

## Eating Guidelines for Menopause

Menopause is part of the natural aging process of a woman's body.

Menopause officially occurs 12 months after your last menstrual period. The process leading up to menopause is called peri-menopause. This is the time you begin having menopausal signs and symptoms, even though you still menstruate. Your hormone levels rise and fall unevenly, and you may have hot flashes and other symptoms. Peri-menopause can last four to five years or longer. Post-menopause is the time after you have reached menopause.

The physical and emotional symptoms of menopause can disrupt sleep, cause low energy and — at least indirectly — trigger mood swings and feelings of sadness and loss. Because of these symptoms, many women seek treatment in the form of medication, supplements and dietary changes. The following suggestions will help you to feel your best and maintain optimal health as your body changes.



### Steps you can take

- Eat a healthy and balanced diet by following "Eating Well with Canada's Food Guide". (For a copy visit [www.healthcanada.gc.ca/foodguide](http://www.healthcanada.gc.ca/foodguide) or phone 1-800-OCANADA). This will help you to meet your nutrition needs, keep your energy levels up and you feeling your best.
- Follow a heart healthy diet. After menopause, your risk of heart disease increases. Limit saturated fat, trans fat, and cholesterol. Replace these with healthy mono- and poly-unsaturated fat. See the "Additional Resources" section for where to get more information about heart healthy eating.
- Maintain a healthy weight. Weight gain has been found to increase with age, but does not seem to be caused by menopause. Keeping a healthy weight decreases your risk of heart disease and other problems. If you have unwanted weight gain,

talk to your doctor, who can refer you to a Registered Dietitian for diet counselling.

- Meet your calcium and vitamin D needs. This is important to maintain healthy bones and prevent bone loss that can happen after menopause. Good food sources of calcium include dairy products (milk, yogurt and cheese), fortified soy and rice beverages, fortified juices, and fish canned with the bones. Good food sources of vitamin D include milk, fortified soy and rice beverages, fortified juices, and fatty fish. If you do not eat these foods every day, discuss the use of a daily supplement with your doctor or registered dietitian. Canada's Food Guide recommends that all adults over the age of 50 years take a daily vitamin D supplement of 400 IU. For more information about calcium and vitamin D, refer to "Additional Resources" below.
- Be physically active every day. Physical activity helps to maintain a healthy weight, keep bones strong and energy levels up, and to decrease risk of heart disease and other age-related complications. When you exercise, think FIT: "F" for frequency, "I" for intensity or pace, and "T" for time. All are important, but frequency comes first so aim for a small amount of exercise every day. As you get used to moving more, you can quicken the pace and keep going a little longer.

### What about soy and flax?

Both soy and flax contain phytoestrogens, estrogen-like compounds found in plants. The level of estrogen in the body decreases in menopause. This causes the unpleasant side effects of menopause. Women often try soy and flax in food or pills to help relieve these side effects. So far, however, studies have not proven that soy and flax in food or pills help. Even though they may not help to reduce menopausal symptoms, soy and flax seeds are healthy foods. You may still want to include them in your diet\*.

\*If you have had breast cancer, talk to your doctor or registered dietitian before adding soy or flax foods to your diet.



## Additional Resources

- HealthLinkBC File #68a Heart Healthy Eating  
[www.HealthLinkBC.ca/healthfiles/hfile68a.stm](http://www.HealthLinkBC.ca/healthfiles/hfile68a.stm)
- HealthLinkBC File #68e Food Sources of Calcium and Vitamin D  
[www.HealthLinkBC.ca/healthfiles/hfile68e.stm](http://www.HealthLinkBC.ca/healthfiles/hfile68e.stm)
- Canadian Physical Activity Guidelines  
<http://www.csep.ca/english/view.asp?x=804>
- Dietitian Services Fact Sheets available by mail (call 8-1-1) or at  
[www.dialadietitian.org](http://www.dialadietitian.org):
  - Lifestyles Steps for Healthy Weight Loss - Getting Started
  - Lifestyle Steps for Healthy Weight Loss - Taking Action
  - Resources for Healthy Lifestyles
- Menopause and U: [http://menopauseandu.ca/index\\_e.aspx](http://menopauseandu.ca/index_e.aspx)

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