Understanding & Embracing the Menopause
Practical tips & insights for a happier transition
Today

• Significant stats
• What’s happening with hormones in the lead up to menopause and post-menopause
• Resulting symptoms & experiences
• How diet & lifestyle habits can make profound difference (whether using HRT or not)

  • The 6 point nutrition & lifestyle plan for a smoother & happier transition
Did you know?

2019 survey of 1400 women:

➔ Hot flushes reported by 72% of women
➔ Sleep issues, 64% of the women surveyed
➔ Night sweats, 58% of the women surveyed
➔ 30% unable to go into work because of their symptoms
What exactly is menopause?

- **Meno** = menstrual cycle  **Pause** = no more cycles
  - 12 months after last menstrual period, average age 51
- Ovaries no longer produce eggs → levels of oestrogen & progesterone fall
- Can occur naturally under 45 (early menopause) or as result of surgery or treatment (any age)
- *An inevitable, natural transformation*
- **Not just about loss of fertility & periods - creates a major metabolic shift in the body, with systemic impact**
Starting with PERI menopause

• Phase of changing hormones from approx. **age 35**
• Body’s **slow & gradual transition towards menopause**
• Brain & ovary communication not as robust
  • = **Oestrogen on a rollercoaster & progesterone declining**
• Many & varied biological & physical changes
• More pronounced mid-late 40s
Oestrogen’s Magic

- **Main metabolic hormone**
- Anti-inflammatory
- Supports brain, skin, bones, heart & more
- **Boosts ‘happy chemical’ serotonin & ‘motivation’ chemical dopamine**
- Female characteristics; round breasts, soft skin, full hips
- Confidence, outgoing, sharp, motivated, good mood, libido
- Blood supply to skin + collagen production
Losing Oestrogen

➢ Hot flushes, night sweats
➢ Mood & cognition issues
➢ Weaker bones & increased risk for osteoporosis
➢ More prone to ‘insulin resistance’ (and type 2 diabetes) & fat around the middle
➢ Slower metabolism
➢ Loss of muscle mass & strength
➢ Inflammation
➢ Loss of skin tone & elasticity (wrinkles)
Progesterone's Magic

- Important for overall sense of wellbeing, esp. good sleep
- Anti-anxiety, calming hormone, natural antidepressant
- Brain-protective (cognition, memory, clarity)
-Boosts metabolism & lean muscle
- Supports thyroid
- Prevents water-retention/puffiness
- **ONLY made as result of ovulation**
Losing Progesterone

➢ More sensitive to all stressors
➢ Anxiety & irritability
➢ Sleep issues / insomnia
➢ Low mood
➢ Cognition or memory issues
➢ Water retention (‘puffiness’)
➢ Increased body fat
➢ Thyroid problems
Menopause & Weight Gain

• Body becomes better at storing fat and worse at maintaining muscle mass 😞
• 3 times more likely to gain weight here
• Oestrogen keeps cells ‘sensitive’ to insulin (preventing insulin resistance)
• Loss of oestrogen results in slower metabolism
• Mostly abdominal (belly) fat (“apple shape”)
Hot Flushes & Night Sweats

- Episodes of profuse heat with sweating and flushing
  - mostly head, neck, chest, upper back
- Lasting 10s - 10 mins, average 4
- From every few days to several times an hour
- Night sweats are heavy perspiration during sleep
The adrenal glands + menopause

- Post-menopause, adrenal glands take over to make small amounts of oestrogen and progesterone
- They make DHEA → Testosterone
- And they make stress hormones!
  - Cortisol elevations shown to increase hot flushes, night sweats, brain fog, impact energy/fatigue, mood, sleep, memory, focus
Must relieve pressure on adrenal glands!

- Managing stress is non-negotiable!
- Comes in many forms:
  - Emotional, physical, mental, financial, late nights, work, home, relationships, exercise
- Where could you make changes?
Some symptoms are your personal stress barometer

- **Yoga and deep breathing exercises** found to significantly reduce frequency and intensity of hot flushes and night sweats and to improve anxiety

- **Just 3-5 mins a day deep breathing** shown to be beneficial for mood, focus and energy

- Strength training, mindful time in nature/green space, Qigong/Tai Chi and meditation also shown to help

- **Beware of overdoing cardio**, HIIT, CrossFit, spin, F45, boot camp, long runs etc
Herbs for menopause symptoms

➢ **Black cohosh**
  ○ Many clinical trials, mixed results
  ○ 2018 study showed significant decrease in hot flushes after 8 weeks
  ○ Drops, powder or capsules

➢ **Sage**
  ○ 2011 study found reduction in hot flushes by 64% within 8 weeks
  ○ Drops

➢ **Nothing trumps nutrition & lifestyle changes!**
Supplementing with soy

- 2 classes of phytoestrogens:
  - Isoflavones from soy
  - Lignans from seeds (flax)
- May have mild pro-oestrogen effect when oestrogen is low
- No clear evidence as a good alternative for oestrogen HRT
- But great to consume through food:
  - Edamame beans, organic tofu & tempeh (avoid processed soy)
  - Flaxseed (ground, 1-2 TBSPS)
Other symptoms

- **Genitourinary syndrome**
  - Vagina, bladder, and pelvic floor associated symptoms such as dryness, atrophy, pain, itching, UTIs, incontinence, prolapse
  - **Associated with low oestrogen causing thinning of tissues that line vagina, vulva, and urethra**
  - Supporting beneficial bacteria in vaginal microbiome (Lactobacillus species) may be helpful

- **Muscle aches and pains**
  - Outrank hot flushes in some studies
  - Most likely due to poor sleep and loss of anti-inflammatory progesterone & oestrogen
  - Manage stress, support sleep, blood sugar balancing diet, body work (massage, osteo, yoga..)
Rewiring the Brain: for help for ALL symptoms!

➢ Loss of protective actions of progesterone & oestrogen on body and brain
➢ Nervous system has to reorganise itself
➢ Research suggests brain undergoes massive rewiring during perimenopause & first few years postmenopause
  • The reason for many of the symptoms
How to help the brain recalibrate?

Keep cells SENSITIVE to insulin! (Prevent or reverse insulin resistance):

➔ 3 blood sugar balancing meals, no snacks
➔ Overnight fast (12-16 hours)
➔ Build muscle / lift weights
➔ Manage stress & support sleep
Supporting sleep

● Can be profoundly disrupted
● Oestrogen maintains circadian rhythm (body’s master clock)
● When out of sync = ‘permanent jet lag’, unrefreshed upon waking, fatigue
● Stress & diet & lifestyle habits have significant impact
Top tips for better sleep

- **Daylight exposure upon waking**
  - 10,000 lux light box for darker months
- **Outdoors again afternoon**
- **Evening wind-down routine:**
  - Dim lights from early evening
  - Blue-light blocking glasses for screen/TV use
  - **No screens/TV 1 hour before bed**
  - Restorative practices: yin yoga, Qigong, meditation, ‘Yoga Nidra’
What About Coffee?

• Stimulates cortisol
• Shown to increase vasomotor symptoms, sleep, mood, weight, energy
• Tolerance varies from person to person
• 1-2 cups max is likely best
• Black, no sugar, high quality bean
The 6 Point Plan

Practical nutrition & lifestyle tips to support your body naturally - for a smoother and more enjoyable transition into this wonderful phase of life
1. Breathe deeply....

- 4:6 Ratio breathing
- 4-7-8 breathing technique
- 3-5 mins

And..
- Walks in nature/green space
- Yoga
- Qi gong
- Gratitude journaling
- White space
2. Build Muscle

- Improves insulin sensitivity and energy to brain cells
- Strength training found to improve hot flushes and protect brain (‘neurogenesis’)
- Strengthens bones, reducing osteoporosis risk
- Improves metabolism
3. Eat more protein

- Key nutrient for blood sugar regulation & insulin sensitivity
- Supports muscle mass (new and maintain) & metabolism
- Amino acids = raw materials for brain chemicals (serotonin, melatonin, dopamine, GABA..)
- Reduces cravings & regulates appetite
How much protein?

1.2g – 2g

per kg of body weight per day, depending on health, activity levels, and goals

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Typical serving size*</th>
<th>How much protein?*</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1 medium sized fillet of chicken (~175g)</td>
<td>41g</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>125g of lean beef</td>
<td>39g</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1 fillet (~120g) salmon</td>
<td>29g</td>
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<tr>
<td>50g (1/2 a tin) of tuna</td>
<td>12.5g</td>
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<tr>
<td>120g (1/2 a tin) of kidney beans or chickpeas</td>
<td>9g</td>
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<tr>
<td>1 medium egg</td>
<td>6g</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1 tablespoon of nut butter</td>
<td>4g</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1 cup of broccoli (~80g)</td>
<td>3.5g</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1 tablespoon of sunflower seeds</td>
<td>3g</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10 almonds</td>
<td>2.5g</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>30g soft cheese</td>
<td>1.6g</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1 tablespoon of hummus</td>
<td>1g</td>
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</tbody>
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*values subject to natural variation

Conversion reference:  
28g = 1oz
100g = 3.5oz
4. Slow-releasing carbohydrates only

➢ ‘Complex’ & fibre-rich for slow breakdown into glucose
➢ Keep insulin under control
➢ Avoid refined/white flour products, & sugar
➢ 1 fist size portion per meal
➢ Balanced with protein & fat
5. Plenty of good fats

- Omega 3
- Omega 6
- Saturated
- Monounsaturated
- Medium Chain
- Dietary cholesterol
Especially Omega 3 Fats

- Anti inflammatory
- EPA & DHA
- Best source is oily fish:
  - Salmon
  - Mackerel
  - Anchovies
  - Sardines
  - Herring
  - Trout
- Also flaxseed, walnuts, chia seeds (ALA)
Wonderful MCT Oil

• Medium-chain triglycerides

• Converts into ketones for non-glucose energy source
  • **May calm brain & reduce inflammation** during re-calibration phase

• 1-2 tablespoons; smoothies, porridge, herbal teas
Ditch trans fats

➢ Vegetable, rapeseed, sunflower oils & sprays
➢ Margarine / spreadables
➢ Processed foods
➢ Long life baked goods
➢ Deep-fried foods
➢ Takeaways/eating out
6. Care for your gut

- **Fermented (probiotic) foods**: Sauerkraut, kimchi, kombucha, miso, kefir, live natural yoghurt
- **Prebiotic fibre**: garlic, onions, asparagus, leeks Jerusalem artichoke, cooked & cooled potatoes
- **Chew** really REALLY well!
Eat the Rainbow

✔ Encourages growth of friendly/protective gut & vaginal bacteria
✔ Contain array of ‘phyto’nutrients: antioxidants with **protective effects on cells** e.g. anti-inflammatory, heart & brain protective
What about HRT?

- ‘Body identical’ HRT is safe, effective & protective (e.g., against osteoporosis & CVD)
- **Women’s Health Initiative Study 2002 - flawed**
- Oestrogen through skin as gel or patch
- ‘Micronised’ progesterone oral in capsule form
- Derived from yam plant
- **Same molecular structure as the hormones produced naturally from ovaries**
Thank you for listening!

• What’s 1 key takeaway or change you will make?

• What questions do you have?
Resources

• Book: Hormone Repair Manual by Lara Briden (Naturopathic Doctor & Women’s Health Specialist)

• Website: Balance Menopause by Dr Louise Newson, GP & Menopause Specialist www.balance-menopause.com. FAQ’s, factsheets, videos, search function

• Environmental Working group – www.ewg.org

• Hormone Replacement Therapy - Ask your doctor about ‘body identical’ oestrogen & progesterone
References

- Effect of menopause on work - https://www.menopasedoctor.co.uk/menopause/menopause-work-new-guidelines
- Study of Women’s Health Across the Nation (SWAN) - https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC3185243/
- Insulin resistance more likely after menopause - https://diabetes.diabetesjournals.org/content/68/2/291
- Cortisol levels higher in menopausal women & linked to increased abdominal fat, CVD & menopause symptoms - https://pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/16645535/
- Black cohosh for hot flashes - https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC5868221/
- Genitourinary symptoms - https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC4561742/
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- Alcohol & hot flashes & night sweats - https://journals.plos.org/plosone/article?id=10.1371/journal.pone.0230515
- Zinc - https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC5492454/
- Further references available on request