Denise Lalonde
HEALTH·STRENGTH·FITNESS™

Menopause

Many years before a woman stops ovulating, her ovaries slow the production of the hormones estrogen, progesterone, and testosterone. Estrogen is most important for reproduction, and also to keep skin smooth and moist, and to keep the body's internal thermostat operating properly. In addition, many cells of the body have receptor sites that require estrogen for normal cell function including cells in the vagina, bladder, breasts, skin, bones, arteries, heart, liver, and brain. Progesterone works as a counterpart to estrogen and in addition to reproductive functions; it has a calming effect on the brain and affects other aspects of nervous system function as well. Testosterone is the hormone that is most important for sex drive.

Perimenopause is the period when a woman's body is preparing for menopause. Many women experience few if any symptoms, some may suffer from some or all of the following:
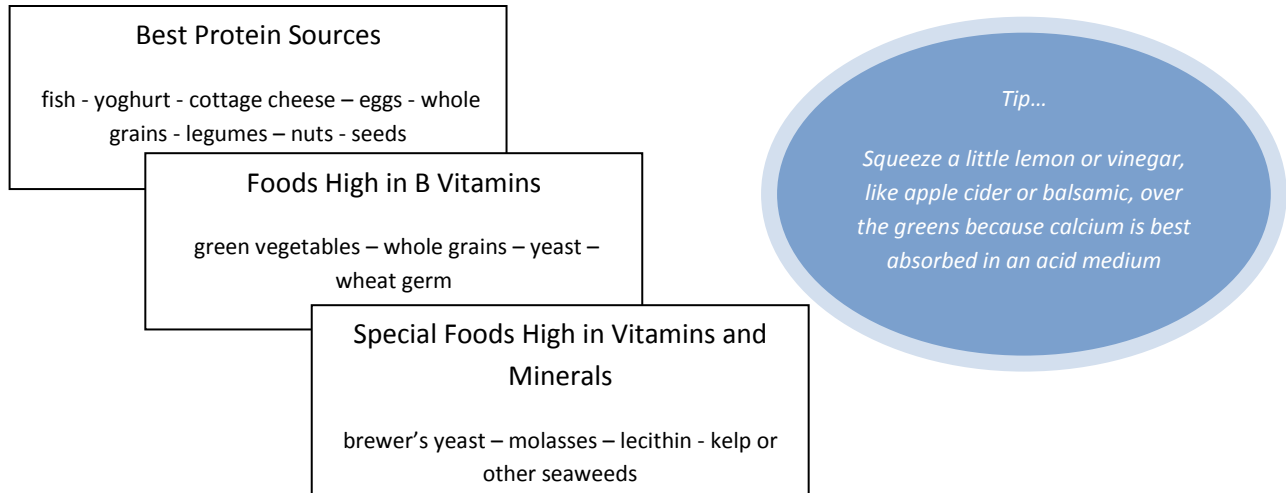
- Anxiety
- Dry skin
- Fatigue
- Feelings of bloating
- Headaches
- Reduced stamina
- Urinary incontinence

- Weight gain
- Cold hands/feet
- Joint pain
- Hair loss
- Skin changes
- Vaginal dryness/itch
- Heart palpitations

- Insomnia
- Irritability
- Decreased sex drive
- Loss of concentration
- Mood swings
- Night sweats
- Hot flashes
- Weight gain

Menopause is the point at which a woman stops ovulating and menstruation ceases, indicating the end of fertility. By this stage, most of the acute problems usually cease and a new balance between all hormones should be established. However, at this time a woman may become increasingly vulnerable to other health problems such as; cardiovascular disease, osteoporosis, and vaginal atrophy. Osteoporosis in particular is a major problem for women after menopause. Osteoporosis is a loss of bone minerals, density, and bone strength. It is important to prevent the risk of Osteoporosis with a good diet and exercise; weight bearing exercises are important to build muscle, strengthen bones and improve calcium metabolism. It may also help mobilize some stored estrogen from the fatty tissues. Aim for regular moderate exercise. Outdoor exercise adds sunlight which aids the body's vitamin D production, which improves calcium utilization.

Menopause and Diet

To maintain healthy bones, ensure an adequate intake of the minerals magnesium, manganese, phosphorus, strontium, and silicon. Vitamin D helps the absorption and utilization of calcium. 15 to 20 minutes of sun exposure daily (without sunscreen) is recommended for adequate production of Vitamin D. Vitamin K and boron aid the incorporation of calcium into the bones. Adequate calcium intake is important in the years before menopause.

Foods to support healthy bones are:

Best Protein Sources

fish - yoghurt - cottage cheese – eggs - whole grains - legumes – nuts - seeds

Foods High in B Vitamins

green vegetables – whole grains – yeast – wheat germ

Special Foods High in Vitamins and Minerals

brewer's yeast – molasses – lecithin - kelp or other seaweeds

Tip…

Squeeze a little lemon or vinegar, like apple cider or balsamic, over the greens because calcium is best absorbed in an acid medium

The optimal diet includes fresh fruits and vegetables, whole grains, nuts, seeds, and legumes; with fish, poultry, eggs, milk products, and cold-pressed oils used in moderation and sugar, refined-flour products, other refined and processed foods, cured meats, fried foods, and chemicals avoided whenever possible.

Some general recommendations:

- Include foods high in phytoestrogens (soybeans, flaxseeds, nuts, whole grains, apples, fennel, celery, parsnips, and alfalfa). These foods are known to help alleviate hot flashes.
- Avoid alcohol, caffeine, sugar, spicy foods, hot soups and drinks; they can trigger hot flashes, aggravate urinary incontinence, and make mood swings worse. They also make the blood more acidic, which prompts bones to release calcium to act as a buffering agent. This is an important factor in bone loss.
- Dairy products and meat promote hot flashes.
- Reduce salt intake, salt increases urinary excretion of calcium.
- Avoid stress or develop effective stress management techniques.
- Drink plenty of water to prevent drying of the skin and mucous membranes.
- For vaginal itching, use vitamin E oil or fragrance free vitamin E cream.
- Valerian root tea can help calm the body and promote restful sleep.
- Smoking is associated with early menopause.
- Regular exercise may help to alleviate or minimize some menopausal symptoms.