Menopause, Diet and Lifestyle



A practical guide to support your health and wellbeing through peri-menopause and menopause

Welcome!

There is a lot of information about menopause, which can sometimes feel overwhelming.

This booklet provides practical information about peri-menopause and menopause, with simple tips to support your health and wellbeing.

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What is Menopause?

Menopause is when your periods stop because hormone levels fall. It usually happens between the ages of 45 and 55, but can happen earlier.

Menopause may happen naturally, after surgery to remove the ovaries, or after some cancer treatments (such as chemotherapy). Family history can also influence the age at which menopause happens. Sometimes the reason is unknown.

Peri-menopause is the stage leading up to menopause, when hormone levels begin to change. Symptoms may start while periods are still occurring and can continue until menopause.
Periods often become irregular, but some people notice symptoms before any change in their periods.

Post-menopause begins when you have not had a period for 12 months. Some symptoms improve, while others may continue.

Common menopause symptoms may include:

Hot flushes  Night sweats  Poor sleep  Mood changes 

Irritability  Anxiety  Brain fog  Irregular periods 

Symptoms can begin during peri-menopause, often years before periods stop, and may continue afterwards. Weight gain is also common.

Menopause symptoms can affect daily life, relationships, social activities and experiences at work. Some people have many symptoms, while others have very few.

Healthy habits that can help manage symptoms:

 Balanced diet

 Regular physical activity

 Good sleep habits

 Emotional wellbeing support



Hormone replacement therapy (HRT) can help relieve menopause symptoms and may also help protect bone health.

Talk to your doctor about whether HRT, supplements or complementary therapies may be suitable for you.

Looking after your health can help manage symptoms and support wellbeing during and after menopause.

How does menopause affect your health ??



Weight changes.

A drop in oestrogen can make it easier to gain weight. Muscle mass also decreases with age, meaning the body burns fewer calories at rest.



Bone health

From around age 35 years, bone density gradually decreases. Lower oestrogen levels during menopause can speed up bone loss, increasing the risk of osteoporosis and fractures.



Help protect your bones

- ✔ Calcium
- ✔ Vitamin D
- ✔ Weight-bearing exercise



HRT may also help maintain bone density and prevent fractures.



Heart health and cholesterol

Lower oestrogen levels can affect cholesterol levels and increase the risk of heart disease.

Blood pressure may also rise during menopause.

Weight gain, stress, anxiety and reduced physical activity can contribute to this.

Healthy Eating and Menopause

How can healthy eating help to manage symptoms?

- Helps maintain a healthy weight
- May help reduce hot flushes
- Supports better sleep
- Supports mental wellbeing
- Helps reduce the risk of heart disease
- Helps reduce the risk of Type 2 diabetes



Tips for managing weight

Set small goals and plan ahead



Aim for regular meals



Be mindful of portion sizes



Choose healthier options



Take regular physical activity



Healthier Choices

Simple food swaps can help support heart health, gut health and overall wellbeing.

Reduce foods and drinks high in added sugar

Foods and drinks high in added sugar can add extra calories, but provide few vitamins, minerals or fibre.

Choose more often ✓

- Fruit
- Unsalted nuts (30g or one small handful)
- Yoghurt

Choose less often and in small amounts ↓

- Chocolate
- Biscuits
- Sweets

Choose high fibre foods

Top Tips:
- ✓ Aim for **30g per day**
- ✓ Increase fibre gradually
- ✓ Drink plenty of fluids

6g of fibre per 100g = a high fibre food

Fibre helps keep your gut healthy and can help you feel fuller for longer.

Easy high fibre choices at each meal

Breakfast	• Porridge oats • High fibre cereal
Lunch	• Wholegrain bread • Baked potato with beans
Dinner	• Brown rice or wholewheat pasta • Extra vegetables
Snacks	• Fruit • Unsalted nuts

Choose low-fat dairy products

Lower fat dairy products provide calcium and protein, while containing less saturated fat.

Choose
Semi skimmed milk | Lower fat yoghurt | Reduced fat cheese

Choose healthier fats for heart health

Choosing foods lower in saturated fat can help support heart health and healthy cholesterol levels

Choose more ✓	Choose less ↓
Olive oil	Butter
Rapeseed oil	Fatty meats
Avocado	Processed meats
Nuts and seeds	Pastries and cakes

Keeping bones healthy

Calcium helps keep bones strong.
For a balanced diet, aim for 2-3 portions of calcium rich foods every day.



One portion equals:

- Small matchbox size piece of hard cheese (eg cheddar)
- 200ml milk
- Small pot yoghurt (150ml)
- Rice pudding or custard (1 pot 55g)

Other good sources of calcium:

Broccoli & kale · Calcium-set tofu · Sesame seeds · Dried figs · Tinned sardines (with bones)

If using dairy alternatives (e.g. soya, oat or almond milk), choose products with added calcium

Vitamin D

Vitamin D helps the body absorb calcium from food and supports healthy bones, muscles and the immune system.

Most people can make enough vitamin D from sunlight between April and September.

Consider taking a supplement containing 10 micrograms (mcg or µg) of Vitamin D daily from October to March. Some people may need Vitamin D all year round. Speak to a healthcare professional for advice.

Foods containing vitamin D include:

Oily fish (salmon, mackerel, sardines) · Egg yolks · Fortified foods such as breakfast cereals and milk

Top tips for Heart health



These simple changes can help support heart health during and after menopause.



Salt

Too much salt can raise blood pressure
Choosing lower-salt foods can help support heart health



- ✔ Choose lower-salt foods where possible
- ✔ Limit ready meals, soups and cooking sauces
- ✔ Use herbs, spices, garlic or lemon juice instead of adding salt

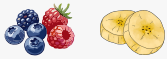
Basil  Parsley  Garlic  Paprika 

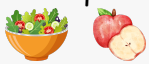


Aim for at at least 5 portions of fruit and vegetables a day

Fruit and vegetables provide vitamins, minerals and fibre to support overall health.

Easy ways to get your 5-a-day

Breakfast: Add a handful of berries or a chopped banana to your breakfast cereal 

Lunch: Include a side salad or pack a piece of fruit such as an apple or orange. 

Dinner: Add vegetables such as frozen peas, spinach, or tinned tomatoes to meals. 

Snacks: Try carrot sticks, cherry tomatoes, or a small handful of dried fruit (30g) 



Aim for 2 portions of fish each week

Oily fish provides omega-3 fats which help support heart health

Include **1 portion of oily fish**: salmon, mackerel, sardines, or trout






Moving more during menopause



Physical activity can help to:

- ✓ Maintain a healthy weight
- ✓ Improve sleep
- ✓ Support mood and wellbeing
- ✓ Reduce the risk of heart disease and Type 2 diabetes

Be active every day

Try to break up long periods of sitting

Aim for:



150 minutes of moderate intensity each week (brisk walking, swimming, cycling)

or **75 minutes of vigorous intensity activity** (running, aerobic exercise, sport)



Build Strength

Building strength is especially important during and after menopause

Lower oestrogen levels can lead to a loss of muscle mass and bone strength, increasing the risk of osteoporosis.



Building strength helps keep muscles and bones strong. It can support weight management and may help reduce the risk of osteoporosis.

Aim to do activities that build strength at least 2 days each week



Everyday ways to build strength

- Carry shopping 
- Climb stairs 
- Go from sitting to standing without using your arms 

More ways to build strength

- Weights or kettlebells 
- Resistance band exercises 
- Bodyweight exercises 
- Pilates 
- Hill walking 

Protein and strength 

Protein helps build and maintain muscle. Include protein-rich foods such as fish, eggs, beans, lentils, dairy foods and tofu as part of a balanced diet.

Key message:

- ✓ Any activity is better than none
- ✓ More activity brings greater health benefits
- ✓ Choose activities you enjoy
- ✓ Every movement counts

Looking after your overall Health and Wellbeing

Caffeine, alcohol and smoking



- Limit caffeine if it worsens hot flushes, anxiety or sleep
- Stopping smoking can improve overall health and may help reduce menopause symptoms
- Keep alcohol within recommended limits (alcohol can worsen sleep quality)

Alcohol recommendations



- No more than 14 units per week
- It's best to spread this evenly over 3 days or more
- Include several alcohol-free days.

Mood and Emotional wellbeing



Make time for activities you enjoy, such as walking, reading, meditation or exercise.

Managing mood changes

It is common to have mood swings, low mood and anxiety around the time of the menopause and peri-menopause.

Cognitive behavioural therapy (CBT) is a type of talking therapy that can help with low mood, anxiety and sleep problems.

- Stay connected with family and friends
- Talk about how you are feeling
- Make time for activities you enjoy
- Relaxation, mindfulness and breathing exercises may help

Sleep, hydration and self-care





Prioritise sleep where possible. Keeping a regular sleep routine may help improve sleep quality.
Most adults need around 7-9 hours of sleep each night.
Good sleep can support mood, energy levels and overall wellbeing.

Stay hydrated

Drinking enough fluids helps your body function properly and supports concentration, digestion and wellbeing.

- Aim for 6 - 8 drinks a day (around 1.5-2 litres of fluid)
  Water, milk, tea, coffee and sugar-free drinks all count
- Pale straw coloured urine is a good sign of hydration

Plant Oestrogens and Supplements



Plant Oestrogens

As oestrogen levels fall during menopause, some people choose to include foods containing plant oestrogens (phytoestrogens) in their diet.

Plant oestrogens are natural compounds found in certain foods that can have a mild oestrogen-like effect in the body.

They may:

- Help reduce hot flushes for some people
- Help ease some menopause symptoms when eaten regularly

Ways to include plant oestrogens in your diet

- Add **flaxseeds** to porridge 
- Make a sandwich with **linseed bread** 
- Fruit with **calcium enriched soya yoghurt**
- Stir fry with **edamame** beans or **tofu** 

- Choose calcium-fortified soya milk

Benefits may take 2-3 months to be noticed



Supplements and herbal remedies

Herbal remedies and supplements are often advertised for menopause symptoms.

There is limited evidence that many of these products are effective and there is not enough research to know whether all products are safe or how they may interact with other medicines.
For this reason, they are not routinely recommended as a treatment for menopause symptoms.

Speak to your doctor or pharmacist before taking supplements or herbal remedies



Different perspectives on menopause

Menopause is often associated with symptoms and health changes, but it can also be seen as a natural life transition.

In some cultures, including Traditional Chinese Medicine, menopause is sometimes described as the "Second Spring", symbolising a time of renewal, self-care and new opportunities.

How we think about menopause can influence how we experience it.

Seek support

Speak to your GP or other health professional if:

- Menopause is affecting your daily life
- You are struggling with low mood or anxiety
- Symptoms are not improving
- You would like to discuss treatment options such as HRT

Watch our Managing Menopause video series on our YouTube Channel
https://www.youtube.com/@publichealthdietitiansNI



Click here or scan the QR Code

Further information and support



Menopause information
nhs.uk/menopause
womens-health-concern.org
menopausematters.co.uk
rockmymenopause.com
menopausesupport.co.uk
selfcareforum.org

Specialist menopause support
menopauseandcancer.org
daisynetwork.org.uk

Bone health
theros.org.uk

Lifestyle support
stopsmokingni.info
drugsandalcoholni.info

Local services
bWellbelfast@hscni.net
belfasttrust.hscni.net/service/menopause-service

Emotional Wellbeing Resources

Mental Health Self Help Guides:
Online self-help guides covering topics such as anxiety, sleep, stress, wellbeing
selfhelp.cntw.nhs.uk/organisation/belfast-health-and-social-care-trust

Cognitive Behavioural Therapy (CBT)
Living Life to the Full - Free online CBT programme: **llttf.com/**

Aware NI - Living Life to the Full Online and face-to-face courses:
aware-ni.org/living-life-to-the-full

Relaxation and Breathing exercises
Minding Your Head - Calming Skills
Breathing and relaxation exercises **mindingyourhead.info/calming-skills**

Information in this booklet is based on guidance from:

- **NHS**
- **British Dietetic Association (BDA)**
- **Women's Health Concern**
- **Menopause Support**
- **Age UK**

Thank you for taking the time to read this booklet.
We hope it has helped you better understand peri-menopause and menopause and feel more confident about supporting your health and wellbeing.

SCAN HERE

Complete our short feedback survey
(approximately 2 minutes)

Scan the QR code or click **here** to complete the survey

If you would prefer a paper or electronic feedback form, please contact us

Your feedback will help us improve future versions of this resource.

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caring supporting improving together

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