

TOP LIFESTYLE TIPS FOR MENOPAUSAL HEALTH

GENERAL

- Stay hydrated (fresh water, herbal teas) – minimise/cut out caffeine & alcohol (common triggers for worsening symptoms)
- If relevant, seek support to stop smoking (common trigger for hot flushes and worsens bone & heart health)
- Layer light clothing (and bedlinen). Wear natural, breathable fibres when possible.
- If you suffer with hot flushes, use a fan; small portable ones are available to take out and about.
- Fill a small spray bottle with water and use this to spritz yourself if you feel overheated.
- Consider keeping a journal/using an online app (e.g. Clio) to see if you can identify any symptom triggers.

NUTRITION

- Centre diet around plant-based whole-foods: women who follow a plant-based diet have a lower risk of heart disease and cancer. Recent evidence suggests that they may also suffer fewer menopausal symptoms, and that leafy greens and dark-coloured berries are particularly beneficial.
- Think “right carbs, good fats” not “low-carb, high fat” or “no fat”: complex carbohydrates (e.g. root vegetables, beans, oats, wholegrains) and plant-based fats (e.g. nuts, seeds, avocado, good quality olive oil) are essential for good hormonal health.
- Eat the **rainbow** AND the alphabet: fill your plate with a wide variety of brightly coloured fruit & veg. Aim to include at least ten different types of vegetable in your meals each week (aim for 30 varieties over the month). Diversity is key to a healthy gut microbiome (and good hormonal & emotional health).
- Include a serving (or two) of beans/lentils/hummus in your daily diet – a fantastic source of fibre, protein and micronutrients. If you do not already regularly consume these and/or suffer with bloating, build up intake slowly and consider short-term digestive enzymes (e.g. BeanAssist); see also Dr Megan Rossi’s excellent book: *Eat Yourself Healthy* (focuses on improving gut health).
- Consider switching cow’s milk for fortified soya/oat/hemp milk (more heart-healthy)
- Include minimally processed soya foods in your diet: e.g. edamame beans, tofu, tempeh, miso – helpful for menopausal symptoms, heart and breast health.
- Flavour your food with a multitude of herbs & spices (rich in polyphenols – plant-based micronutrients)
- Minimise refined carbohydrates and junk food (e.g. added sugars, white bread, baked goods, take-aways)
- Avoid processed meats and all factory-farmed (intensively-reared) meat, fish, dairy & eggs.
- Aim to eat all meals within a 12-hour window e.g. between 7am & 7pm. This helps with weight control.

Cookbook recommendations:

- *The Happy Pear: Recipes for Happiness* - David & Stephen Flynn, *The Oh-She-Glows Cookbook* – Angela Liddon, *River Cottage: Much More Veg* – Hugh Fearnley-Whittingstall, *Forks Over Knives: The Cookbook* – Del Sroufe, *Virtually Vegan* – Heather Whinney, *The Green Roasting Tin* – Rukmini Iyer

SUPPLEMENTS

Recommended for everyone, irrespective of diet:

- *Vitamin B12*: Aim for 10 micrograms (mcg) daily or at least 2000 micrograms once a week
- *Vitamin D3*: Aim for 10 mcg/400 IU October-April (in spring/summer ensure sun exposure to skin on arms/legs/back for at least 20 minutes daily; continue to supplement if not possible)
- *Iodine*: RDA 150 mcg daily (do not exceed 0.5 mg/day; avoid kelp-based supplements)

For the above, I recommend the *VEG 1 Supplement* (affordable & reliable) available online from The Vegan Society

- *Omega 3 Essential Fatty Acids (EFAs)*: Algae derived (sustainable) EPA & DHA (200-300mg/daily) or 1 tablespoon of ground flaxseed (e.g. added to cereal/smoothies/salad/soups) and 6 walnut halves daily.

SLEEP

- Aim for 7-8 hours of sleep each night
- If you suffer from hot flushes/night sweats, sleep naked or wear cotton nightclothes. Consider investing in a cold gel pack or cooling pillow. Avoid hot drinks before bed; take sips of cold water instead.
- Ensure your bedroom is comfortably cool. Keep the window slightly open and/or a fan near your bed.
- Switch off electronic devices/screens at least one hour before bed and/or consider wearing blue-light blocking glasses in the evening.
- Do not consume caffeine (including dark chocolate and cola) after midday.
- Avoid smoking. Nicotine acts as a stimulant and withdrawal can lead to early wakening.
- Avoid alcohol before bed; not only does it reduce good-quality sleep, it is an endocrine (hormone) disrupter and can affect HRT.
- Aim to get up at approximately the same time each day, including weekends, to establish a routine.
- Aim to get outside in the morning daylight (whatever the weather) for at least 20 minutes each day. If this is not possible, try and have your breakfast/morning drink close to a window/in a naturally lit area.
- <https://www.sleepio.com/> is a digital, evidence-based, CBT programme (available on the NHS in some areas)

EXERCISE/MOVEMENT

- Aim to move your body daily – this is important for mental & physical well-being, as well as symptom control.
- If you don't already have an exercise regimen, start slowly – even a ten-minute walk around the block has its benefits <https://www.nhs.uk/oneyou/active10/home>, or consider a five minute morning online yoga session e.g. <https://yogawithadriene.com/5-minute-morning-yoga/>
- Weight-bearing exercise (e.g. hiking, running, dancing, weight-training, tennis) – at least twice weekly – is essential for bone health after menopause. Swimming and cycling are great forms of exercise for heart health and general well-being, but will not prevent osteoporosis.
- Consider joining your local Park Run <http://www.parkrun.org.uk/> or Great Run Local <https://www.greatrunlocal.org/> - great not only for exercise, but also community-building, social inclusion and gets you out into nature (which has enormous benefits for our mental health). Do not be put off if you do not run (yet!); many people walk or walk-run around the courses. Children and dogs are welcome too 😊
- Balance and core-strength are increasingly important as we age, and reduce the risk of falling in later life. Another reason to consider a regular yoga practice, or why not sign up to a local Pilates or tai chi class?

STRESS REDUCTION/SELF CARE

- Stress reduction is important for all of us and is paramount during the menopausal transition.
- 5-10 minutes of daily mindfulness meditation/breathing exercises can provide enormous benefits and lower the stress response: Headspace, Calm and Insight Timer are all meditation apps you can trial for free. Clarity is an app designed specifically with menopause in mind.
- Take at least 15-30 minutes a day, every day, to do something you enjoy (and solely for you) e.g. reading a novel, gardening, playing an instrument, having a bath with relaxing essential oils, listening to your favourite music/podcast, walking in nature.
- BE KIND TO YOURSELF

Suggested reading (holistic health, exercise, inspiration):

The 4 Pillar Plan and *The Stress Solution*: Dr Rangan Chatterjee

Sorted: The Active Woman's Guide to Health: Dr Juliet McGrattan

Podcasts (health, wellbeing, inspiration):

Feel Better, Live More <https://drchatterjee.com/blog/category/podcast/>

Deliciously Ella Podcast <https://play.acast.com/s/deliciouslyellapodcast>

Oprah's SuperSoul Conversations <http://www.oprah.com/app/supersoul-sessions.html>