

A NUTRITION GUIDE FOR MENOPAUSE

This guide provides vegan-friendly nutrition tips for people going through the menopause. These tips complement the general information available in the [nutrition overview](#) on our website.

WHAT IS THE MENOPAUSE?

Menopause is when menstruation stops permanently due to loss of ovarian activity. You are considered “menopausal or post-menopausal” when you have not had any periods or bleeding for one year. There are a number of menopausal stages, and the average age for people to enter the

menopause is 51, however some may experience early menopause between 40-45 years old. Premature ovarian insufficiency can lead to an earlier menopause under the age of 40 and requires specialist intervention and tests¹.

WHAT HAPPENS DURING PERIMENOPAUSE AND MENOPAUSE?

Your body goes through various changes as you enter the menopause. Perimenopause is the period of transition from a normal ovulatory and menstrual cycle, to post-menopausal, when ovulation and menstruation stops². The range and severity of symptoms differ between people and usually last around 4-7 years, but can last up to 12 years for some¹. Symptoms of perimenopause and menopause are wide-ranging and can include the following¹

- Heavy and/or irregular periods
- Loss of fertility
- Reduced libido
- Vaginal dryness
- Urinary tract infections (UTIs)
- Incontinence
- Higher blood pressure
- Changes in blood cholesterol
- Hot flushes/night sweats
- Weight gain
- Muscle and joint pain
- Headaches
- Poor concentration
- Mood changes such as depression and anxiety
- Digestive issues³

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Reduced oestrogen levels have a lasting effect on the body, including a higher risk of heart disease and osteoporosis. Osteoporosis is a condition that weakens bones and increases risk of fractures, and risk is increased during the menopause due to increased calcium losses from bones due to a loss of oestrogen⁴. Therefore, nutritional considerations

to support heart health and bone health are still important during the menopause. Many benefits associated with following plant-based diets are of particular relevance during the menopause, including managing symptoms and addressing the increased risk of heart disease and osteoporosis.

Heart health

Following a plant-based diet may reduce your risk of heart disease.^{5,6,7} Here are some important dietary considerations when focusing on heart health.⁸

Fats	Replace saturated fats, like coconut, shea and palm fats, with unsaturated fats, such as peanuts, nuts, seeds, avocado and small amounts of vegetable (rapeseed) or olive oils and spreads.
Salt	Aim for less than 6g a day, taking into account salt that is already present in foods – check labels aiming for less than 1.5g salt per 100g, and try not to add extra during cooking or at the table. Cooking with herbs, spices and lemon juice is a good way to add flavour without salt
Fibre	Aim to eat foods higher in fibre, such as brown rice, oats, beans, chickpeas, lentils, fruit, vegetables, flaxseed, chia seeds and wholegrain varieties of bread, breakfast cereal and pasta.
Fruit and vegetables	Aim to eat at least five portions of a variety of fruit and vegetables daily, including fresh, frozen, canned and dried options.
Alcohol	If you drink alcohol, aim for no more than 14 units per week spread across at least three days, with several alcohol-free days. ⁹

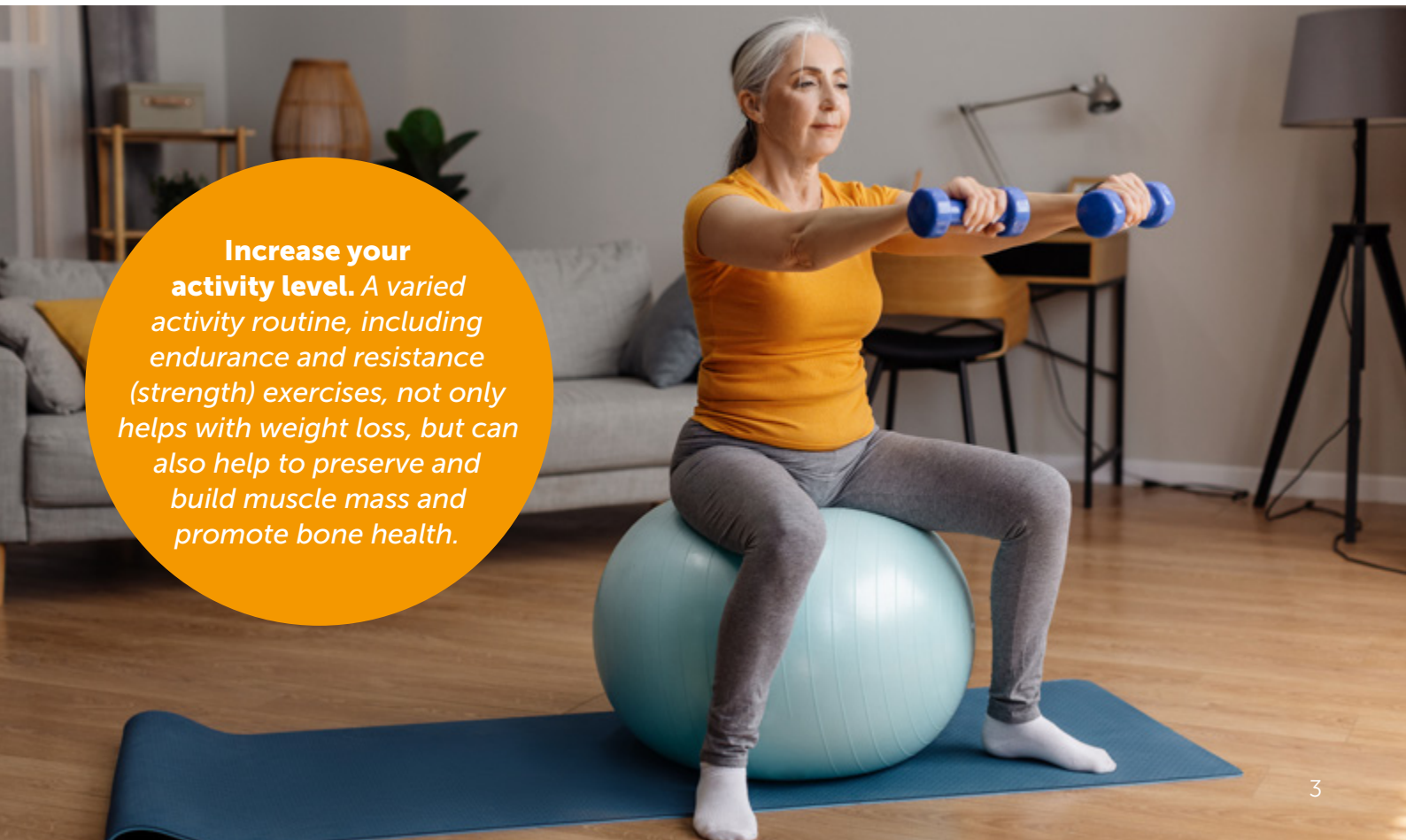
WEIGHT CHANGES

During the menopause, there is a reduction in muscle mass¹⁰. This means you may need fewer calories than previously required. Overconsumption of calories can lead to

unintentional weight gain. If this is the case, following a well-planned vegan diet based on healthy eating principles can help. Here are some tips to consider¹¹:

Starchy foods	Adjust your portion sizes by plating up a smaller portion of starchy food, such as bread, potatoes or rice, and adding more vegetables to fill half of your plate.
Protein	Have a good quality source of protein at each meal, like tofu, tempeh, kidney beans, chickpeas or lentils, to satisfy your hunger.
Hydration	Drink plenty of water or unsweetened beverages to keep hydrated as hunger can often be mistaken for thirst.
Fat and sugar	Avoid high fat and sugary food and drink ¹²
Physical activity	Increase your activity level. A varied activity routine, including endurance and resistance (strength) exercises, not only helps with weight loss, but can also help to preserve and build muscle mass and promote bone health. ¹³
Sustainable weight loss	Steady weight loss is recommended – aim for around one to two pounds (0.5 to 1 kilogram) per week.

Maintaining or working towards a healthy body composition is important in managing the risk of conditions such as heart disease, cancer and type 2 diabetes.



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BONE HEALTH

Everyone experiences a steady reduction in bone density during later life. However, changes can happen more rapidly in the decade after menstrual periods stop due to the drop in oestrogen, which increases the risk of osteoporosis and fractures.² Therefore, it is particularly important to follow bone health guidance during the menopause. Healthy exercise habits, a balanced diet and stopping smoking can help to keep your bones strong.

Calcium and vitamin D sources should be optimised during the menopause. Check that you are consuming calcium-rich food at least twice a day, such as fortified milk and yoghurt

alternatives, soya and linseed bread fortified with extra calcium, fortified ready oat cereal and calcium-set tofu.

Vitamin D is involved in calcium absorption. Our bodies can make this nutrient when our skin is exposed to sunlight. However, in the UK, there are concerns that we do not make enough to keep our bones and muscles healthy – supplementation is recommended for everyone from October to March as a minimum.^{14,15,16,17}

Check out our nutrient webpages for further information about how to get enough [calcium](#) and [vitamin D](#).

PHYTOESTROGENS

There is some evidence that consumption of phytoestrogens may relieve symptoms of the menopause because plant and human oestrogen structures are similar. Soya contains phytoestrogens and research suggests that consuming

around two servings per day as part of a balanced diet may reduce severity and frequency of hot flushes during the menopause.^{18,19,20} Here are examples of what you might aim to consume in a day:

Food	Amount	
Soya mince	100g	 1/4 dinner plate
Edamame beans	100g	 1 cup
Soya milk	2 x 250ml	 1 mug full
Soya milk + Soya yoghurt	250ml 200g	 1 mug full + 2/5 large pot
Firm tofu + Soya milk OR Soya yoghurt	100g 125g 150ml	 1/4 dinner plate 1 small glass 1 small pot

It is thought to be more beneficial to spread your phytoestrogen intake across the day to maintain the level in your blood. However, be mindful that effectiveness may differ

from person to person, and it can take two to three months to see benefits.



BEYOND FOOD

Hormone replacement therapy (HRT) is a popular treatment used by many to reduce menopausal symptoms and there is evidence that HRT can be cardioprotective when started within ten years of menopause or before the age of 60.²¹ Some may consider HRT if menopausal symptoms are having a negative impact on quality of life and lifestyle changes aren't possible or haven't helped.

Some HRT options may not be vegan, however the definition of veganism recognises that it is not always possible or practicable to avoid animal use in a non-vegan world. Sometimes, you may have no alternative to

medication manufactured using animal products. Even if other medications are available, they may be less effective, have more side effects or be unsuitable for your healthcare needs. While it can be upsetting to compromise our vegan beliefs, we encourage vegans to look after their health and that of others, enabling them to be effective advocates for veganism.²²

If you are considering HRT, please discuss which option is best for you, considering your health needs and medical history, with a healthcare professional.

FURTHER INFORMATION

- Visit our webpage about veganism and medications for general information.
- Detailed guidance about bone health is available on our website.

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Produced by The Vegan Society and expertly reviewed by Rohini Bajekal, Nutritionist and Board-Certified Lifestyle Medicine Professional.

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