



food **TO**
FIX YOUR
hormones

PHYTOESTROGENS

What are they and why you need them.

When it comes to diet, food is so much more than macronutrients like protein, carbohydrate and fat. And even more than the sum of its vitamin and mineral content. Some of the magic ingredients the nutrition world is talking about are phytoestrogens.

These are naturally occurring plant-based chemicals, which are structurally similar to oestrogen and exert a weak oestrogenic effect. The great news is that you can use them to gently help rebalance your hormones.

Phytoestrogens are particularly helpful for women because they are adaptogens. This means they can either replicate or counteract the effects of oestrogen.

They're useful for all women but especially if you are going through the perimenopause, have endometriosis, fibroids or PMT (any symptoms at all during or in the run up to your period).



HOW THEY HELP

Peri-menopause

This is a stage in a woman's life usually starting in her late 40s. During this time, your body stops making as many female hormones like oestrogen. This transitions into a time when your periods have stopped for at least 12 months - menopause. There are many uncomfortable symptoms that usually occur during this phase of your life, ranging from hot flushes and mood swings to decreased libido. Research shows that phytoestrogens can have a positive impact on many of these symptoms.



Bone Health

Oestrogen plays an important role in maintaining bone mineral density. Osteoporosis is a disease in which bone density and quality is reduced, resulting in greater porosity of bones and a higher risk of fracture. Research is ongoing in this area but the work shows that a diet that brings these phytoestrogens into your life may help prevent osteoporosis.

HOW THEY HELP

Menstrual irregularities

Many menstrual problems are linked to too much oestrogen in your system – like endometriosis and fibroids. Phytoestrogen-rich foods decrease the effects of oestrogen levels naturally by blocking the oestrogen receptors on the cells in fibroids and other estrogen-sensitive tissues.



Acne

Adult acne can result from an imbalance in hormones, often where male hormones like testosterone are present in a higher than normal ratio compared with oestrogen. The idea is that these plant sources of oestrogen counteract the effect of the male hormones and may help prevent acne as a result.

PHYTOESTROGEN-RICH FOODS

The three types of phytoestrogens are isoflavones, lignans and coumestans.

Isoflavones

* Soybeans
(and related products
like tofu, tempeh, miso)
Edamame beans
Lentils
Beans
(blackbeans, aduki
beans, broad beans,
pinto beans)
Chickpeas
Split peas
Alfalfa
Broccoli
Cauliflower

* denotes particularly rich source

Lignans

* Flaxseeds
Sesame seeds
Sunflower seeds
Pumpkin seeds
Kale
Broccoli
Cabbage
Brussels sprouts
Fennel
Onion
Garlic
Apples/pears
Carrots
Asparagus
Wheat
Barley
Rye
Rice
Oats
Lentils

Coumestans

Split peas
Pinto beans
Alfalfa
Soybean sprouts

The power of food

While synthetic oestrogens (think HRT) have been linked to unfavourable outcomes like increased risk of some hormone-driven cancers, there are no known health risks from eating more plant foods.

Phytoestrogen and the gut

The absorption of phytoestrogens depends on a healthy gut, as there must be enough healthy bacteria to convert phytoestrogens into their active form. A probiotic supplement will be helpful here.

HUMMUS

Serves 2

Ingredients:

200g canned chickpeas

2 tbsp lemon juice (or more to taste)

2 garlic cloves, crushed

1 tsp ground cumin

pinch salt

1 tbsp tahini (sesame seed paste)

4 tbsp water

2 tbsp extra virgin olive oil

1 tsp paprika

1. Drain the chickpeas and rinse in cold water.
2. Reserve a few whole chickpeas for serving.
3. Put the chickpeas, lemon juice, garlic, cumin, salt, tahini and water in a food processor and blend to a purée.
4. Add more lemon juice, garlic, cumin or salt to taste. Use an additional splash of olive oil and a little water to loosen the consistency if you like.
5. Drizzle with extra virgin olive oil and scatter with the reserved chickpeas.
6. Sprinkle with paprika and serve with crudité's or flaxseed crackers.



MEXICAN BEAN DIP

Serves 2

Ingredients:

2 garlic cloves, crushed

1 tsp olive oil

1 tsp lemon juice

150g kidney beans, cooked and drained

1 tbsp natural yoghurt

Salt & pepper, to taste

1. Blend all ingredients in a food processor until smooth and creamy.
2. Serve with oatcakes or vegetable crudités.
3. Enjoy!





CHEESY FLAX CRACKERS

Makes about 20

Ingredients:

50g grated gruyere cheese

(or parmesan)

130 ground flaxseeds

2 tsp dried oregano

1/2 chilli flakes

1/2 tsp salt

1/2 tsp ground black pepper

(or to taste).

1. Add all the ingredients in a bowl and mix with 150ml water, combining to form a wet dough.
2. Line a baking sheet with greaseproof paper.
3. Use your hands and/or a palette knife to press and spread the mixture as thinly as you can over the sheet.
4. Bake for 40 mins at 130C. Turn the oven up to 200C and bake for a further 10 mins.
5. Remove from the oven and allow to cool before breaking into crackers.





CHICKPEA AND CAULIFLOWER CURRY

Serves 4

Ingredients:

- 2 tbsp coconut oil
- 3 tbsp medium curry paste
- 2 large onions, sliced
- 1 red pepper, chopped
- 1/2 cauliflower, broken into small florets
- 240g dried chickpeas, soaked and rinsed then drained
- 400ml hot vegetable stock
- Handful fresh coriander, chopped or torn, to serve
- Salt & pepper, to taste

1. Heat the oil and curry paste in a large frying pan.
2. Add the onions and red pepper and fry over a medium heat to soften.
3. Add the cauliflower and chickpeas and stir to coat them in the curry paste mix.
4. Pour over the hot stock, stir then bring to the boil.
5. Cover the pan and simmer over a gentle heat for 35 mins until the cauliflower is fairly soft.
6. Season to taste.
7. Sprinkle over fresh coriander to serve