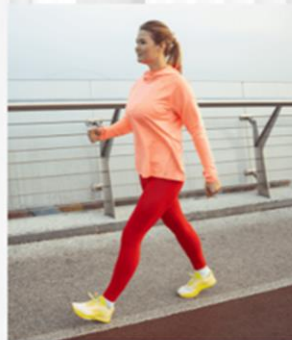


# Reflexology and the Five Pillars for Healthy Menopause



Diet



Exercise



Relaxation



Sleep



Purpose

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## **A Time to Pause and Reframe:**

*Who do you want to be for the next phase of your Life?*

*How can you achieve that?*



## Introduction

Menopause is a natural process and it is a journey that women will come through. Whilst perimenopause and menopause can be a pretty tough time for many women there are things that we can do that may help. On average we spend a third to a half of our lives post menopause, so we need to embrace this as a time for us to decide who we want to be for the rest of our lives and make plans for how we can achieve it - this may mean lifestyle changes need to be made to help ensure that we transition through to healthy ageing. However there are times when we may need a little bit of extra support and choosing reflexology can be a wonderful way to smooth this journey. Your therapist has also undertaken further training in Reflexology for Menopause so you are in good hands.

As mentioned, it is important to consider some lifestyle factors and this booklet introduces you to Five Pillars for a Healthy Menopause and these are actually foundations for healthy ageing too. I encourage you to have an honest look at your current lifestyle and identify where there could be a few tweaks – then pick one change and try it for 3-4 weeks to see how you feel. Don't try to make too many changes at once and choose something that is achievable for you.

It is fascinating to look at cultural differences; in agricultural, non-industrialised cultures menopause is generally an uneventful time whilst in western industrialised countries it can be a very trying time with many women experiencing hot flushes, fatigue, weight gain, mood swings etc - so why is there this difference? - this booklet will take you through what I believe to be the 5 Pillars for Health Menopause to help you identify areas for positive change and improved physical and emotional wellbeing. Attitudes to menopause are dramatically changing and you can now find plenty of books, podcasts, and advice readily available.

We often associate 'change' as being a negative thing but there are activities we can do that can help us start to be proactive about change as a way of progressing. It can take time to even get to the point of recognising a change could be beneficial, it is rarely straightforward and it can be easy to deny that a change is even needed.

To be successful in bringing about change there are some questions you need to ask:

- 1. What change do you want to make?**
- 2. What is your driving force for making this change?** – how will you benefit?
- 3. Do you have the motivation, resources and knowledge required?** Or where can you get help?
- 4. Are there any barriers that might prevent this change?** And are there ways around these and can they be avoided?
- 5. Is the investment you are going to make going to be worth it?** E.g. time, money, emotions vs improved wellbeing and healthy menopause
- 6. Is this change going to be sustainable for you longer term?** This is why it is better to start with small changes and then add others.

**I trust this booklet helps you find your Zest for Life again!**

Sally Earlam FMAR. BSc. PGCE. (Retired RGN)

Be the best that you can be



## A little bit about Menopause

Menopause means the cessation of menstruation and you are classed as moving from perimenopause to menopause after you have had no period for 12 months. Perimenopause generally starts between the ages of 40 and 50 years and the first symptom most women will notice is irregular periods. In perimenopause hormones such as oestrogen and progesterone begin to fluctuate due to the declining egg reserve and over time these hormones will dramatically fall. It is these changes in hormones that are responsible for menopausal symptoms.

The transition through to Menopause, on average, takes 4 years but this can range from 1-12 years and the average age of Menopause in the UK is 51. So with time symptoms should ease.

In the UK it is estimated that 80% of women do experience some symptoms with the most common being hot flushes and night sweats – the good news here is that a research study has shown that reflexology can help these symptoms (more in a little bit).

It is key that women really take care of their health as they head into perimenopause and beyond, as the hormone oestrogen has many protective functions all around the body. Oestrogen is perhaps best known for its role in our monthly menstrual cycle but it also has a role to play in brain function/memory, bone health, circulation, digestion, liver function, kidney function, immune system, nerves, muscles, cardiovascular system plus many other functions of the body.

Therefore, as oestrogen levels fall, this is a risk factor that increases the chance of developing certain long-term conditions such as heart disease, high blood pressure, high cholesterol, diabetes, stroke, some cancers, respiratory disease, osteoporosis, inflammatory conditions etc.

This sounds rather alarming, but this is why myself and your reflexologist feel passionate about sharing knowledge to help support you through this journey. The medical world has historically focused on men's health, yet we are now in a position where women live longer than men but with more unhealthy years, which is quite shocking. We still have a long way to go to achieve gender equality in healthcare but I am hoping this booklet may empower you to be able to better support your menopause journey. There are of course times when we need to seek medical help or consider HRT but many women want to try natural solutions first and if this is the case then do read on.

We have seen that the way we live our lives has a big impact on the way women experience menopause with women in non-industrialised cultures experiencing far fewer symptoms than women in western industrialised countries.

So what are 'The 5 Pillars' that can be looked at for easing the menopause transition, from perimenopause through to healthy ageing?:

- Nutrition
- Exercise
- Managing stress levels
- Getting good quality sleep
- Find enjoyment and purpose



## 1. Nutrition – the right foods can make you feel better.

As oestrogen levels fall, the body becomes less effective at breaking down carbohydrates, which can increase fat storage, and our metabolism also slows which makes it harder to lose weight. A study has shown that on average women gain 12lbs within 8 years of menopause (1). We also see a redistribution of body fat with a particular increase around the waistline and this is thought to happen when the levels of androgens, such as testosterone and androstenedione, become higher in relation to the falling oestrogen levels and androgens promote the accumulation of abdominal fat.

We also see a change in cholesterol in menopause with an increase in the 'bad' cholesterol - low-density lipoprotein (LDL) and a reduction in the 'good' cholesterol - high-density lipoprotein (HDL) which is one of the contributory factors to increased risk of cardiovascular events in menopause.(2)

**General nutritional recommendations** are around maintaining a healthy weight, cardiac health, bone health, reducing inflammation and reducing carbohydrates. A Mediterranean style diet with plenty of olive oil (an anti-inflammatory) is often recommended with plenty of variety in vegetables and pulses for optimising gut biome. This type of diet is generally low in processed foods, meat, dairy, sugar and salt and high in fresh seasonal vegetables, beans, wholegrains, nuts and seeds. This type of diet is generally regarded as a low glycaemic (favouring a slow release of glucose into the bloodstream), helping not only with weight control but also cognition and mood.



If you are having hot flushes and/or night sweats then try and cut out or reduce your sugar, alcohol and caffeine intake as these add fuel/heat into the body. Try stopping for 3 weeks and see if it makes a difference – you can try and eliminate one at a time if you prefer.

## 2. Exercise – because your body deserves it

Exercise is believed to be one of the most important things that anyone can do to improve longevity and physical and emotional health. In menopause, the general recommendations are to work within your limits and build up, if you need to, until you are doing at least 150 minutes a week of moderate aerobic activity, plus strength exercises 2 or more days a week to work major muscle groups.

There are many benefits; exercise lowers the risk of coronary heart disease by up to 35%, helps maintain bone density, reduces the risk of many types of cancer, reduces the risk of other long-term conditions such as type 2 diabetes, heart disease, strengthens muscles, helps maintain a healthy weight, helps improve flexibility and stability which can prevent falls, improves sleep and can help lift mood (3).





The British Menopause Society recommends Regular weight bearing exercise e.g. walking, skipping, jogging, tennis. They also say to vary your exercise and to keep fit and flexible to reduce risk of falling e.g. Yoga, Tai Chi

**Do what you enjoy  
and don't worry about what other people think!**

### 3. Managing stress levels – Make time for yourself - you are worth it

Oestrogen and progesterone(O&P), our calming hormones, help protect us from cortisol (a stress hormone) so as O&P come crashing down in menopause, the effects of cortisol are felt more and anxiety is a really common symptom. Menopause can often happen in conjunction with children leaving home, a negative perception of ageing and possible worries of ageing parents. So no wonder we need to look after our emotional wellbeing at this time too.

It is worth spending time to reflect and be honest with yourself about your stressors and lifestyle. If life feels like it is a struggle, you can then look at making positive changes to help improve emotional wellbeing. Ideally, have regular reflexology and spend at least 10 minutes a day on relaxation techniques such as meditation, mindfulness, journaling or writing down 3 things you are grateful for each day. Make this a positive act, slumping in front of the TV doesn't count. It needs to be a time for an activity that takes you out of your head and into your body.

It is so important to take care of our mental health as in women the rate peaks between the age of 45-54 years old, and the most common issue is mixed anxiety and depression (4). If anxiety and/or depression are affecting your daily life then you should talk to your GP.

#### Daily activities for Emotional Wellbeing

- **Daily stress busters** – meditation, yoga, journal, walking etc
- **Exercise** – is a cornerstone of emotional wellbeing
- **Vision boards** – place your dream on a board, this primes the brain looks for opportunities
- **Journaling / 3 gratitude's** – allows you brain to focus on positives
- **Look after blood sugar levels**
- **Reduce/Avoid caffeine and alcohol**
- **Treat yourself** – because you are worth it!
- **Do something creative**
- **Laugh and smile as much as you can**
- **Talk to friends, family or professionals** – about how you are feeling







#### 4. Good Quality Sleep

It is well documented that too little sleep has detrimental effects on mental health, cardiac health, cognitive function and more and we should be having around 7 hours of sleep a night. In the menopause transition, sleep disturbance is common and this is thought to be associated with falling hormones but is also affected by hot flushes or night sweats, anxious thoughts, less deep sleep and frequent urination which can all occur with reduced oestrogen levels.



Progesterone has sleep-inducing effects on brain pathways which diminish in the menopause transition and also melatonin, which controls our sleep-wake cycles, decreases with age and can further disrupt sleep. (5)

Reflexology has been shown to be a useful intervention to relieve fatigue and promote sleep (6) and should go alongside a good bedtime routine.

#### Sleep advice

- Set a nightly wind-down routine – e.g. reading, bath, meditation etc
- Switch off anything with a screen or LED display in your bedroom
- A bedroom is for sleeping in – no tv, phone etc
- Keep the room cool - ideally around 18°C
- De-clutter your bedroom and make your bed (19% improved sleep)
- Sleep in complete darkness to encourage sleep neurotransmitters serotonin and melatonin

#### 6. Find enjoyment and purpose in life

Although in the UK 80% of women do experience symptoms in perimenopause and menopause, it can also be a time for women to reframe their lives and to decide who they want to be for the rest of their lives.

So rather than talking about empty nest syndrome, this can be reframed as an opportunity to find a new hobby or interest, contact old friends, develop a new exercise routine etc.

Maud Mead (anthropologist) describes her own positive experience of giving up PMS for PMZ (post-menopausal zest).

**I am not saying it is always easy to change habits –**

*but even small changes can have a significant impact on wellbeing*



## Reflexology and Menopause

There are so many symptoms associated with menopause that this can make research tricky. However, there is good news, as we do have some studies showing that reflexology is beneficial for some menopausal symptoms including:

- Reflexology is an effective therapy for sleep disorders and hot flushes in menopause (7)
- *Reflexology can be effective in decreasing vasomotor problems and increasing quality of life in the menopausal period (8)*
- The findings indicated that the foot reflexology technique can be effective for reducing women's depression during menopause. (9)

However, seeing a reflexologist who is trained in Reflexology for Menopause means you will get optimum care. Your therapist will be interested to hear about how menopause is affecting you, as everyone's experience is very different, and they will want to know about the symptoms you are experiencing as this will allow them to plan their reflexology specifically for you.

Reflexologists support women not only by offering the reflexology but by maintaining unconditional positive regard, non-judgmental listening, and are able to share knowledge if you want to know more about lifestyle changes.

**We want you to come away with improved physical and emotional wellbeing and to be the best that you can be!**

### **How often do I need to have reflexology?**

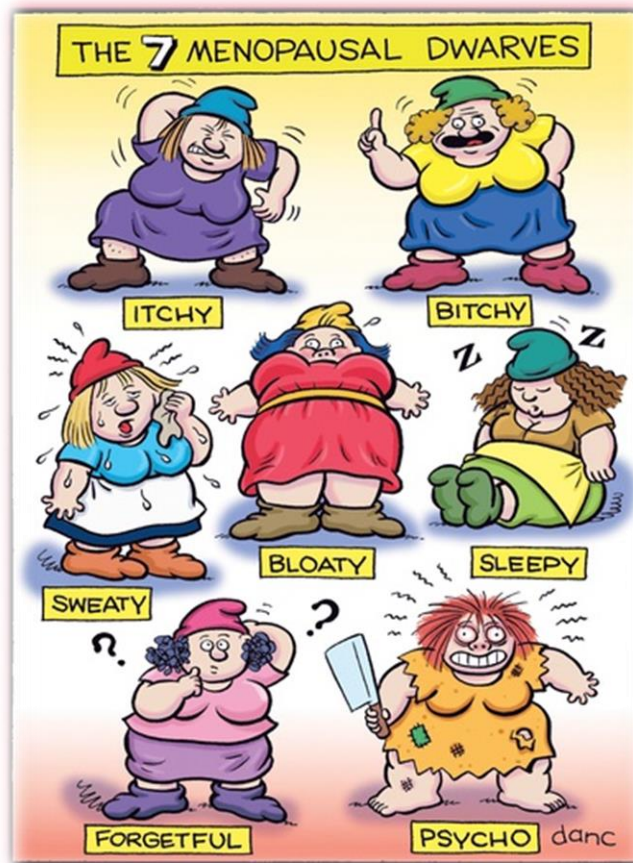
As with all complementary therapies there is a cumulative effect so if you are able to have a few treatments close together you should see quicker results. In an ideal world we would recommend 4-6 treatments a week apart and then a couple fortnightly with the aim to continue with monthly treatments for top ups.

We do appreciate that it is not often an ideal world so let your therapist know what suits you best. Even monthly treatments can be beneficial.

This does mean that there needs to be some commitment to booking a few treatments to see the full effect of how you will benefit from reflexology.

**Everybody responds differently to reflexology – the only way to know how you will benefit is to try it!**

## May these times become a thing of the past!



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