



nutrition

Healthy Eating During the Menopause

Member

Virgin active

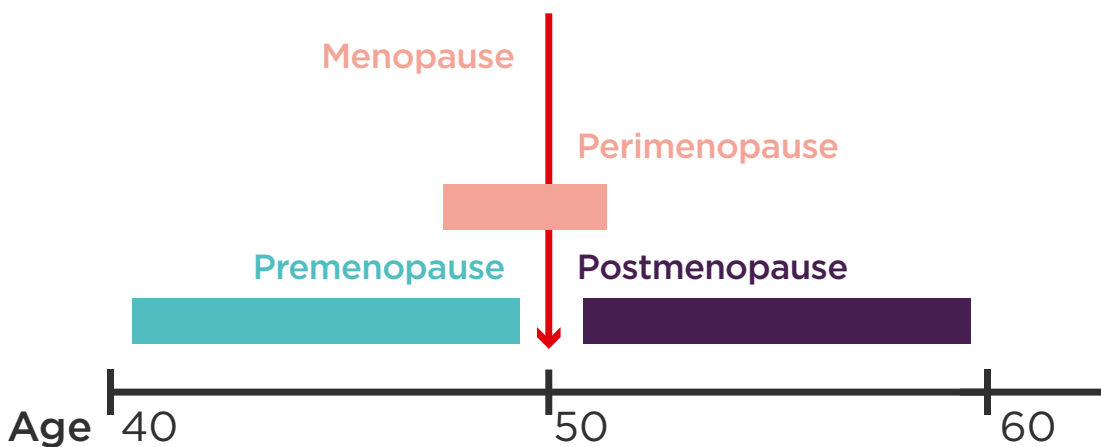
What is the menopause?

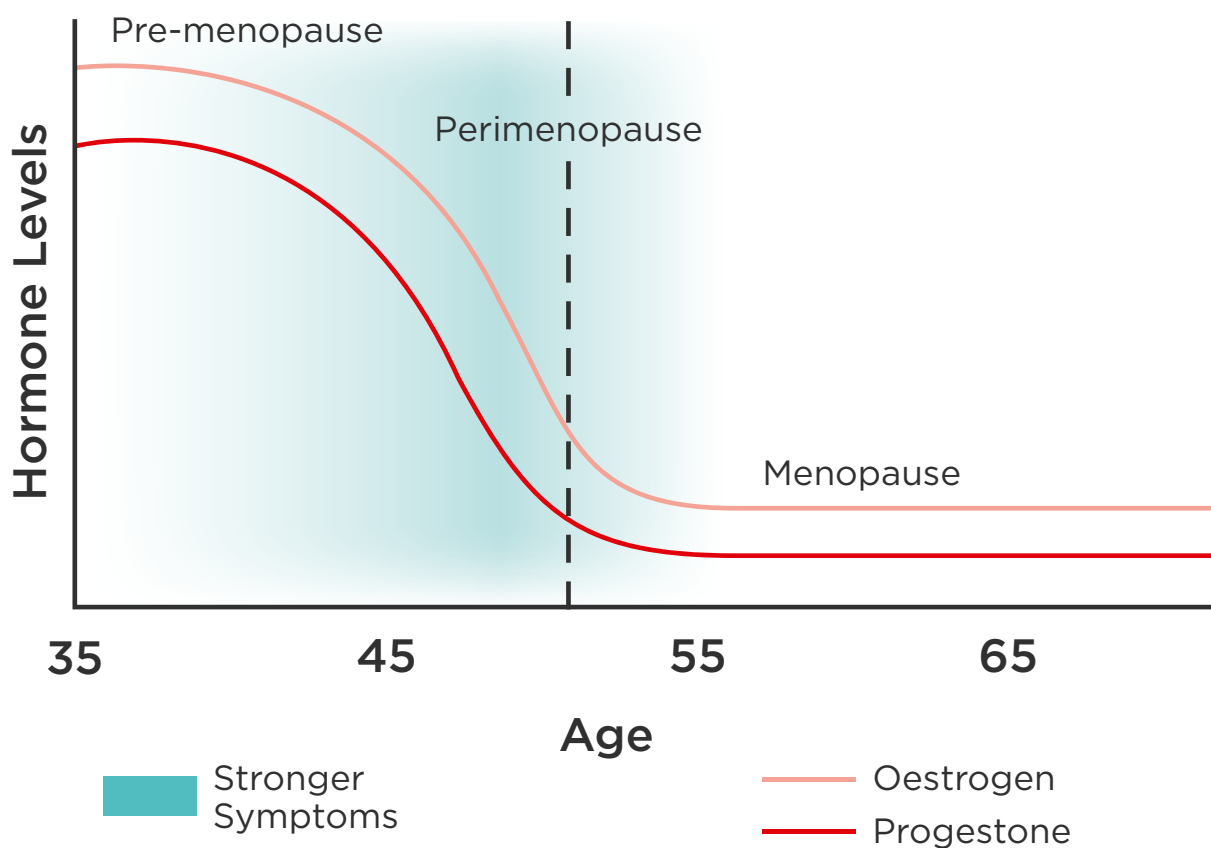
Menopause is a natural phase of a woman's life, that typically occurs between the ages of 45-55 (although this is not always the case). This transition brings about hormonal changes, such as a decrease in oestrogen, which may lead to physical and emotional symptoms such as hot flushes, mood swings, sleep problems, weight gain, and bone density changes.

What are the stages of the menopause?

Perimenopause: The time leading up to your final period, which can last for a few months or several years. During this time, periods become irregular as oestrogen levels decline. This is often where menopausal symptoms are experienced.

Postmenopause: The time after menopause starting, where there has not been a period for 12 consecutive months.





The role of Oestrogen

Not only does oestrogen play a role in normal sexual and reproductive development in females, but it also influences other systems in the body, such as the bones, heart and brain.

Consequently, a decline in oestrogen can impact a woman's short-term health and quality of life due to menopausal symptoms (hot flushes, night sweats, sleep disturbance, muscle and joint pain, anxiety and depression, low libido).

Long-term risks include higher cholesterol and cardiovascular disease risk, osteoporosis and weight gain.

Please speak to your GP if you are experiencing any perimenopausal symptoms.



Dietary changes for menopausal symptoms

Limit caffeine, alcohol, and spicy food.

Reducing these foods may help reduce the occurrence of hot flashes and sleep disturbances, yet this is highly individual. Current guidelines suggest no more than 14 units/week of alcohol.

Phytoestrogens (isoflavones).

These are plant-derived compounds found in soy-based products. They have a similar structure to oestrogen, but weaker activity. Phytoestrogens may help reduce menopause symptoms such as hot flashes.

While there is limited evidence to support the efficacy of phytoestrogen or isoflavone supplementation, consuming foods high in these nutrients can still contribute to a healthy diet with limited risk of adverse effects.

Foods high in phytoestrogens include soybeans/soy-based products (tofu, edamame beans, soy sauce, soy milk, soy yoghurt, miso, tempeh), sesame seeds, flaxseeds, berries, apricots, and wholegrains.



Dietary changes for long-term health

The decline in oestrogen may increase the risk of cardiovascular disease and osteoporosis, diabetes, depression, obesity, and dementia. Dietary changes may help to reduce the risk of these conditions.

Bone Health

As oestrogen plays an important role in bone health, its decline during menopause increases the risk of osteoporosis. Diet plays an important role in bone health. Therefore, it is important to consume adequate amounts of the following nutrients:

- Calcium: ensure adequate intake of calcium (~1,000 mg/day) to promote bone health and reduce the risk of osteoporosis
- Vitamin D: supplement with vitamin D (at least 10 mcg/day [400IU]) to promote bone health and reduce the risk of osteoporosis
- Lean proteins: include lean protein sources such as fish, poultry, beans, lentils and tofu to support and maintain muscle mass
- Vitamin K: may improve bone strength and reduce the risk of fractures; found in green vegetables, fermented food, dairy and meat

See the 'Bone health' resource for more information.



Resistance training improves bone strength by stimulating the bones to produce more bone tissue, reducing the risk of osteoporosis. The NHS advises 30 minutes twice a week for adults over the age of 35 years. Resistance training includes brisk walking, resistance bands, yoga/Pilates, weight training, or gardening.



Reducing the risk of cardiovascular disease

Cardiovascular diseases (CVD) refer to conditions affecting blood vessels and the heart by the narrowing of arteries (atherosclerosis) and an increased risk of blood clots, such as strokes.

Weight gain associated with declining oestrogen levels may also contribute to an increased risk of obesity, higher blood pressure, and type 2 diabetes, which are known risk factors for CVD.

Dietary changes can reduce the risk of CVD. Aim to apply the following principles into your diet:

- Reduce ultra-processed foods that are high in sugar, salt and saturated fat
- Substitute saturated fats (animal fat) for unsaturated fats (mono- and poly-unsaturated), such as extra virgin olive oil, avocado, nuts and seeds, oily fish. Healthy fats support heart health, vitamin absorption and hormone production
- Aim to consume 30g fibre per day; try substituting refined carbohydrates for wholegrain carbohydrates
- Eat at least 5 portions of fruit and vegetables per day
- Aim for 2 portions of oily fish (salmon, mackerel, sardines) per week
- Snack on a handful of nuts and seeds once per day
- Reduce alcohol consumption to less than 14 units per week, or as low as possible



Maintaining a healthy weight

Maintaining a healthy weight reduces the risk of type 2 diabetes and CVD. However, this is made more challenging given the declining oestrogen and its role in energy balance and weight gain.

- Focus on a well-balanced diet that includes a variety of nutrient-dense foods from all food groups. Forget the fads!
- Be mindful of portion sizes: managing portion sizes can help to maintain a healthy weight without being overly restrictive
- Support your gut microbiome by eating fermented foods such as kefir or certain types of yoghurt. Long-term weight gain (over 10 years) in humans has been associated with low microbiota diversity (less species of microorganisms in the gut). Consuming probiotic and prebiotic foods and adequate fibre will help to diversify your gut microbiome (see the 'Fibre, probiotics and prebiotics' resource for more information)
- Regular exercise: combine a balanced diet with regular physical activity, both cardiovascular and resistance based
- Mindfulness: practice stress-reducing techniques like meditation, deep breathing or yoga to manage stress, irritability, and overall well-being. Educate yourself on proper sleep hygiene and what to do if you start to suffer with chronic sleep problems. The Sleepy Head Program could help; [Home - Sleepyhead Program](#)



We have designed a nutrition checklist with examples of foods and their nutrient content to help you meet your needs during the menopause (see 'Healthy Eating During the Menopause - Checklist' resource).

Speak with your GP before taking any herbal remedies or supplements for managing menopausal symptoms, as they may have side effects or interact with other medications.



Summary

The menopause is a natural life stage that affects everyone differently. In the long and short-term, positive lifestyle changes may relieve menopausal symptoms and manage health-related concerns.

Remember, every individual will have a unique experience. Adopting a holistic approach by incorporating a balanced diet, regular exercise, and healthy lifestyle habits can contribute to overall well-being during this transitional phase.

Please speak to your GP when you start to experience the perimenopause.

