Fact checker

In the know... The menopause

Nutrition for menopausal health and wellbeing

The definitions

Menopause is defined as having 12 months of no periods (for no other medical reason). The UK's average age for menopause is 51.

Perimenopause is the transition to menopause, on average starting at 45. Hormones fluctuate, periods become irregular and symptoms can include hot flushes, night sweats, brain fog and irritability.

Meet our expert

Laura Clark is a dietitian, women's health specialist and founder of The Menopause Dietitian (themenopausedietitian.co.uk).

'What we eat can help alleviate certain menopausal symptoms, protect our ageing and postmenopausal bodies against disease, and give us the nutrients we need to feel energised and healthy in midlife. However, eating well can be tricky as we juggle busy schedules and often see to the needs of others before our own. Hormonal shifts and the impact of menopause on the body is different for everyone. Hormone Replacement Therapy (HRT) can support us, but it's also a chance to reflect on if our diets are serving us well.'

Q&A

Q Is Hormone Replacement Therapy (HRT) the only way to alleviate symptoms?

A Research shows that plant-based diets can help to reduce symptoms of menopause. Phytoestrogens are plant compounds with oestrogen-like properties, and there are two main types: isoflavones, found in soya beans and soya products, and lignans, found in flaxseeds, wholegrains, fruits, vegetables and legumes.

Fact vs fiction

Menopause makes you gain weight

It's believed weight gain is more linked to ageing than menopause. Falling oestrogen levels influence where we store fat, most notably around the middle. Help by increasing your protein intake and doing weight-bearing exercises (walking or dancing) and strength work.

Did you know...?

A 12-week study of postmenopausal women found that eating 86g of cooked soya beans daily with a low-fat, plant-based diet reduced hot flushes by nearly 80%*.

5 FOODS TO SUPPORT YOUR MENOPAUSE

EDAMAME OR SOYA BEANS
These are a great source of protein**.

QUINOA
A wholegrain, it's a source of protein, as well as iron and magnesium, which support energy levels.

ALMONDS
A few almonds a day may help reduce cholesterol*** – important since cardiac disease risk increases after menopause.

FLAXSEEDS AND LINSEEDS
Support normal digestive function.

BLUEBERRIES
High in polyphenols, they're believed to support cognitive function, and may help lower blood pressure.

*Source: ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC8462449 **per 100g ***Source: heartuk.org.uk/healthy-living/cholesterol-lowering-foods

> Increasing your intake of plant-based foods, even if not exclusively, is a really good way to improve your menopausal health
>
> Laura Clark, dietitian

Add some beans

It's easy to increase your protein levels without eating more meat – just add tasty soya beans.

SPEEDY GREENS & PESTO PASTA

Serves 4 V DF ❄
Takes 25 mins **Cost per serve** £1.08

350g frozen soya beans
300g wholewheat fusilli
375g pack broccoli, cut into florets
1 tsp olive oil, plus 1.5 tbsp
2 courgettes, peeled into ribbons
1 tsp crushed chillies
For the pesto
55g golden flaxseeds, toasted
2 garlic cloves, roughly chopped
30g pack fresh basil
1 lemon, zested and juiced

1 Boil the beans for 6 mins. Transfer to a bowl with a slotted spoon, reserving the water; set aside.
2 Cook the fusilli to pack instructions in the reserved water, adding the broccoli for the last 4 mins. Drain, reserving 150ml cooking water.
3 Meanwhile, heat 1 tsp oil in a frying pan over a medium heat. Add the courgettes and fry for 2-3 mins until softened and reduced. Stir in the fusilli, broccoli and 150g soya beans.
4 Tip the toasted flaxseeds into a food processor with the remaining 200g cooked soya beans, the garlic, basil and lemon zest and juice; blitz to combine. With the motor running, add 2 tbsp olive oil and enough of the reserved pasta water to make a chunky but spoonable sauce. Season to taste.
5 Stir the pesto through the pasta and veg; scatter with crushed chillies.

Each serving contains

Energy	Fat	Saturates	Sugars	Salt
2473kJ 590kcal	21g	3g	9g	0.3g
30%	30%	14%	10%	4%

of the reference intake. See page 97.
Carbohydrate 59g Protein 31g Fibre 22g
High in protein, which supports the maintenance of normal bones

WE USED
FROZEN SOYA BEANS

Soya beans (podded edamame beans) are high in protein** and help support bone health.
Soya Beans 600g, £2.25 (36p/100g)

GET AHEAD

Make the burger mixture up to the end of step 2, then cover and keep in the fridge for up to 24 hrs.

SPICY EDAMAME BURGERS WITH LIME SLAW

Serves 4 V DF freeze burgers only
Takes 40 mins **Cost per serve** £1.32

100g bunch spring onions, trimmed and roughly chopped
1 red chilli, sliced, deseeded if you like
3 garlic cloves, roughly chopped
3cm piece fresh ginger, roughly chopped
400g tin chickpeas, drained and rinsed
250g frozen soya beans, defrosted
30g pack fresh coriander, 20g roughly chopped, 10g leaves picked

To serve

300g pack sweet chilli slaw kit
2 limes, juiced
½ tsp caster sugar
2 tbsp reduced-salt soy sauce
4-pack large wholemeal baps, halved
2 tbsp vegan mayo
potato wedges, to serve (optional)

1 Start by making the lime slaw. Put the veg from the sweet chilli slaw kit in a bowl with the lime juice, sugar and 1 tbsp soy sauce. Toss together, then set aside, reserving the sweet chilli sachet.

2 Preheat the oven to gas 6, 200°C, fan 180°C. Put the spring onions, chilli, garlic, ginger, remaining soy sauce and the chickpeas in a food processor and blitz to combine; season with black pepper. Add the soya beans and chopped coriander, then blitz again to a slightly chunky mix.

3 Shape the mixture into 4 patties and transfer to a lined baking sheet. Bake for 25 mins, adding the baps for the last 5 mins to warm through.

4 When ready to serve, stir the coriander leaves through the slaw. Mix the vegan mayo with the reserved sweet chilli sauce and spread on the bottom halves of the baps. Top with a burger and a spoonful of slaw, then sandwich with the lid and serve with more slaw and potato wedges on the side, if you like.

Each serving contains

Energy	Fat	Saturates	Sugars	Salt
2135kJ 509kcal	15g	3g	16g	1.7g
25%	22%	13%	18%	29%

of the reference intake. See page 97.
Carbohydrate 61g Protein 24g Fibre 16g
High in manganese, which supports normal energy-yielding metabolism

WORDS **LAURA CLARK** RECIPES **BRYONY BOWIE** PHOTOGRAPHY **ALEX LUCK** FOOD STYLING **ALICE OSTAN** PROP STYLING **MORAG FARQUHAR**