

Lifestyle Factors

Maximising health during menopause: A comprehensive guide

Maintaining a healthy lifestyle is crucial for women experiencing perimenopause and menopause. Not only does it alleviate symptoms, but it also enhances long-term health and well-being.

1. Nutrition and hydration

Eating a healthy, balanced diet and maintaining a healthy weight can significantly reduce menopausal symptoms, maintain bone density, and reduce your risk of heart disease, type 2 diabetes, and cancer. A diet rich in vegetables, fruit, whole grains, lean protein, and healthy fats, and low in processed and ultra-processed food, is recommended. Adequate calcium and Vitamin D is essential to prevent osteoporosis, which women are more susceptible to after menopause. As well as being present in some foods, Vitamin D is made in the skin when exposed to sunlight. A Vitamin D supplement is recommended during the autumn and winter in the UK. Use **this calcium calculator** to track your calcium intake against recommended daily amounts.

Reducing caffeine has been shown to reduce the severity of hot flushes. Minimising alcohol can reduce both hot flushes and night sweats as well as help in maintaining a healthy weight. It is important to stay hydrated by ensuring an adequate water intake. Aim to drink 1.5 to 2 litres of fluid a day, preferably water, though low-fat milk, tea, and coffee also count (bearing in mind

that caffeinated drinks may worsen hot flushes and night sweats and disrupt sleep). Increase your fluid intake in hot weather, if you are physically active, or during illness or recovery from illness.

2. Regular physical activity

Engaging in regular physical activity offers numerous benefits during menopause:

- **Weight management:** Women tend to gain abdominal fat and lose muscle mass during perimenopause and menopause. Regular physical activity can help prevent abdominal fat gain and maintain strength and muscle mass.
- **Cancer risk reduction:** Maintaining a healthy weight through regular exercise protects against various cancers, including colon, breast, and endometrial cancer.
- **Muscle and bone health:** Exercise slows bone loss and builds muscle mass, lowering the risk of osteoporosis and fractures.
- **Disease prevention:** Regular physical activity reduces the risks of heart disease and type 2 diabetes by helping with weight management.
- **Mood enhancement:** Physically active adults have a lower risk of depression, reduced stress levels, and a reduced risk of age-related cognitive decline.
- **Improved sleep:** Regular activity enhances sleep quality and quantity, boosting overall energy levels.
- **Mobility:** Maintaining regular physical activity helps preserve independence and mobility with age.

Recommendation Aim for 30 minutes of moderate-intensity activity five times weekly. If you're new to exercise it can feel more manageable to start gradually, rather than trying to do five exercise sessions a week straight away. A combination of aerobic activity with strength training using weights, resistance bands, or bodyweight exercises is ideal. Remember any activity is better than none.

3. Stress reduction

Reducing stress can significantly alleviate menopause symptoms, particularly hot flushes, mood swings, and insomnia, and improve your overall well-being. Effective stress reduction measures include:

- **Yoga**
- **Meditation**
- **Deep breathing techniques**
- **Exercise**
- **Adequate sleep**
- **Healthy diet**
- **Massage**
- **Talking to friends, family, or a therapist**
- **Cognitive behavioural therapy (CBT)**

4. Smoking cessation

Stopping smoking is one of the best things you can do for your health. Smoking increases your risk of heart disease, lung disease, lung cancer as well as other cancers, and osteoporosis. Women

who smoke have been shown to experience more severe hot flushes and night sweats. For help with stopping smoking, visit the NHS website. By quitting smoking, you can improve your overall health and reduce the severity of menopause symptoms.

5. Alcohol

As you age, your body becomes more sensitive to alcohol. Alcohol may trigger hot flushes, night sweats, and worsen sleep disturbances common during menopause. Excessive alcohol consumption is linked to mental health issues such as depression and also increases the risk of osteoporosis, heart disease, and certain cancers. Reducing alcohol intake can significantly benefit menopausal women. Setting limits, planning alcohol-free days, and opting for low-alcohol alternatives are effective strategies. Staying hydrated and seeking support from friends and family can also help manage alcohol consumption. If alcohol has become a concern, seek support from your GP or local resources. Online tools and apps can assist in tracking and reducing alcohol consumption.

6. Sleep hygiene

Sleep problems are common during menopause. Poor sleep exacerbates menopausal symptoms and makes it harder to maintain healthy habits such as eating well, exercising, and managing stress. Practising good “sleep hygiene” involves habits and behaviours that promote regular, high-quality sleep. These include:

- Establishing a regular bedtime and wake time

- Establishing a wind-down routine prior to bedtime
- Avoiding heavy meals in the evening if digestive discomfort keeps you awake
- Creating a cool, dark environment for sleep
- Minimising noise, or listening to sounds that help you sleep (such as white noise or sleep meditations)
- Avoiding alcohol, caffeine, and nicotine

Resources:

For further information, visit **the Sleep Charity website**

Sleepio is a digital sleep improvement program based on Cognitive Behavioural Therapy (CBT), accessible via web browser or iOS/Android app. It can be accessed through self-referral on the product website or via referral by a healthcare professional in NHS-commissioned regions.

By adopting these practices, women can effectively manage menopause symptoms and improve their overall health and quality of life during this natural life transition.

For further information visit **the Sleep Charity website.**