

## Menopause

The menopause (the time in a woman's life when periods stop) usually happens between the ages of 45-55 years.

As well as a loss of fertility, other physical changes may happen including an increase in blood pressure, changes in cholesterol levels and weakening of the bone.

These symptoms are mainly due to falling oestrogen levels, and can last for just a few months or for several years. The range of symptoms and how severe they are, can be different for each woman.

Early symptoms can include weight gain, hot flushes, night sweats, irritability, poor concentration, more frequent headaches, joint pains and irregular or heavy periods. Over the long-term, loss of oestrogen increases the risk of heart disease and bone weakness.

Hormone replacement therapy (HRT) is used by many women to control these symptoms, however others cannot take HRT due to other health problems, whilst others choose not to. Instead some women make diet and lifestyle changes to try and gain relief from symptoms. This can include taking dietary supplement products in place of hormone therapy.

### Weight Gain

During the menopause, muscle mass reduces meaning that fewer calories may be needed. Over time this can lead to weight gain. Being careful about energy intake and doing more physical activity can help prevent weight gain.

Thirty minutes of fast walking a day could lead to around 7kg (15lb) weight loss in a year, and also reduce the risk of heart disease.

For top tips on safe effective weight control see [bdaweightwise.com](http://bdaweightwise.com)

### Bone Health

From the age of about 35, there is a slow loss of calcium from the bone in both men and women. However, this increases during menopause



because of the loss of oestrogen. This is more common in women who are not on HRT, as HRT contains oestrogen. Many nutrients help keep bones healthy, so it's important that the diet is balanced. You can do this by choosing a variety of foods and consuming plenty of fruit, vegetables and foods from the milk and dairy group as these are a source of calcium.

For most women this would mean aiming for two to three portions of calcium-rich foods every day which can include: a third of a pint/ 200ml semi skimmed milk, a matchbox size piece of cheese, a small yoghurt or a milk-based pudding like custard or rice pudding.

Vitamin D is also very important for bone health. It is made in the skin in response to sunlight. You will get enough vitamin D to last the year if you leave your face and forearms uncovered in the sun for about 15 minutes a day between the hours of 10am and 3pm between April and October. All adults should consider taking a daily supplement containing 10 micrograms of vitamin D especially during autumn and winter.

Women over the age of 65, those with dark skin, from African, African-Caribbean and South Asian backgrounds or who have low sunlight exposure should consider taking a vitamin D supplement of 10 mcg per day all year round.

There are not many foods that are good sources of vitamin D. Find out more in our vitamin D Food Fact Sheet.

**Foods that contain vitamin D include:**

• oily fish	• cod liver oil
• red meat	• butter and margarine
• fortified cereals	• eggs

## Heart Health

It is thought that during the menopause a woman's risk of developing heart disease goes up to the same level of a man of the same age. There are some very simple lifestyle changes you can make to reduce the risk:

### Eat less saturated and trans fats

- Cut down on fatty meat products, choose lean cuts of meat, avoid processed meat products.
- Cut back on fats and oils high in saturates such as lard, ghee, and coconut oil.
- Use fats that are high in unsaturated fat (monounsaturates and polyunsaturates), such as rapeseed, olive and sunflower oils/spreads, but only use them in small amounts or opt for lower fat spreads.
- Choose semi-skimmed, 1% or skimmed milk rather than whole milk and opt for low or reduced fat dairy products and low fat yogurt.
- Grill rather than fry foods whenever possible and go easy with creamy and cheesy sauces (e.g. carbonara).
- Reduce your intake of processed foods such as crisps, biscuits and pies.
- Reduce your intake of refined sugars like sweets, cakes and soft drinks.

### Choose foods that contain heart-friendly fats

For example, avocado, unsalted nuts and oily fish.

### Reduce salt by avoiding processed foods like ready meals and cooking sauces

Cooking from scratch means you can use different ingredients for flavour such as herbs and spices.

### Aim for at least two portions of fish per week, one which should be oily

Oily fish includes canned sardines, mackerel, salmon, fresh tuna, trout and herrings.

### Eat a minimum of five different coloured fruits and vegetables each day

ALL types can count (fresh, frozen, canned, dried or juiced).

### Eat some fibre containing foods every day

Oats, wholegrain cereals and breads as well as pulses like lentils, chickpeas and beans are all excellent sources.

## What about plant oestrogens?

Some women choose to eat foods or take supplements containing plant oestrogens to help with symptoms. Plant oestrogens are a group of substances found in plant foods such as soy and red clover. They are similar, but much weaker than human oestrogen. It is thought that if they are eaten regularly they may have positive health benefits including reducing hot flushes and improving levels of fat in the blood, but more research is needed before the helpful benefits of plant oestrogen are proven. Sources of plant oestrogen include calcium-enriched soya products like milk, yoghurts and soya and linseed breads or a red clover supplement.

## A lifestyle approach to the menopause

Changing lifestyle may help women to reduce menopausal symptoms, keep bone density and reduce risk of heart disease.

- Eat a healthy diet, include at least five portions of different coloured fruit and vegetables everyday.
- Aim for two to three portions of calcium-rich foods every day.
- Eat a good mixture of foods containing fibre.
- Moderate intake of caffeine from drinks like coffee, tea and colas or choose decaffeinated drinks if you are sensitive to its stimulatory effects. Keep to sensible alcohol limits – no more than 2-3 units per day or avoid altogether if you feel it makes symptoms worse.
- Look after your heart by eating at least two portions of fish a week, one which should be oily and limiting salt and saturated fats.
- Maintain or take steps to achieve a healthy body weight – [bdaweightwise.com](http://bdaweightwise.com)
- Take regular moderate exercise, especially weight bearing activity.
- If you think you might want to take nutritional supplements, get some advice from your dietitian, doctor or pharmacist.

### Further information: The Menopause

Exchange: [menopause-exchange.co.uk](http://menopause-exchange.co.uk)

Food Fact Sheets on Vitamin D, Heart Health, Calcium, Omega-3 and Supplements and other topics are available at [bda.uk.com/foodfacts](http://bda.uk.com/foodfacts)

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