



*When you're not feeling 100%, it can be hard to really look after yourself properly. However, research clearly shows that making some positive changes in life can really help alleviate menopausal symptoms and improve quality of life.*

*There are four main areas you can focus on: sleep, exercise, nutrition and stress. And, of course, don't limit yourself to these four! Doing things which you enjoy, taking some time out and finding a creative outlet can all help you feel better and improve your mood.*

## Sleep well...

If you're having difficulty sleeping at this time, it can be deeply frustrating. As your hormones fluctuate, it can lead to sleep disturbances<sup>1</sup>.

Here are some steps you can take to help improve your sleeping patterns:

### ***Exercise***

Moderate exercise has been shown to improve sleep during menopause.

### ***Avoid caffeine and alcohol***

Both of these substances can trigger hot flushes while you sleep & disturb sleep.

### ***Keep cool***

Having a shower before bed, having cotton night clothes & bedding and ensuring the temperature is cool enough in your room can all help you get a better night's sleep.

### ***Meditation & yoga***

Regularly meditating and/ or practicing yoga can help reduce stress & help you sleep.

### ***Stick to a schedule***

Maintaining a schedule – and sticking to it – can help you create healthier sleeping patterns.

### ***Ditch the phone (and tablet, computer, screens, etc.)***

Screen time in the bedroom can hinder getting to sleep. Keep your room free of screens!

### ***Take a nap?***

Many people find that short naps – of up to about 20 minutes – can be restorative and help them make up for some of their lost sleep. Longer naps often leave us feeling groggy and can affect sleep at night.

### **Get moving and have fun...**

Exercise is a great way to improve your overall health, sleep better, help maintain healthy bones, reduce stress and even help with hot flushes<sup>2</sup>! If you're used to exercising, this can be a good time to explore some new activities which you can add to your usual regime. Make sure you start at a pace which is suitable for your current level of health and fitness.

### ***Walking***

Brisk walking is a great way to burn calories, get some much needed Vitamin D into your body and a good way to destress. It's completely free and easy to start!

### ***Swimming***

Swimming is a fantastic all-over body workout. It's a great way to increase overall fitness and strengthen muscles.

### ***Yoga***

Yoga not only helps improve fitness, strength and flexibility, it also helps you manage stress and can help with sleep – which is so important during menopause.

### ***Pilates***

Pilates is another great form of exercise for increasing muscle strength, helping alignment and creating a strong core. It's great for helping you maintain a healthy back and posture.

### ***Resistance training***

We want to keep healthy bones as we age, and resistance training is a great way of doing that. Whether it's a workout at the gym or using body weight as resistance, there are a whole range of workouts which can help you retain muscle and healthy bones.

### ***Cardio workouts***

Introducing some cardio into your exercise plan is great for burning calories and keeping your heart healthy. There are loads of classes & different options for your current fitness level.

### **Eat for health...**

The types of food you choose can help you maintain your energy levels, maintain your weight and help you reduce the amount of hot flushes you experience.

### ***Energy boosting foods***

During perimenopause - that time leading up to your menopause - you may experience adrenal fatigue. When you are younger, your ovaries produce most of the progesterone and estrogen in your body, but as you approach menopause, the adrenal glands increasingly produce these hormones. The adrenal glands are also responsible for producing cortisol and adrenaline in response to stress throughout your life. If you have experienced prolonged emotional or physical stress, your adrenal glands may become overworked and fatigued. Already tired, they're asked to do more work at the time of the menopause. As a result, you may be tired and lethargic, even after sleep. You may feel anxious or depressed and have aching muscles. The good news is, you can do loads to help support your adrenal function simply by changing your diet.

Eating plenty of protein helps to support your adrenals and, in addition, the following supplements or foods contain vitamins can be taken to support your adrenal function. It is also important to include foods (some of which are listed below) which contain calcium and/ or Vitamin D to promote healthy bones.

Mushrooms (especially shiitake)

Cheese (blue cheese, Camembert, feta)

Oily fish (trout, salmon, herring)

Pork

Poultry

Whole cereals

Eggs

Shellfish (crab, oysters and clams)

Nuts (hazelnuts, walnuts, peanuts, cashews) Soya beans

Milk

Potatoes

Some fortified breakfast cereals

Vitamin C – found in foods such as peppers, sprouts, kale, broccoli, strawberries, cauliflower.

Omega 3 foods, including: Oily fish

Leafy green vegetables Nuts and seeds

### ***Magnesium (enjoy a soak in an Epsom salt bath)***

When magnesium levels are too low in the body, the result can be increased levels of anxiety and depression. This means that the point at which your adrenals kick into action to produce cortisol and adrenaline is much lower than it should be and even the most minor event can cause you to have a fight or flight response. Having an Epsom salt bath is a great, and safe, way to increase magnesium levels. A couple of cups in a bath, two to three times a week, and a lovely excuse for a healthy soak (and rest - another way to support healthy adrenal function!).

### ***Water***

Increasing your intake of water is good for your health generally and can help with some of the dryness symptoms caused by decreasing estrogen levels. Drinking water can also help with some of the bloating effects of hormonal changes.

### ***Plant rich diet***

Diets rich in fruit and vegetables, and low in sugar and solid fats have been linked to an improvement in menopausal symptoms<sup>3</sup>, whilst one study showed that increasing soyabean levels can have beneficial effects<sup>4</sup>. Getting more fruit and vege into your diet could be one way of helping yourself manage your symptoms.

### ***Foods to eliminate or avoid***

Some foods - such as caffeine, alcohol and refined carbohydrates - put increasing stress on your adrenals and should be eliminated or avoided. These types of food cause spikes and drops in energy and can lead to greater fatigue. They will also make it harder to maintain a healthy weight.

Alcohol, caffeine and spicy foods can all trigger hot flushes.

## Reduce your stress levels...

Changing hormone levels during menopause often lead to an increase in anxiety levels and this is a time of life which is often demanding and stressful. We know that there is a relationship between stress and more severe menopausal symptoms, and reducing your stress levels can help alleviate symptoms in addition to improving your quality of life.

You may already know what suits you best in terms of stress reduction strategies. What's really important is to make the effort each day to make time for yourself and stick to what you need to do. Here are some suggestions:

### ***Exercise***

Exercise can help reduce stress levels in addition to increasing your general quality of life.

### ***Identifying helpful coping strategies***

Many of us have had times in life when we've tried to manage stress through coping strategies such as eating too much, drinking alcohol or taking drugs. Whilst these types of behaviours provide a temporary sense of relief, long term they make our stress and anxiety far worse. If you've got any unhelpful coping strategies, perhaps you could replace them with some of the suggestions here.

### ***Meditation***

Meditation is a great way to reduce our stress levels. We can actually train our brains to think in new, helpful ways with less rumination and stress behaviours.

### ***Creative outlet***

Doing things we enjoy can be a great way of reducing stress. Whether it's a new hobby, career or something else, try experimenting with doing things which are just for you (and that you enjoy!).

### ***Say no***

Most of us get stressed because we take on too much in life. This is a great time to start putting your needs first. Say yes to the things that turn you on, and start saying no to the rest! Self-care isn't selfish; it's what you need to do as your own needs are changing and evolving.

1. Gava G, Orsili I, Alvisi S, Mancini I, et al. (2019) Cognition, Mood and Sleep in Menopausal Transition: The Role of Menopause Hormone Therapy. *Medicina (Kaunas)*. 55(10):668. Published 2019 Oct 1. doi:10.3390/medicina55100668
2. Skrzypulec V, Dabrowska J, Drosdzol A (2010) The influence of physical activity level on climacteric symptoms in menopausal women. *Climacteric*. 13(4):355-61.
3. Soleymani M, Siassi F, Qorbani M, et al. (2019) Dietary patterns and their association with menopausal symptoms: a cross-sectional study. *Menopause*. 26(4):365-372. doi: 10.1097/GME.0000000000001245. PMID: 30363011.
4. Barnard, ND, Kahleova, H, Holtz, D et al. (2021) The Women's Study for the Alleviation of Vasomotor Symptoms (WAVS): a randomized, controlled trial of a plant-based diet and whole soybeans for postmenopausal women, *Menopause*.10: 1150-1156