**Menopause and Diet**

People say menopause is a natural, positive experience, but the symptoms and side-effects of menopause can be bewildering both to women patients and their doctors. Fortunately, a healthy diet combined with regular physical exercise really does make a difference. So whether you are in the perimenopause, menopause, or post-menopausal stage, eat healthily and get fit.  

‘Let thy food be thy medicine’

Hippocrates

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**Menopause and Weight**

- Majority of women tend to gain 2 kg of weight.
- The increase in weight is around the abdomen i.e. midriff.
- There is tendency to lose muscle and bone weight.
- Increase in weight is associated with increase in heart disease, hypertension, diabetes mellitus, osteoarthritis and some cancer.

**Does Menopause Cause Weight Gain?**

Although experts concede that menopausal women tend to gain weight, they say it is not triggered by menopause. Instead, it is the result of these things:

1. **Eating too many calories**
   - As we get older, our muscle mass declines. Result? Our metabolic rate slows down, so we need fewer calories. Unfortunately, we don’t reduce our calorie intake, so it effect we overeat.

2. **Insufficient Exercise**
   - As we lose muscle strength, and get weightier!, we tend to take less physical exercise. Result? Our calories expenditure falls.

3. **Physical and Mental Stress**
   - Whether from menopause symptoms, the effects of bad teenage children or other mid-life problems, the result is the same. We turn to food for comfort.

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**Heart Disease After Menopause**

Before the menopause, estrogen protects women from some of the effects of a high fat diet. This is why rates of heart disease are lower in premenopausal women than those of similar age. But during the menopausal and postmenopausal stages, estrogen levels decline. This leads to a fall in the level of HDL cholesterol (the good blood fat) and a rise in LDL cholesterol (the bad fat). Which is why rates of heart disease among menopausal and postmenopausal women are as high as those among men of similar age.

**Drink Alcohol in Moderate Amounts**

Drinking a glass of wine every evening is good for your health. But more is not better: it can be quite unhealthy and may aggravate some symptoms of menopause. Instead, drink water, diluted fruit juice including calcium-fortified juice, vegetable juice, fat-free milk, calcium-fortified soy milk, herbal teas like hibiscus and green tea.

**Avoid Highly Spiced Foods**

Spicy foods such as hot curry, hot chilli dishes, can make hot flashes worse. So go easy on highly flavored meals.

**Caffeine**

Reduce your intake of caffeine (from coffee, tea and soft drinks). Too much caffeine can cause loss of calcium. A few cups of regular strength coffee is a great way to many situations. You can also be a great comfort, and green tea is packed with healthy ingredients. So if you enjoy coffee or tea, then continue drinking it but don’t overdose.

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**Best Diet for Menopause**

**Introduction**

As we get older, the digestive tract becomes less efficient and digestion takes longer. Our body finds it more difficult to handle foods that are high in calories but low in nutrition. However, we still need the same amount of vitamins, minerals and phytochemicals - sometimes more. Food should be nutrient dense and not calorie dense.

**Diet Nutrition is Crucial**

For optimum health and feelgood during menopause, focus on good diet nutrition. A healthy nutritious diet not only minimizes all the additional medical health risks of menopause and general ageing, it also reduces both physical and mental symptoms of menopausal life. Choose as many natural foods as possible, choose and have variety of vegetables and fruit on. Include calcium rich diet.

**Healthy Eating Doesn’t Mean Being Perfect**

Healthy Menopause Diet suggesting on the next page should help to alleviate the symptoms of menopause, including hot flashes, sweating, water retention, tiredness and depression. In addition, if combined with regular exercises, you will reduce weight and find it much easier to maintain a healthy weight as you get older.

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**Healthy Menopause Diet**

- Have about 100gms of fruit and 300gms of vegetables. On whole fruits rather than juices.
- Drink 8 glasses of water every day.
- Include whole grains, beans and lentils daily.
- Include 3 serves of low fat milk, cereal, pulses, nuts.
- Eat 1-3 serves per week of oily fish like salmon, mackerel.
- Stick on 5-6 nuts like almonds, walnuts or dried-fruits like dates, figs, apricots and seeds like pumpkin, sunflower. Add powdered flax seeds, cinnamon, fennugreek, saffron in your diet.
- Limit use of cooking oil to ½ to 1 teaspoon per person per month i.e. 2-500g/day.
- Use combinations of two cooking oils. Choose from rice bran, saffola, sunflower, mustard, oil, groundnut, olive oil.
- Limit intake of tea and coffee to 3 cups a day: 1 cup (150mL) of brewed coffee is equal to 200mg of caffeine and 40mg for instant coffee and tea. Not more than 200mg/day of caffeine.
- Limit consumption of sugar which only has empty calories.

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[Dr. Muneet](https://www.indianmenopause.org)  
[Dr. Supriya Chabukdar](https://www.indianmenopause.org)

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**Tips for healthy cooking**
- Wash vegetables before cutting and preferably cut in long pieces. Do not soak in water for long.
- Use only sufficient water for cooking.
- Cook food in vessels covered with lids or use cover.
- Prefer pressure vessels to deep fry and cooking.
- Avoid use of cooking oils, artificial colors.
- Do not reheate the left over food repeatedly.
- Fermented foods like idli, dosa, dhokla and sponges improve digestibility and impart vitamin C and B-complex absorption.

**Foods which help**
- Carrot, tomato, cucumber, pungkin, egg plant, potato, peas, green leafy vegetables, yam.
- Apple, plum, papaya, muss melon, pomogranate.
- Walnuts, almonds, chamom, saffron, flaxseed, sesam.
- Garlic, fenugreek.
- Whole grains, barley, wheat, ragi, sprouts, mung, Bengal gram.
- Low fat milk, curds, paneer, soy milk or soy food.
- Fermented products like idli, dhokla, brown bread.

**Foods to be eaten in small quantities occasionally**
- Chai, spaces, butter, pickles, papad, chips, sweets.
- Excess caffeine (coffee, tea and soft drinks).
- Processed, canned, frozen and packed foods, soups and salted nuts.

**Food and Menopause**
A balanced diet should have a blend of any four basic food groups (i.e. cereals, milk, milk products, fruits, vegetables, eggs, oil, milk and cocoa etc.) and non nutrients such as dietary fibre, antioxidants and phytochemicals.

**Classifications of food based on function**
- **Source of energy**
- **Source of vitamins**
- **Source of minerals**
- **Source of anti-oxidants**
- **Source of phytochemicals**

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**Phytochemicals & Antioxidants**
Phytochemicals are found in foods that provide the body protective menopause beyond basic nutrition such as antioxidant, antimicrobial, antiprostaglandin, antiradical formation and interaction with hormone i.e. phytoestrogen. Dietary source of phytoestrogen includes:
- Fermented foods like idli, dhokla.
- Enhanced nutrient content of diets, esp. those containing a cereals-pulse mix.

**Antioxidants**
Antioxidants are natural defensive substances that provide protection from free radicals produced in the body daily during metabolic activity. Free radicals produce disease and accelerate ageing. They are generated by atmospheric pollution, tobacco, alcohol, emotional stress. Certain vitamins, minerals, bioflavonoids are important antioxidants. These are vitamin A, vitamin C, vitamin E, folic acid, zinc, selenium, copper and bioflavonoids like lycopene and lutein.

**Vitamin A**
This vitamin is necessary for the health and growth of the skin, eyes and mucous membranes. Vitamin A deficiency can lead to night blindness, increased susceptibility to infections and rough skin. Low levels of vitamin A contribute to heavy menstrual bleeding and (possibly cervical cancer) and aged-related skin conditions like lipoaskepia.
- Include: Carrots, spinach, turnips, apricots, Liver, melons, sweet potatoes.

**Vitamin B Complex**
Several B vitamins are beneficial during menopause. Folic acid may help to prevent pernicious changes in the cervix. All B vitamins work in harmony. They help us to handle sugar, maintain health of the liver, and stabilizes brain function. Low levels of vitamin B complex can lead to emotional stress, fatigue and depression.
- Folic acid is found in green leafy vegetables, nuts, peas, beans, Liver and kidney. Vitamin B12 is found in meat and poultry, fish, beans, wholemeal bread. Vitamin B8 is found in meat and poultry, Fish, eggs, wholemeal cereals and dairy products. Vitamin B12 is found in fish, poultry, eggs and milk.
- Include: Wheatgerm oil, eggs, green leafy vegetables, cereals, dried beans, nuts.

**Bioflavonoids**
A type of phytochemical found in the pit of pit and pulp of citrus fruits, which helps to combat hot flashes, excessive menstrual bleeding, menopausal vaginal problems, anxiety and emotional problems.
- Include: Turmeric, turmeric, cereals, citrus fruits, broccoli, peppers, tomatoes.

**Vitamin D**
Along with calcium and estrogen, vitamin D is essential for the ongoing strengthening and maintenance of bone mass, and to minimize the risk of osteoporosis as we get older. Although vitamin D deficiency is sure, all menopausal women should include adequate amounts of vitamin D in their diet to maintain strong bones.
- Skin exposure of hands arms and face to peak sunlight for 15 minutes every day without using sunscreen.
- Include: Canned tuns or salmon, eggs or milk products.

**Vitamin E**
Sometimes called "the menopausal vitamin", it may also have health benefits as well as psychological symptoms of menopause. It is also a powerful antioxidant that helps keep cells disease free.
- Include: Wheatgerm oil, eggs, green leafy vegetables, cereals, dried beans, nuts.

**Calcium**
Calcium is present in the bone, has an effect on cardiovascular system, nervous system, and muscle. On average, only 25-40 percent of calcium consumed is absorbed and this decreases with age. Other factors that inhibit absorption of calcium include: lack of exercise, medicines, drugs, smoking, caffeine and stress. Lack of calcium also reduces absorption of calcium, especially the vitamins D, C and K, as well as the mineral’s magnesium and phosphorus. So, drinking a glass of milk or pouring a calcium tablet isn’t enough to prevent bone loss. This is why a healthy balanced diet is of utmost importance.
- Include: Milk, milk products, almonds, salmon, leafy green vegetables, nuts and dried beans.

**Magnesium**
Helps to control menopause-associated conditions like osteoporosis, fatigue, type 2 diabetes, coronary artery disease, anxiety and depression.
- Include: Figs, lemons, citrus, almonds, nuts, soybeans, seeds, dark green vegetables, apples.

**Selenium**
Helps to combat thyroid-breast disease and cancer.
- Include: Wheat germ, tina, tomatoes, broccoli.

**Manganese**
Helps to combat adrenal crisis in later life.
- Include: Nuts, fruit, grains, wholegrain cereals.

**Phosphorus**
Helps in prevention of osteoporosis.
- Include: Meat, fish, eggs, milk, grains, nuts, seeds and beans.

**Zinc**
Helps to combat osteoporosis in later life.
- Include: Wheat grain, paprika, seeds, eggs.