

Definition

An established menopause = six months without a period. Menopause normally occurs between the age of 45 and 55 years with the average age of onset in the UK being 50. Oestrogen levels fall, often resulting in a number of uncomfortable or unpleasant symptoms.

Main Symptoms

The symptoms of menopause include:

- Hot flushes
- Night sweats - can lead to insomnia
- Vaginal dryness
- Vaginal infections, itching and discharge
- Loss of libido
- Depression and anxiety
- Tiredness
- Mood swings
- Bloating
- Water retention
- Poor hair and skin condition

Health Risks

The risks associated with menopause include:

- Increased levels of cholesterol
- Increased risk of heart disease
- Increased risk of osteoporosis (brittle bones)

To manage the unpleasant symptoms of menopause and associated health risk it is helpful to follow a healthy diet which will lead to a good level of hormone production. Such a diet will have an abundant supply of minerals - especially calcium, magnesium and selenium. Research has shown that increased intake of these minerals slows down loss of mineral density in bones leading to fewer bone fractures in those taking them.

Dietary Recommendations

TAKE ONLY IN MODERATION	AVOID	DO
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Red meat (preferably organic) as high red meat consumption can lead to excess calcium excretion in urine. • Coffee and alcohol as these can aggravate hot flushes. • Tea and coffee as they promote excretion of calcium. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Fizzy drinks and carbonated water as they interfere with the absorption of calcium. • Refined sugar and chemical additives as they can upset mood and blood sugar levels. • Spicy foods as they can aggravate hot flushes. • Fried foods which lead to high cholesterol - grill or bake instead. • Saturated fats like butter and that found in most cheeses. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Drink plenty of water as this can cool hot flushes and reduce vaginal dryness. • Take moderate regular exercise such as walking to preserve bone mineral density. • Aim to reduce stress levels. • Rest.

In general eat plenty of oestrogenic foods and follow a healthy diet of fresh foods high in vitamins and minerals. See table overleaf.

Soya	Soybeans, calcium-fortified soy milk, soy yogurt and tofu.	Increases oestrogen and helps build bone mass. (compared to soya protein, eating animal protein washes away more calcium).
Seeds	Sesame, pumpkin and sunflower seeds. Sprouted seeds, like alfalfa and fenugreek, can be added to salads.	High in essential fatty acids which help maintain hormone balance. Also high in Vitamin D which helps to maintain bone density.
Wholegrains	Organic oats, wheat, rye, millet, buckwheat. Buckwheat should be soaked then cooked. It can be added to salads or served instead of rice.	Rich in fibre, B vitamins, zinc and phyto-oestrogens, phosphorus and zinc.
Fresh fruits	Bananas, avocados, papayas, mangoes, melons, bananas and citrus fruits like oranges and lemons.	Melons, bananas and citrus fruits like oranges and lemons are high in potassium therefore help to deal with sodium and water retention.
Dark leafy greens	Kale, broccoli	High in calcium - crucial for maintaining bone density
Dried fruits	Prunes, dates, figs, raisins	High in calcium - crucial for maintaining bone density
Cold-pressed oils	Safflower oil and olive oil can be used for cooking or added to salads.	High in essential fatty acids Vitamin E in olive oil essential for healthy skin and hair and helps to reduce hot flushes.
Nut oils	Walnut, hazelnut	High in essential fatty acids - help maintain hormone balance. Both high in Vitamin E which is essential for healthy skin and hair and helps to reduce hot flushes.
Nuts	Almonds	High in calcium - crucial for maintaining bone density. Contain Vitamin B complex and magnesium
Oily fish	Salmon, sardines, mackerel, herring, trout and pilchards.	High in essential fatty acids - help maintain hormone balance and magnesium and phosphorus
Legumes & pulses	Beans and lentils	Help increase oestrogen levels.

References

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