

MENOPAUSE, A NUTRITIONAL APPROACH

What is Menopause anyway?

Menopause is the time in a woman's life when menstruation ends. This can be a gradual process usually between age forty to the mid-fifties or it can occur a lot earlier in life as a result of surgery.

From the first menstrual period the ovaries release estrogen, a hormone responsible for development of breasts, the vagina and uterus. Estrogen also regulates the menstrual cycle and reproduction. As menopause nears, the ovaries gradually stop making estrogen. The resulting deficiency of estrogen is the principal cause of menopausal symptoms. Menopausal symptoms also appear when the ovaries are removed surgically, usually a part of a hysterectomy. This is called "surgical menopause."

What Can I Expect?

Menopause is different for each woman. Some women have no symptoms at all while others may have more drastic changes in their bodies and mood. Common symptoms include hot flashes or flushes, vaginal dryness, irregular or missed periods, and moodiness, irritability or depression.

Potential Problem Foods for the Menopausal Woman

- Too much protein and salt in your diet increases the loss of calcium through urine, and may put you at higher risk for osteoporosis.
- Alcohol can damage your liver, suppress bone growth, upset ovarian function and increase the likelihood of menstrual problems.
- Excess calories from fat, protein, carbohydrate and/or alcohol lead to weight gain.

What Should I Eat?

Choose a variety of foods among all the food groups daily to supply nutrients for good general health. Most women need about 2000 calories each day. They should come from:

- Bread, Cereal, Rice and Pasta Group
6-11 servings daily
- Vegetable Group
3-5 servings daily
- Milk, Yogurt, and Cheese Group
2-3 servings daily
- Meat, Produce, Fish, Dry Beans, Eggs and Nuts Group
2-3 servings daily
- Use fats, oils and sweets sparingly.

Be sure to include foods that are rich in calcium and Vitamin D. You need them for dense strong bones and to prevent osteoporosis.

Calcium sources include:

- milk
- cheese
- yogurt
- ice cream
- tofu
- collards
- turnip greens
- broccoli
- cottage cheese
- beans

Some brands of juice, bread, cereal and snack bars are calcium fortified.

Some women trying to reduce their risk of breast cancer are increasing their intake of foods high in phytoestrogens. Phytoestrogens are found primarily in soy foods.

Do I Need Extra Vitamins During Menopause?

No, not necessarily. Extra vitamins and minerals may help if your intake is deficient. There may be benefit from taking a multiple vitamin and mineral supplement, but no special menopausal supplement is needed.

HEALTH RISKS

Osteoporosis. The loss of estrogen that occurs during menopause can result in reduced bone strength, poor bone quality, and an increase in the risk of fractures, especially during the first seven years after menstruation stops. Because the bone loss in Osteoporosis is gradual and painless, it often goes undetected until crippling fractures occur.

Osteoporosis may affect over 20 million, or 1 out of every 4 women over the age of 50 in the U.S. Additionally, 1 out of every 3 women older than 50 will experience a fracture of the spine as a result of osteoporosis.

Fortunately, you can decrease your risk of developing osteoporosis. The National Institute of Health recommends after menopause women consume 1,500 mg per day of calcium if they are not on hormonal replacement therapy or 1,000 mg per day if taking hormonal therapy. Ask your doctor if you might be a candidate for calcium supplement tablets if you are not able to take in enough calcium in your diet.

Examples of 1,500 mg of calcium:

- | Example 1 | Example 2 |
|----------------------------|--------------------|
| 3 cups of skim milk | 1 slice of cheese |
| 2 slices of low fat cheese | 1 cup fruit yogurt |
| ½ cup collards | 1 cup dried beans |
| ½ cup broccoli | |

Example of 1,000 mg of calcium:

- 3 cups of skim milk
- 1 cup black-eyed peas
- 1 cup low fat cottage cheese

WHO'S AT HIGHEST RISK FOR OSTEOPOROSIS?

- Asians or Caucasians
- Thin and small-framed
- Physically inactive
- Smokers

And women who have:

- Early Menopause
- A low intake of calcium
- Consumed an excessive amount of alcohol
- Family history of bone fractures

Be sure to discuss your potential risk for osteoporosis with you physician.

Cardiovascular Disease (CVD)

CVD includes coronary heart disease, high blood pressure, stroke, and other diseases that affect the heart and blood vessels. Heart disease alone causes half of all deaths in women over the age of 50.

You can help reduce your risk of CVD by eating a healthy diet and following the nutritional guidelines discussed earlier. Eating low-fat, low cholesterol foods, eating lots of fruits and vegetables, not smoking, and exercising regularly will offer the most benefit in preventing CVD.

Also, ask your doctor if Estrogen Replacement Therapy is right for you.

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