



Menopause diet: What to eat and what to avoid

Healthcare professionals note that the foods women eat can affect how they feel during menopause. Some foods may reduce or eliminate troublesome symptoms, while others actually may make conditions worse. Weight gain, hot flashes, lack of energy, and mood swings are some of the more widely known symptoms of menopause, which is the time when a woman's menstrual cycle permanently ceases due to the natural depletion of ovarian follicles

and oocytes. Elevated follicle stimulating hormone, or FSH, and low estrogen levels are consistent with menopause and can cause any number of symptoms. While hormone replacement therapy is one option, women may find that changing their diets is enough to make them feel better and may even help them reduce their risk for certain diseases and better manage some of the negative side effects of menopause.

• **Osteoporosis:** Menopausal women are at a greater risk for

osteoporosis, a condition in which bones become weaker and more brittle. Increasing one's intake of foods rich in calcium and vitamin D can help. Calcium-rich foods include low-fat yogurt, sardines, broccoli, and firm tofu.

• **Weight gain:** It's possible to gain some weight during menopause. Data from the International Menopause Society and the Mayo Clinic point to decreases in metabolism as the source of menopausal weight gain. Women should cut back on fatty foods and trim any visible fats from the foods they cook. Eating foods high in complex sources of fiber can help a person to feel full on less food.

• **Mood swings:** Hormone fluctuations may lead to mood swings and feelings of anxiety or depression. Improve mental



well-being by increasing intake of foods rich in B vitamins and omega-3 fatty acids. Consuming whole grains, lentils, flaxseed, and oily fish can help.

• **Risk for other diseases:** Women who are menopausal are at an elevated risk for breast cancer and even cardiovascular disease. The North American

Menopause Society says such women should cut down on alcohol consumption, which can contribute

to increased risk for both of these conditions. Women who have between two and five drinks per day are one and a half times as likely to get breast cancer than women who don't drink at all.

• **Fatigue:** Foods can control how the body sustains energy levels. Sugary foods may provide a fast jolt of energy, but that boost often dwindles shortly thereafter. Look for carbohydrates from fruits and vegetables, as such carbs

provide longer-lasting energy. Boosting iron intake also may provide more pep and may even boost metabolism.

Smart food choices can help women reduce the severity of some uncomfortable symptoms and side effects of menopause.



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