



7 SECRETS TO A *happy, healthy* MENOPAUSE





HELLO THERE!

Midlife is full of surprises – and not all of them are good... If you are reading this guide then I'm guessing that you are touched in some way by symptoms of the menopause – or more accurately, the transition to menopause. Perhaps you are even horrified at the person looking back at you in the mirror. Who is this person? What the heck happened?

You are not alone. Until recently, when celebrities like Cameron Diaz, Gillian Anderson and Kirsty Walk started speaking out about their experiences, menopause was the silent shame. Yet experts reckon that 80% of women experience the symptoms of menopause.

It might be that you are really suffering or perhaps you've just started noticing some changes. The experience is different for every woman but often means being hot, cold, moody, tired, sleep-deprived, nervy, irritable, sad, or hairy. It can mean hot flashes, memory loss, and a seemingly immovable band of fat around the middle and thighs.

Your fluctuating hormones are the cause of all of this, but you don't have to accept these symptoms as the way things need to be. Learning to rebalance your hormones naturally will help you take back control of your life. Given life expectancy increases, women can expect to spend at least a third of their life 'menopausal', so it's really worth getting the help you need now. Despite what you might have feared, menopause is not the death of your youth or vitality, but the start of some of the best and most powerful years of your life.



NEED TO KNOW ABOUT MENOPAUSE

The term 'menopause' is technically inaccurate because it represents the end of symptoms, whereas the stage that most women struggle through is called peri-menopause, which can last anything from two to eight years until the last period.

The average age of menopause is 51. You officially reach menopause when you have had no periods for 12 consecutive months.

Women's experiences vary wildly and from country to country. Hot sweats are very common in the West but very few Japanese women experience them.

Before the actual menopause (see above), there is still a risk of pregnancy. Once women hit their 40s, they typically gain an average of 1lb a year so you could easily be a stone heavier by the time you reach 55.

The age your mother was when she reached menopause can indicate when you might do so - but it won't necessarily tell you about the symptoms you might experience or the severity of them.

Your health is no longer something peripheral you can take for granted but you do have some control over managing symptoms. It's all about making some changes to your diet, stepping up your self care and taking action to reduce stress, and moving gently.

MENOPAUSE SYMPTOMS

Night sweats

Erratic menstrual cycle

Stubborn weight gain
around the middle

Insomnia

Bloating

Cravings

Headaches/ Migraines

Overwhelm

Irritability

Mood swings

Anxiety/ Depression

Brain fog

Poor memory

Loss of sex drive

Vaginal dryness

Aging skin (and hair)

Joint pains

Fatigue





WHAT'S HAPPENING INSIDE?

You may not have given your hormones a second's thought before but, given the rollercoaster you are on right now, it's worth having some understanding of what's going on chemically inside you and the impact it's having.

Progesterone levels fall rapidly as you stop ovulating as regularly. Although oestrogen is likely decreasing, too, it's falling at a slower rate, meaning you can end up being oestrogen dominant (that's a ratio of too much oestrogen to progesterone). This is usually what's behind many of the typical symptoms experienced during the transition to menopause.

The stress hormone cortisol can also increase (particularly if you're used to spinning too many plates), making sleep more difficult and leading to weight gain. The thyroid comes under increased pressure, and low levels of thyroid hormones can bring mood changes, weight increases, constipation and a sluggish feeling.

Your hormones work together synergistically. When one or more is out of kilter, there is an effect on the others, too.

MENOPAUSE & YOU

Take a little time to reflect on how menopause symptoms are affecting your life and what you would like to change about your current situation.

How many of the different menopause symptoms affect you? List the symptoms you experience.

Do any of those symptoms stop you doing things that you used to do or would like to do?

Describe how the symptoms limit you.

If I could wave a magic wand, I would like to feel ... (write as if you have already achieved your goals)

I would look...

The clothes I wear...

MENOPAUSE & YOU

The things other people say to me...

What I enjoy doing that I couldn't do before...

What I think when I look in the mirror...

How my health has improved and what this feels like...

In what other ways will my life improve by making these positive changes?
(list at least 5)



1. WATCH WHAT YOU EAT

One of the tragedies about menopause is the realisation that you really cannot get away with eating the same foods you used to. Your body has changed, and you need to learn to eat for this new way of being. Why?

The drop in oestrogen levels that occurs during menopause has a side effect of redistributing body fat and excess pounds start to settle around the waist. On top of that, the change that happens in relation to oestrogen and progesterone at this stage of life is also likely to make your body less sensitive to insulin, the fat storage hormone. This is produced in response to you eating carbohydrates.

When the body's cells are less sensitive to insulin, more insulin is needed to do the same job, and more insulin produced means more fat stored. There are also lifestyle factors to consider. Muscle mass diminishes with age while fat increases.

That means it's more important than ever to switch from whatever kind of diet you're on now to a low GL (glycaemic load) diet that balances your blood sugar levels. This means you will be eating foods that do not trigger insulin secretion in response to what you eat. I appreciate that might sound a bit scientific and possibly a bit scary, but eating this kind of diet really is enjoyable and filled with foods you'd probably heard you couldn't eat like good fats, avocados and eggs!

A blood sugar balancing diet like this focuses on REAL food: meat, fish, eggs, tofu, lentils, beans and chickpeas, lots of veg, some fruit, nuts, seeds and wholegrains.

You won't feel hungry - promise - but, if this is along way from where you are now, I'd love to help you move to this way of eating. Work with me and it will feel easy rather than an uphill struggle or - worse still - devoid of all those little props you have used to get yourself through these trying times.



2. EAT FUNCTIONAL FOODS

These are foods that actually do stuff in the body. On one level, the food you eat can help balance your blood sugar and energy levels. On another it keeps you feeling satiated and also nourishes you. The cherry on top is to use the very subtle yet magical powers of food to help support your body in times of need.

At this time of your life, that means phytoestrogens. Phytoestrogens are plant-based chemicals (the good kind), which are structurally similar to oestrogen and exert a weak oestrogenic effect. They include soy beans, lentils, beans, chickpeas, tofu, barley, rye, oats, alfalfa, apples, pears, carrots, fennel, onion, garlic, sunflower seeds, flaxseeds, liquorice root.



3. MANAGE YOUR STRESS

Cortisol is one of the main stress hormones and it can make you fat, and feel both tired and miserable as well as using up stores of important vitamins. You probably already know that dwindling oestrogen levels are one of the main factors behind your symptoms. However, the effects of stress can be just as debilitating.

Most hormones are made from the same basic ingredients. When it's under fire, the body prioritises those jobs that are useful for sustaining life, which means that when you are stressed, your body will make stress hormones ahead of anything else. So all those raw materials that might have gone to make oestrogen now won't.

Apart from your fat cells, the only source of oestrogen after your ovaries stop making it is the adrenal glands, which is where the stress hormones are made. If your adrenals are busy making stress hormones...

This is why a stress action plan is a must. Self care in your 40s and 50s is no longer a 'nice thing to do', it is essential for managing symptoms of the transition to menopause and also - she says dramatically - staying alive. If you have not been good (and many women aren't) at putting your needs first and doing nice things for yourself, start now. Write down 5 activities you really enjoy doing - even if it's been a while since you did any of them! Examples might include painting your nails, doing a jigsaw, taking a bath surrounded by candles...



4. DO THE RIGHT EXERCISE

As the weight creeps on, it's very common for women to start getting into the types of exercise that are very punishing on the body, like running and high intensity interval training.

What do I mean by punishing? These very intense forms of exercise stress the body and, if your body is already stressed, it's just too much.

Yoga, Pilates, Zumba and other dance-based classes are good, and don't knock a decent walking workout.

Resistance/ strength exercise (weights) is also good to help with the loss of muscle. Strength training also helps you shore up bone, maintain balance, and avoid injury—important for protecting your skeleton both now and when you're older.



5. AVOID TOXIC CHEMICALS

Chemicals in your body care products – anything from shampoo and conditioner to body wash, body lotion and other moisturisers – contain chemicals like parabens, sodium lauryl/laureth sulphate, ureas and the like.

These are synthetic forms of oestrogen that are known Endocrine Disrupting Chemicals (code for: they muck up your hormones). Scientifically, these chemicals are molecularly similar to oestrogen and your body finds it very tricky to distinguish between the fake oestrogen and the real oestrogen.

At this time in your life, you really don't want to be overloading your body. These toxins place an additional stress on the body, can damage the cells in your body that produce insulin, disrupting its action (and not in a good way), can impair thyroid hormones and place extra burden on the detoxification system.

6. GET BETTER SLEEP

You have probably heard about all the good things sleep can do for you, from making you look younger and feel more energised to helping you lose weight – and so much in between. Suffice to say, sleep is good and you should get more of it. As you work on a diet and lifestyle plan to get your hormones back into balance, better sleep will start to follow. If it feels like you need some emergency assistance, ask yourself honestly how many of the 'dos' you are actually doing and how many of the 'don'ts' you are guilty of...

DO

Try to go to bed at the same time every day.

Your body thrives on routine.

Keep the temperature in your bedroom comfortable; not too hot, nor too cold.

Use your bed only for sleep and sex. This may help you completely switch off.

Keep the bedroom completely dark, so you're not disturbed by light, which your brain detects even when your eyes are closed. Eye masks can be useful.

Spend time outdoors to soak up the sun.

Try to take some gentle exercise every day. There is evidence that regular exercise improves restful sleep. This includes stretching and aerobic exercise. A brisk walk ticks both boxes.

Make an effort to relax for at least 5 minutes before going to bed - a warm bath, massage, meditation.

Keep your feet and hands warm. Wear warm socks and/or mittens or gloves to bed.

Consider getting a traditional alarm clock so your smartphone can stay out of the bedroom. Better still, work out how much sleep you need by going to bed 15 minutes earlier until you find that you wake up naturally before your alarm. That's your personal sleep requirement.

DON'T

Engage in stimulating activities – like playing a competitive game, watching an edge-of-the-seat film, or having an important conversation with a loved one. Even using smartphones and tablets can interfere with sleep, because they emit the same kind of light as the morning sun.

Eat a heavy meal within four hours of going to bed.

Drink caffeine after lunch – like coffee, 'normal' and green tea, and colas.

Use alcohol to help you sleep. Alcohol can make sleep more disturbed.

Go to bed too hungry. Have a snack before bed – a glass of milk or banana are ideal.

Try to avoid daytime naps.

Try not to get frustrated if you can't sleep. Go to bed in a positive mood – "I will sleep tonight".



7. GET EXPERT HELP

I know that you get that this period of your life is a seismic change. You should always talk to your doctor about symptoms you are particularly concerned about, but there is such a lot you can do to feel more energised than you do right now, and fix that spare tyre round the middle.

What you need is my signature programme where we'll work together to tackle all aspects of what I've been talking about above. This is perfect for you if you experience any of the issues I set out at the beginning, and if you need now is exactly the right time for a brand new you: new diet, new attitude and new healthy lifestyle habits.