + MIXED BERRIES</p> <p>200g Greek-style plain soya or dairy yogurt + 3tbsp granola + handful of berries.</p>	<p>CARROT + CHICKPEA SOUP</p> <p>Cook ½ onion (chopped) + 1 tsp olive oil + 1 carrot (chopped) + 300ml vegetable stock. Add ½ tin (200g) chickpeas, blend + serve with 1tbsp plain soya or dairy yogurt + 1 slice wholegrain bread.</p>	<p>CRISPY TOFU FRIED RICE</p> <p>100g firm tofu (cubed, stir-fried for 4 min) + 200g cooked wholegrain rice + 2 spring onions (sliced) + 1 garlic clove (sliced) + 1tsp fresh ginger (finely chopped) + ½ red pepper (chopped) + 1tsp soy sauce + small handful of cashew nuts.</p>	<p>3 oatcakes with hummus.</p>
DAY 3	<p>TOFU SCRAMBLE</p> <p>100g tofu (crumble + mix with 1 pinch turmeric, paprika. Fry in non-stick pan for 2-3 min) + 1 slice wholegrain toast + cherry tomatoes.</p>	<p>PUY LENTIL + FETA SALAD</p> <p>Mix together ½ pouch cooked puy lentils + 3 cherry tomatoes (quartered) + ½ red onion (chopped + fried) + 30g feta (cubed) + 1tbsp fresh mint (chopped) + squeeze lemon juice.</p>	<p>GRILLED MACKEREL WITH NEW POTATOES</p> <p>1 mackerel fillet (seasoned with salt + pepper, grilled for 4 min) + 150g new potatoes (boiled) + 6 tbsp steamed kale.</p>	<p>150g soya or dairy yogurt + 1tbsp mixed seeds.</p>

PHOTOGRAPHY: SERGEY NAREVSKIKH/STOCKSY UNITED. SRDJAN STEFANOVIC/GETTY, GETTY