

# EATING FOR MENOPAUSE

Menopause marks a significant transition in a woman's life, one that brings a lot of hormonal shifts. In addition to the well-known "hot flashes," this change can impact everything from metabolism to bone health, and overall well-being. In fact, there are 34 different symptoms associated with menopause! But, here's the good news: What you eat can have a major impact. Eating a balanced diet tailored to the needs of menopause can help you manage symptoms, keep you feeling strong, and support your long-term health during this time of change.

## 1. EAT WHOLE, REAL FOODS

Studies show that real, unprocessed foods with an emphasis on plants such as the Mediterranean diet may potentially help decrease vasomotor symptoms (hot flashes, night sweats, etc.) These foods are packed with vitamins, minerals, and nutrients that support your body during menopause. Key nutrients that are provided by these foods include:

- **Fiber and Antioxidants:** Found in plant foods, including fruits, vegetables, nuts and seeds. These foods also help support the gut microbiome, which is also involved in estrogen metabolism. Aim for a wide variety of colors to ensure a wide range of nutrients.
- **Omega-3 Fatty Acids:** These fats have anti-inflammatory effects and can help minimize menopause symptoms, as well as decrease the risk of heart disease and osteoporosis. Found in fatty fish such as salmon, mackerel, and sardines, as well as chia seeds, flaxseeds, and walnuts.
- **Calcium and Vitamin D:** As estrogen drops during menopause, the risk of bone loss increases, and getting adequate sources of calcium and vitamin D becomes even more important. Sources include vitamin D-fortified dairy products and plant-based milks, leafy greens, and fatty fish such as salmon.

## 2. BALANCE BLOOD SUGAR LEVELS

Blood sugar fluctuations can lead to mood swings, fatigue, insulin resistance, and weight gain, as well as increased cravings, which are all already associated with menopause. Studies show that blood sugar "rollercoasters" may increase hot flashes as well as sleeping difficulties. Stabilizing your blood sugar will help to maintain energy levels and support overall health.

- **Include Protein, Fiber, and Healthy Fats:** These slow down the absorption of carbohydrates after a meal and help keep you full longer. Avoid eating "naked carbohydrates" a.k.a. carbohydrates eaten by themselves which can cause a rapid spike in blood sugar levels, followed by a crash, leaving you feeling even more hungry shortly after.
- **Start your meal with some vegetables,** such as salad, vegetable soup, or some raw vegetables and dip. This will also help slow the absorption of carbohydrates and minimize blood sugar spikes.
- **Avoid sugary snacks and drinks**
- **Choose whole grains, avoid refined carbohydrates:** (anything made with white flour)
- **Stay active:** Taking a 5–10-minute walk after meals can go a long way to stabilizing blood sugars.
- **Stay hydrated:** Dehydration can also impact blood sugar levels. In addition to water, add more fruits and vegetables to your diet as they can also contribute to hydration.

### 3. ADD IN PHYTOESTROGENS

Phytoestrogens are plant-based compounds, typically found in foods such as soy, which mimic estrogen in the body. They can potentially help alleviate some menopausal symptoms, such as hot flashes, as well as lower the risk of osteoporosis and cancer, including breast cancer.

Here are some healthful options:

- **Soy products:** Incorporate tofu, edamame, and soy milk into your meals. Avoid highly processed soy products such as soy protein isolates.
- **Flaxseeds:** Add ground flaxseeds to smoothies, yogurt, or salads.
- **Legumes and whole grains:** Include foods like lentils, chickpeas, and barley.

### 4. FOCUS ON BUILDING LEAN MUSCLE MASS

As estrogen levels drop, muscle mass naturally declines, leading to slower metabolism and less strength. Focusing on building and maintaining muscle mass is essential and can boost metabolism, improve bone density, maintain mobility, and lead to an overall higher quality of life during and after menopause.

- **Strength Training:** Incorporate weight-bearing exercises like weightlifting or resistance bands into your routine 2-3 times per week, as well as regular exercise several times per week.
- **Protein Intake:** Make sure you are getting adequate protein to prevent muscle loss and encourage growth. Many studies suggest women's protein needs may actually increase with age! Aim for adequate protein at EACH MEAL. Seafood, tofu, beans and lentils, eggs, cheese, nuts and seeds, and lean meats are all great sources of protein.

### 5. LIFESTYLE TIPS

Lastly, don't forget to add in some lifestyle adjustments:

- **Prioritize quality sleep** by aiming for 7-8 hours each night as well as creating a sleep routine and calming bedroom environment.
- **Incorporate stress reduction** techniques, such as yoga or meditation, which can help with mood swings and irritability.
- **Keep moving!** Physical activity helps to manage stress, prevent anxiety and depression, and maintain mobility.
- **Lastly, remember you are not alone!** More than 1 million women in the US alone enter menopause each year. Find a practitioner who specializes in menopause near you at [www.menopause.org](http://www.menopause.org). There are many treatment options available!