

Everything I'd Tell a Friend Going Through PERIMENOPAUSE

Nutrition, exercise, sleep, and stress strategies that actually help during perimenopause and menopause.



Contents

03	Perimenopause
04	Menopause
05	Nutrition and Lifestyle Factors to Address a Healthy Perimenopause & Menopause
06	Blood Sugar Balance
06	Improving the Gut Microbiome
07	Stress Management
07	Resistance, Balance & Weight Bearing Exercise
08	Cardiovascular Exercise
08	Importance of Adequate Sleep
09	Strategies to Improve Sleep
09	Ensuring Adequate Protein Intake
10	Amount of Protein in Some Common Foods
10	Leucine Rich Foods
11	Ensuring Adequate Calcium Intake
11	Calcium Content of Foods
12	Ensuring Sufficient Vitamin D Intake
12	Time Restricted Eating
13	References

Perimenopause

Perimenopause generally begins 5–10 years before the end of your periods (Cunningham et al., 2023). During this time, the ovaries gradually run out of follicles, leading to a decline in oestrogen and progesterone production (Peacock et al., 2023).

Oestrogen levels can fluctuate significantly due to erratic ovulation, which is why blood tests are often unreliable when it comes to confirming whether you're in perimenopause.

These hormonal shifts can create a complex picture. Higher oestrogen relative to progesterone can trigger symptoms similar to PMS, while over the age of 50, rising cortisol (the stress hormone) can add a further layer of symptoms — particularly in the later stages of perimenopause.

Together, these changes in hormone levels can lead to a wide range of symptoms, including:

- Hot flushes and night sweats
- Muscle cramps
- Mood swings
- Headaches and migraines
- Changes in libido
- And many more

Menopause

Menopause occurs 12 months after a women's last menstrual bleed.

It occurs when the ovarian reserve (the total amount of follicles in the ovaries) is entirely or almost entirely exhausted. As the follicles run out the ovaries reduce their ability to produce hormones.

The average age for menopause in the UK is 51 years (British Menopause Society, 2022)

Many of the symptoms felt during perimenopause may now resolve

However there are certain other conditions which women are now more susceptible to such as:

- Vaginal dryness
- Stress incontinence
- Facial hair
- Weight gain
- Osteoporosis
- Sarcopenia
- Cardiovascular issues
- Gut problems

Nutrition and Lifestyle Factors to Address for a Healthier Perimenopause and Menopause

Although women are more susceptible to certain health problems following menopause it is possible to address many of these problems through diet and lifestyle.

- Blood sugar balance
- Gut microbiome health
- Stress management
- Muscle mass/strength
- Balance
- Cardiovascular health
- Sleep health
- Sufficient dietary protein
- Sufficient dietary calcium
- Sufficient Vitamin D
- Times of eating

Nutrition & Lifestyle Strategies

BLOOD SUGAR BALANCE

This is important to help with energy, weight management and diabetes prevention.

As oestrogen helps cells respond to insulin, women post-menopause tend to have poorer blood sugar regulation (Bermingham et al., 2022). Strategies to improve blood sugar regulation are:

- Reduce added sugar in the diet
- Swap refined carbohydrates to whole grain
- Eat a breakfast high in protein and fibre
- Have savoury snacks
- Have a salad or vegetables as a starter
- Aim for a 12–14 hour overnight fast
- Increase dietary fibre
- Cut out sugary drinks and fruit juices
- Go for a walk after eating

IMPROVE THE GUT MICROBIOME

The gut microbiome is an ecosystem of trillions of microorganisms living in the large intestine.

It is crucial for health, but around the time of the perimenopause, due to the changes in oestrogen and progesterone, it changes, with an increase in harmful bacteria and a decrease in beneficial bacteria (Wang et al., 2025)

A healthy gut microbiome can reduce gut problems, and improve nutrient absorption, blood sugar management, stress management, weight management, immune health and mental health (through the gut-brain axis). Strategies to build a healthy microbiome are:

- Increase the amount of dietary fibre
- Increase the variety of plant foods in the diet
- Eat as much organic produce as possible
- Reduce sugar and artificial sweeteners
- Swap processed to unprocessed foods
- Swap alcohol to non-alcoholic drinks
- Increase probiotic foods in diet
- Adequate sleep
- Stress reduction
- Movement

Reminder: Always introduce added fibre to your diet gradually and ensure you are drinking at least 2L of water/day. If you have any changes in your digestion discuss with a medical professional.

Nutrition & Lifestyle Strategies

STRESS MANAGEMENT

Increased sensitivity to stress, anxiety and reduced resilience are common symptoms during the perimenopause and menopause. This is driven by the reduction in oestrogen and progesterone. When oestrogen levels drop, the system which regulates stress is impaired leading to increased cortisol levels and a drop in the level of the feel good hormone serotonin. When progesterone levels drops there is a reduction in GABA activity, with GABA acting as a calming agent in the brain. Strategies to reduce feelings of stress and anxiety are:

- Meditation
- Yoga
- Consider swapping high intensity exercise to walking
- Avoid fasting for long periods of time
- Walk in nature
- Reduce your caffeine intake
- Listen to music
- Journalling

RESISTANCE, BALANCE & WEIGHT-BEARING EXERCISE

To help prevent sarcopenia (the age related decline in muscle mass) and osteoporosis (weakened more fragile bones), assist in weight management, and prevent falls later in life, try to implement some of the strategies listed below every week – make sure you aim for something you enjoy. If you have back or other joint problems it's advisable to chat to a Physiotherapist before starting any new exercise.

- Walking with a weighted vest or ankle/wrist weights
- Walking up and down the stairs with weighted vest/ankle weights
- Use resistance bands 3x week – gradually increasing the resistance
- Weight training 3x week – gradually increasing the weight
- Yoga
- Tennis
- Dancing/Zumba
- Body pump
- Pilates

Nutrition & Lifestyle Strategies

INCREASE CARDIOVASCULAR EXERCISE

To assist in blood sugar management, lowering of LDL cholesterol, improved blood pressure control, prevention of cardiovascular disease, weight management and to improve mood, aim to include some of the following at least 2–3 times per week. If you have any underlying health problems it's advisable to discuss any increase in exercise with your GP.

- Increase distance and speed of walking
- Couch to 5K
- Skipping
- Tennis
- Swimming and aquafit
- Zumba
- Dance
- Hot yoga
- HIIT training
- Running

ADEQUATE SLEEP

Adults need 7–9 hours of sleep/night (NIH, 2022)

Lack of sleep can be a factor in a number of health problems (US Institute of Medicine, 2006) such as:

- Obesity
- Impaired glucose tolerance
- Cardiovascular disease and hypertension
- Depression
- Anxiety
- Cognitive impairment – weakening memory and focus.

Nutrition & Lifestyle Strategies

STRATEGIES TO IMPROVE SLEEP (ALONGSIDE YOUR STRESS MANAGEMENT TOOLS)

- Get morning light
- Reduce alcohol intake which can lead to a disrupted nights sleep
- Avoid eating too late – which alters circadian rhythms (your body clock) forcing the body to digest food when it should be resting
- Avoid blue light – especially from laptops and computers – for at least 1 hour before bed
- Avoid caffeine after lunch – swapping to caffeine free options
- Try drinking a cup of chamomile or lemon balm tea before bed
- Keep your bedroom at 18 degrees C or cooler
- Include unrefined carbohydrates in your evening meal – eating refined carbohydrates before bed can lead to a blood sugar crash during the night
- Try a hot bath before bed

ADEQUATE PROTEIN INTAKE

Adequate protein intake is imperative to reduce the risk of sarcopenia and osteoporosis. As we age it is harder for our bodies to absorb protein so our protein requirement actually gets greater, therefore:

- Aim for 1–1.2g/kg of body weight of protein/day (Deutz et al., 2014) divided across 3 meals – especially thinking about breakfast (Layman, 2024), which tends to be carbohydrate heavy, aim for 1/4 of your plate to be protein rich food
- Aim for foods high in essential amino acids (your body requires 20 amino acids to build protein, 9 of which are essential and must be obtained through diet), make sure that leucine is one of the essential amino acids included (it is found mostly in animal based proteins) as it is imperative to help increase muscle synthesis (Volpi, 2018; Berrazaga et al., 2019)
- Try organic unflavoured whey protein supplements if you're struggling to consume adequate protein

Protein & Leucine

AMOUNT OF PROTEIN IN SOME COMMON FOODS.

			
2 eggs (size 6), boiled 13.2g	95g can of tuna drained 25.g	100g salmon, pan-fried 20g	100g steak, braised 25g
			
100g chicken breast, grilled 31.2g	chickpeas, drained 150g 10.8g	Tofu, firm, 100g 12-15g	1/2 cup peas (85g), boiled 4-18g

Source: New Zealand FOODfiles™ 2018 Version 012

LEUCINE (AND ESSENTIAL AMINO ACID) RICH FOODS

- Chicken Breast
- Turkey Breast
- Lamb
- Pork
- Beef
- Emmental and parmesan cheese
- Sardines
- Tuna fish
- Mackerel
- Salmon and cod
- Eggs
- Nuts

FOODS WITH MODERATE LEUCINE CONTENT

- Greek yoghurt
- Cannelini beans
- Dried peas

(Rondanelli et al., 2021)

Nutrition & Lifestyle Strategies

ADEQUATE CALCIUM INTAKE

Adequate calcium intake is essential for osteoporosis prevention. Calcium absorption decreases significantly with lower levels of oestrogen after menopause. Women post-menopause require around 1200mg of calcium/day. The highest sources of calcium are dairy and some seafood such as salmon and sardines (with bones) (Gropper et al., 2018)

Other good sources of calcium are:

- Broccoli
- Bok Choy
- Kale
- Chickpeas
- Tahini, dried figs and spinach are often stated as being high in calcium, however, their bioavailability (how easily absorbed they are) is low (Muleya et al., 2024) due to high levels of oxalates which bind to calcium forming insoluble compounds non-absorbable by the body, cooking can reduce the oxalate content meaning cooked spinach is better than raw.

If you're trying to maximise your calcium intake aim not to drink tea and coffee at the same time as eating calcium rich foods as caffeine may reduce calcium absorption in the gut.

CALCIUM CONTECT AND BIOAVAILABILITY OF FOODS

Protein eaten alongside calcium rich foods increases the absorption of calcium, whereas caffeine & alcohol reduce it's absorption. Try and have at least one hour between eating and having a coffee or switch to decaf'.

Food (serving)	Calcium (mg)	% Bioaccessibilty
Milk/Yoghurt (250ml)	200-400	29.9
Cheeses - Variety (85g)	100-125	
Salmon - Canned w/ Bones (85g)	190	N/A but absorbs well
Sardines - Canned w/ Bones (85g)	200	N/A
Kale - Cooked (125g)	47	42.7
Broccoli - Cooked (125g)	21	59.9
Kidney Beans (250g)	64	18.7
Chickpeas (125g)	77	26.9
Almonds (75g)	75	20

Nutrition & Lifestyle Strategies

SUFFICIENT VITAMIN D INTAKE

Vitamin D is essential for calcium absorption but also for immune health, inflammation control and glucose metabolism (NIH, 2025). Adults and children over 1 year require 10mcg per day, women over 50 need 15–25 mcg/day but no more than 100mcg. The best source of vitamin D is sunlight, although ageing reduces the skin's capacity to produce vitamin D.

In the UK between October and April there is insufficient light from the sun for the skin to generate vitamin D and supplements may therefore be required. Depending on genetics some people may require higher levels of vitamin D than the general population

Best ways to increase your Vitamin D levels:

- Get outside – being careful to always avoid burning – especially on your face
- Take supplements (that include vitamin K) – especially in the winter months
- Eat plenty of fatty fish which are a good source of vitamin D.
- Eat mushrooms that have been grown in the sun.

Reminder: Always consult a healthcare professional before taking supplements if you have an underlying health condition or are taking regular medication.

TIME RESTRICTED EATING

Restricting eating to an 8–12 hour window has been shown to improve cardio-metabolic health, weight management and gut function. (Chang et al., 2024).

- Fasting periods enable the migrating motility complex – a series of involuntary muscular contractions that pulsate through the gastrointestinal tract – to flush out any undigested food particles, waste and unwanted bacteria from the small intestine to the colon.
- It can also improve blood sugar management – enhancing insulin sensitivity and promoting fat burning.
- Finish eating dinner earlier in the evening
- Swap evening snacks to herb tea
- If you have to leave for work early have breakfast prepared that you can take with you.
- Eat plenty of protein, fibre and healthy fats at dinner to keep full.

Reminder: Always consult a healthcare professional before making any dietary changes if you suffer from diabetes.

References

- Bermingham, K. M., Linenberg, I., Hall, W. L., Kadé, K., Franks, P. W., Davies, R., Wolf, J., Hadjigeorgiou, G., Asnicar, F., Segata, N., Manson, J. E., Newson, L. R., Delahanty, L. M., Ordovas, J. M., Chan, A. T., Spector, T. D., Valdes, A. M., & Berry, S. E. (2022). Menopause is associated with postprandial metabolism, metabolic health and lifestyle: The ZOE PREDICT study. *EBioMedicine*, 85, 104303. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ebiom.2022.104303>
- Berrazaga, I., Micard, V., Gueugneau, M., & Walrand, S. (2019). The Role of the Anabolic Properties of Plant- versus Animal-Based Protein Sources in Supporting Muscle Mass Maintenance: A Critical Review. *Nutrients*, 11(8), 1825. <https://doi.org/10.3390/nu1108182>
- Briden, L. (2021). *Hormone Repair Manual*. Macmillan.
- Briggs, P. (2021). Fast facts for patients: Menopause. <https://karger.com/books/book/3633/Fast-Facts-for-Patients-Menopause>
- British Menopause Society. (2022). Tools for Clinicians. What is the menopause. <https://thebms.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2023/08/17-BMS-TfC-What-is-the-menopause-AUGUST2023-A.pdf>
- Cano, A., Chedraui, P., Goulis, D. G., Lopes, P., Mishra, G., Mueck, A., Senturk, L. M., Simoncini, T., Stevenson, J. C., Stute, P., Tuomikoski, P., Rees, M., & Lambrinoudaki, I. (2018). Calcium in the prevention of postmenopausal osteoporosis: EMAS clinical guide. *Maturitas*, 107, 7–12. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.maturitas.2017.10.004>
- Chang, Y., Du, T., Zhuang, X., & Ma, G. (2024). Time-restricted eating improves health because of energy deficit and circadian rhythm: A systematic review and meta-analysis. *iScience*, 27(2), 109000. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.isci.2024.109000>
- Cunningham, A.C., Hewings-Martin, Y., Wickham, A.P. et al. Perimenopause symptoms, severity, and healthcare seeking in women in the US. *npj Womens Health* 3, 12 (2025). <https://doi.org/10.1038/s44294-025-00061-3>
- Deutz, N. E., Bauer, J. M., Barazzoni, R., Biolo, G., Boirie, Y., Bosy-Westphal, A., Cederholm, T., Cruz-Jentoft, A., Krznarić, Z., Nair, K. S., Singer, P., Teta, D., Tipton, K., & Calder, P. C. (2014). Protein intake and exercise for optimal muscle function with aging: recommendations from the ESPEN Expert Group. *Clinical nutrition (Edinburgh, Scotland)*, 33(6), 929–936. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.clnu.2014.04.007>
- Gropper, S., Smith, J & Carr, T. (2018) *Advanced Nutrition and Human Metabolism* (7th Edition). Cengage.
- Institute of Medicine (US) Committee on Sleep Medicine and Research; Colten HR, Altevogt BM, editors. *Sleep Disorders and Sleep Deprivation: An Unmet Public Health Problem*. Washington (DC): National Academies Press (US); 2006. 3, Extent and Health Consequences of Chronic Sleep Loss and Sleep Disorders. Available from: <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/books/NBK19961/>

References

- Peacock K, Carlson K, Ketvertis KM. Menopause. [Updated 2023 Dec 21]. In: StatPearls [Internet]. Treasure Island (FL): StatPearls Publishing; 2025 Jan-. Available from: <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/books/NBK507826/>
- Layman D. K. (2024). Impacts of protein quantity and distribution on body composition. *Frontiers in nutrition*, 11, 1388986. <https://doi.org/10.3389/fnut.2024.1388986>
- NIH. (2022). How much sleep is enough? <https://www.nhlbi.nih.gov/health/sleep/how-much-sleep>
- NIH. (2025). Vitamin D. <https://ods.od.nih.gov/factsheets/VitaminD-HealthProfessional/>
- Peacock K, Carlson K, Ketvertis KM. Menopause. [Updated 2023 Dec 21]. In: StatPearls [Internet]. Treasure Island (FL): StatPearls Publishing; 2025 Jan-. Available from: <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/books/NBK507826/>
- Rondanelli, M., Nichetti, M., Peroni, G., Faliva, M. A., Naso, M., Gasparri, C., Perna, S., Oberto, L., Di Paolo, E., Riva, A., Petrangolini, G., Guerreschi, G., & Tartara, A. (2021). Where to Find Leucine in Food and How to Feed Elderly With Sarcopenia in Order to Counteract Loss of Muscle Mass: Practical Advice. *Frontiers in nutrition*, 7, 622391. <https://doi.org/10.3389/fnut.2020.622391>
- Shkembali, B., & Huppertz, T. (2021). Calcium Absorption from Food Products: Food Matrix Effects. *Nutrients*, 14(1), 180. <https://doi.org/10.3390/nu14010180>
- Volpi E. (2018). Is leucine content in dietary protein the key to muscle preservation in older women?. *The American journal of clinical nutrition*, 107(2), 143–144. <https://doi.org/10.1093/ajcn/nqy009>
- Wang, H., Shi, F., Zheng, L., Zhou, W., Mi, B., Wu, S., & Feng, X. (2025). Gut microbiota has the potential to improve health of menopausal women by regulating estrogen. *Frontiers in endocrinology*, 16, 1562332. <https://doi.org/10.3389/fendo.2025.1562332>