

Menopause Nutrition Guide

Prepared by the Midlife and Menopause Society of Zambia

Nourish Your Body. Support Your Energy. Thrive Through Menopause.

Menopause is a natural stage of life, but changing hormone levels can influence sleep, appetite, body composition, bone health, cardiovascular health, mood and energy.

There is no single “menopause diet”. The most helpful approach is to build a varied, nutrient-rich eating pattern that supports your **bones, heart, muscles, brain, gut and overall wellbeing**.

Small, sustainable changes can make a meaningful difference.

Your Menopause Nutrition Priorities

1. Build meals around protein

Protein helps maintain muscle mass and strength, which becomes increasingly important as we age.

Include a source of protein at each meal:

- Fish and seafood
- Eggs
- Chicken and lean meats
- Greek yoghurt and other dairy foods
- Cottage cheese
- Beans and lentils
- Chickpeas
- Tofu, tempeh and other soya foods
- Nuts and seeds

Simple goal: Ask yourself, “*Where is my protein?*” when planning each meal.

Pairing protein with fibre-rich carbohydrates and vegetables can also help create satisfying meals and support steadier energy.

2. Eat plenty of plants

Aim for a colourful variety of:

- Vegetables
- Fruit
- Beans and pulses
- Whole grains
- Nuts and seeds
- Herbs and spices

A Mediterranean-style eating pattern is a useful model: vegetables, fruit, whole grains, legumes, fish, nuts, seeds and unsaturated fats such as olive oil form the foundation.

A balanced diet rich in whole foods can support cardiovascular health, healthy weight management and general wellbeing.

Try to “eat the rainbow”

Different coloured plant foods provide different vitamins, minerals and protective plant compounds.

3. Protect your bones with calcium + vitamin D

Oestrogen levels fall during menopause, and bone loss can accelerate around the menopause transition.

Calcium and vitamin D are therefore particularly important, alongside weight-bearing and resistance exercise.

Calcium-rich foods include:

- Milk
- Yoghurt
- Cheese
- Calcium-fortified plant milks
- Calcium-set tofu
- Sardines and other fish eaten with bones
- Kale and other leafy green vegetables
- Some fortified cereals and breads

Many healthy adults can obtain adequate calcium through food. UK guidance commonly uses **700 mg per day** as the adult reference intake, although individual requirements can differ.

Vitamin D

Vitamin D helps the body absorb calcium and supports healthy bones and muscles.

A commonly recommended supplement is **10 micrograms (400 IU) of vitamin D daily**, although recommendations vary by country, season, sun exposure and individual circumstances.

If you have osteoporosis, limited sun exposure, a condition affecting vitamin D absorption, or another risk factor, ask your healthcare professional whether you need a different dose.

4. Choose healthy fats

Don't be afraid of dietary fat. The type of fat matters.

Choose more:

- Extra-virgin olive oil
- Avocado
- Nuts
- Seeds
- Oily fish
- Nut and seed butters

Oily fish such as salmon, sardines, mackerel and trout provide omega-3 fatty acids and are valuable additions to a balanced diet.

5. Make fibre your friend

Fibre supports digestive and cardiovascular health and helps meals feel more satisfying.

Good sources include:

- Oats
- Wholegrain bread and cereals
- Brown rice
- Quinoa
- Beans

- Lentils
- Chickpeas
- Vegetables
- Fruit
- Nuts
- Seeds
- Ground flaxseed

Increase fibre gradually and drink enough fluid to help prevent constipation.

6. Consider soya and other phytoestrogen-containing foods

Foods containing phytoestrogens include:

- Tofu
- Tempeh
- Edamame
- Soya milk
- Lentils
- Chickpeas
- Flaxseed
- Whole grains

Some women may find that regularly eating soya foods helps with hot flushes, although the evidence is not strong enough to guarantee an effect for everyone. The BMS notes that evidence for dietary phytoestrogens remains limited.

Food first: whole soya foods are preferable to relying on high-dose phytoestrogen supplements.

7. Support steady energy

Feeling tired is common during the menopause transition, but nutrition is only one piece of the puzzle. Sleep, stress, physical activity, medical conditions and menopause symptoms can all influence energy.

Try building meals around:

Protein + fibre-rich carbohydrate + vegetables/fruit + healthy fat

For example:

Breakfast: Greek yoghurt + berries + oats + seeds

Lunch: Lentil and vegetable soup + wholegrain bread + avocado

Dinner: Salmon + roasted vegetables + quinoa

Snack: Apple + nut butter

Regular meals and balanced snacks can be particularly helpful if long gaps between meals leave you feeling tired or hungry.

8. Reduce ultra-processed foods without banning them

You do not need a perfect diet.

Instead, aim to make minimally processed, nutrient-rich foods the foundation of your eating pattern and reduce your reliance on foods high in added sugars, salt and saturated fat.

Examples to have less often include:

- Sugary drinks
- Sweets and confectionery
- Highly processed snack foods
- Pastries
- Processed meats
- Frequent takeaway meals

Think addition, not deprivation: add more vegetables, protein, whole grains, fruit, nuts and pulses rather than simply focusing on foods to remove.

9. Identify your personal hot-flush triggers

Certain foods and drinks can trigger or worsen hot flushes or night sweats in some women.

Potential triggers include:

- Alcohol
- Caffeine
- Spicy foods
- Very hot drinks

However, triggers are individual. You do not necessarily need to eliminate these foods unless you notice a connection.

Try a symptom experiment

For two weeks, record:

Food/drink → symptom → severity → time of day

This can help you identify your own patterns rather than following unnecessary food restrictions.

10. Stay hydrated

Thirst can sometimes be mistaken for hunger, and dehydration can contribute to tiredness and headaches.

Keep water available throughout the day.

Other drinks can contribute to your fluid intake, but remember that alcohol and high-caffeine drinks may aggravate symptoms for some women.

Supplements: What Do You Actually Need?

Supplements can be useful when there is a nutritional deficiency or increased requirement, but **more is not necessarily better**.

The British Menopause Society states that the routine dietary supplement recommended for women during perimenopause and menopause is vitamin D, with additional supplements used when there is a clinical need.

Vitamin D

Why?

Supports bone and muscle health and helps calcium absorption.

Typical guidance:

10 micrograms (400 IU) daily is a common general recommendation in UK guidance, although individual needs may differ.

Ask your healthcare professional if you may need a different dose.

Calcium

Why?

Essential for maintaining healthy bones.

Food first:

Most people should aim to obtain calcium through a varied diet.

Calcium supplements may be appropriate if dietary intake is insufficient or if a healthcare professional identifies a specific need.

Vitamin B12

Vitamin B12 is important for red blood cells, nerves and normal energy metabolism.

Consider discussing B12 with a healthcare professional if you:

- Follow a vegan diet
- Eat very little animal-derived food
- Have been diagnosed with a B12 deficiency
- Take medicines that can affect B12 absorption
- Have symptoms or medical conditions that increase your risk of deficiency

People following vegan diets need particular attention to B12, calcium, iron and omega-3 intake.

Iron

Iron is essential for healthy red blood cells and oxygen transport.

Do not routinely take iron supplements just because you are menopausal.

If you have heavy periods, persistent fatigue or another reason to suspect iron deficiency, speak to a healthcare professional about testing before supplementing.

Omega-3

Omega-3 fats are important nutrients and can be obtained from oily fish such as salmon, sardines and mackerel.

If you do not eat fish, plant sources such as flaxseed, chia seeds, walnuts and rapeseed oil provide ALA, while algae-based supplements can provide DHA/EPA.

Discuss supplements with your healthcare professional if you take blood-thinning medication or have a medical condition.

What About Magnesium?

Magnesium is involved in many processes in the body, including normal muscle and nerve function.

Good food sources include:

- Nuts
- Seeds
- Whole grains
- Beans
- Lentils
- Dark leafy greens

Food sources are the preferred starting point unless a healthcare professional identifies a reason for supplementation.

What About Herbal Menopause Supplements?

Be cautious with products marketed as “menopause support”, “hormone balance” or “natural HRT”.

Natural does not automatically mean safe.

Products such as black cohosh, red clover, evening primrose oil and other herbal preparations have varying levels of evidence, quality and safety data. Some supplements can interact with medicines or may not be appropriate for people with particular medical conditions.

Always tell your doctor, pharmacist or menopause specialist about supplements you are taking.

A Simple Menopause Plate

At most main meals, aim for:

 **½ plate**

Vegetables and/or salad

 **¼ plate**

Protein

Fish, eggs, chicken, beans, lentils, tofu or yoghurt

 **¼ plate**

High-fibre carbohydrates

Wholegrain rice, quinoa, oats, potatoes, wholegrain pasta or bread

 **Add**

A small portion of healthy fat

Olive oil, avocado, nuts or seeds

And include a calcium-rich food regularly.

A Sample Day

Breakfast

Porridge made with calcium-fortified milk or soya milk, topped with berries, walnuts and ground flaxseed.

Lunch

Large mixed salad with chickpeas, roasted vegetables, wholegrain bread and olive oil dressing.

Snack

Greek yoghurt or fortified soya yoghurt with fruit.

Dinner

Grilled salmon, lentils or tofu with broccoli, leafy greens and roasted sweet potato.

Evening

Water or a caffeine-free drink if desired.

Your Menopause Nutrition Checklist

- ☐ I include protein regularly throughout the day.
 - ☐ I eat a variety of vegetables and fruit.
 - ☐ I regularly eat whole grains and other high-fibre foods.
 - ☐ I include calcium-rich foods.
 - ☐ I get enough vitamin D for my individual needs.
 - ☐ I include healthy fats.
 - ☐ I eat oily fish or another source of omega-3 fats.
 - ☐ I drink enough fluids.
 - ☐ I limit ultra-processed foods most of the time.
 - ☐ I have considered whether caffeine, alcohol or spicy foods trigger my symptoms.
 - ☐ I avoid taking unnecessary high-dose supplements.
 - ☐ I discuss supplements and herbal products with a healthcare professional when appropriate.
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Most Important: Don't Aim for Perfect

Menopause nutrition is not about restrictive diets, detoxes or trying to “balance your hormones” with a particular food.

It is about **nourishing yourself well**.

Prioritise:

Protein. Plants. Fibre. Calcium. Vitamin D. Healthy fats. Hydration. Variety.

Combine good nutrition with regular resistance and weight-bearing exercise, restorative sleep and support for your mental wellbeing.

Your nutritional needs are individual. If you have a medical condition, take medication, have osteoporosis, follow a restrictive diet, have unexplained fatigue or are considering supplements, seek personalised advice from a doctor or registered dietitian.

Medical Disclaimer

This guide is intended for general educational and wellbeing purposes and is not a substitute for individual medical or nutritional advice. Dietary and supplement requirements vary between individuals. Speak with a qualified healthcare professional before starting supplements, particularly if you take medication, have an existing medical condition, are pregnant or could become pregnant, or have been diagnosed with a nutritional deficiency.

