

Empower - Menopause and Cancer Survivorship Pathway

Top lifestyle tips for menopause after cancer

The menopause is often time women want to take stock of eating habits and begin some gradual changes to help ensure the best health possible while entering a new phase of life. Taking steps to achieve a healthy diet, good fitness levels and an ideal body weight can help to ease immediate symptoms such as hot flashes and improve longer term health, such as reducing the risk of developing osteoporosis (brittle bones) or heart disease.

These tips should give some easy ideas to get you started in the right direction and the resource list below will provide further sources of evidence based advice for further reading.

Body composition

From around the age of 35-40 you start to lose muscle mass, it is a natural part of aging. Muscle mass burns calories and so you will burn fewer calories over the day when you have less muscle. This can lead to weight gain as you get older. Two tips for enhancing your muscles at any age are as follows.

- 1) Have adequate protein in your meals. Spacing protein out over mealtimes is important. Good sources of protein include eggs, fish, beans, pulses, legumes, meat, tofu, soya mince, nuts, and seeds. Protein is also found in dairy products such as milk, cheese, and yoghurts.
- 2) Aim to meet the recommendations for exercise which are at least 30 minutes a day of moderate activity on 5 days a week, or 150 minutes a week. Focus on aerobic activity, muscle-strengthening, and balance.

You may notice more weight is gained around your waist. After menopause women's body shape can change from holding weight around the hips and thighs (pear shape) to holding weight around the abdomen (apple shape). Help minimise loss of muscle and stay strong by doing exercise regularly and watching portions size and food choices.

Digestive Health

Changing hormones of the menopause may increase any tendency towards sluggish digestions, bloating and constipation. Research tells us that having a high fibre diet and drinking plenty of fluids can help with this. Look for 'high fibre' or 'bran' on labels and check the nutrition panel. Foods with at least 3g/100g means they are a source of fibre. Foods with 6g/100g means they are a high fibre food. Fruit, vegetables, beans, and pulses are great sources of fibre too. There is research to suggest women experience higher rates of irritable bowel syndrome after menopause. First line advice leaflet on the management of irritable

bowel syndrome is included in the resource list below. Seek help from a dietitian if symptoms persist.

Bone Health

During the menopause transition, the loss of bone mineral density is increased. This increases the risk of developing osteoporosis. Boosting your intake of calcium and having adequate vitamin D is important.

Aim to include a low-fat dairy food (or calcium fortified plant alternative) in your diet 2-3 times per day (e.g., low fat milk, low fat yoghurt). Tinned fish, tofu and dried figs are non-dairy alternative sources. It is recommended to take a Vitamin D supplement (15ug) daily, all year, if you are over the age of 65 years of age or have a dark skin ethnicity. If you are under the age of 65 years then you are advised to take Vitamin D supplement from September to May.

Hot Flashes

For many women specific things trigger a hot flash such as hot drinks, alcohol, spicy food or caffeine. Try work out your dietary and lifestyle triggers and minimise these if you find a specific pattern. Aiming for a healthy body weight has been shown in large scale observational studies to be helpful in reducing vasomotor symptoms such as hot flashes and night sweats.

There is some evidence that omega-3 in combination with Vitamin E may improve vasomotor symptoms such as hot flashes and night sweats. From a dietary prospective oily fish are a great source of omega 3 fats as well as protein, and are good for heart health too. Oily fish include salmon, fresh tuna (not tinned), mackerel, trout, anchovies. Aim for 2 portions of oily fish per week which would be about 140g or a palm size portion or a small tin of fish. Food first approach is advised but if you don't eat fish and chose to trial an omega 3 supplement. The recommendation for adults equals 250-500mg per day of omega 3. Vitamin E helps to maintain healthy skin and eyes, and helps to strengthen your immune system. It can be found in rapeseed and olive oil as well as nuts and sunflower seeds.

Plant oestrogens, called phytoestrogens, have a structure like human oestrogens but have a much weaker effect in the human body. Isoflavones are a type of phytoestrogen found in foods including soya beans, soy food. There has been a lot of interest in the benefit of soya in controlling hot flashes. But what is the evidence? The European Food Safety Authority evaluated studies that investigated the benefit of soy isoflavones on hot flushes and night sweats. They reported that the evidence currently available was not sufficient to make any authorized health claims on soy and isoflavones in food or food supplements. It seems phytoestrogens may work better for controlling hot flashes for some women than others which may be down to differences in gut bacteria and how we process the phytoestrogens in

soya products. Foods containing phytoestrogens (such as soya) are also beneficial for heart health so it may be worth trying them to see if you find a benefit if you enjoy them in your diet. Examples are tofu, soya milk, soya yoghurts and edamame beans.

Previously, women with hormone dependent cancers were previously advised to avoid soya containing foods. However, no human studies have shown a link between eating soya or soya products and an increased risk of cancer. There is now more evidence to show that an increased intake of soya-containing foods is safe to consume and can even reduce the risk of certain cancers, including breast cancer.

Stay hydrated.

Many people do not drink enough fluid and can be slightly dehydrated much of the time. This can increase the risk of headaches and fatigue. Decreasing oestrogen levels increases collagen loss and skin becomes drier and thinner. Eating well and staying hydrated are two simple ways to boost skin health. If you are well hydrated your urine will be pale straw colour- any darker than this and you need to drink more.

Heart Health.

As oestrogen levels drop cholesterol levels can rise. This increases the risk of heart disease. Steps to help lower cholesterol include:

- Reducing saturated fats is the single biggest support for reducing cholesterol. They are found in red meat, processed meat, butter, cream, pastry, cakes, biscuits, and many processed foods. Replace these with unsaturated fats like olive oil, rapeseed oil, avocados, olives, nuts, and seeds. Choose lower fat dairy foods and include fish (especially oily fish) 2-3 times per week. Fill up on fibre through having whole grains, vegetables, and fruit.
- Foods containing beta glucans are particularly good at reducing cholesterol levels. Beta Glucans are found in oats, barley, seaweed, and certain types of mushrooms such as oyster or shiitake mushrooms. Having 3.5g daily in your diet can help significantly reduce “bad” LDL cholesterol. In context 1.5 cups of cooked porridge = 3g beta glucans and 1 cup of pearl barley = 2.5g. Oats can be used to make porridge, overnight oats, porridge bread, bircher muesli. Barley is a great alternative to rice for lunches and dinners or can be added to soups or stews.
- In combination with a balanced diet, eating foods that provide you with 2–2.5g of plant sterols or stanols every day can have an additional cholesterol-lowering benefit. There are few good dietary sources of plant sterols and stanols. As a result, they have been added to certain foods, including margarines, spreads, soft cheeses, and

yoghurts. 1 mini yoghurt or dairy free drink, which contain all the recommended 2g/day.

Aim to eat 5-a-day.

Eating at least 5 portions of fruits and vegetables every day means that you are more likely to be getting enough fibre, vitamins, minerals and antioxidants which are important during menopause. One equivalent is approximately 80g or 3 heaped tablespoons of vegetables, a side bowl of salad, a couple of satsumas, an apple, or a bowl of vegetable soup. The more the better so 5 a day is the minimum intake suggested.

Links to Evidence Based Dietary Resources for Menopause

Breakthrough Cancer Research have an evidenced based information and recipe booklet on healthy eating for cancer survivors designed by cancer dietitians. This booklet is based on the World Cancer research fund recommendations on diet and lifestyle factors for cancer survivors. The booklet can be ordered from their website or downloaded from their website.

<https://breakthroughcancerresearch.ie/healthy-eating-for-cancer-survivors/>

Breakthrough Cancer Research have also developed an information booklet on the commons myths and misconceptions about diet and cancer. The booklet can be ordered from their website or downloaded from their website.

<https://breakthroughcancerresearch.ie/the-truth-behind-food-and-cancer/>

This is Go has a very helpful table of calcium rich food with the amount of calcium in each serving size! To access the link, one must create a profile. To create a profile, you can go to [this link](#).

<https://myprofile.thisisgo.ie/articles/diet-and-bone-health/>

World Cancer Research Fund download on fibre and how to meet 30g per day

<https://www.wcrf-uk.org/health-advice-and-support/health-advice-booklets/facts-about-fibre/>

The British Dietetic Association have a helpful factsheet on irritable bowel syndrome. This is first line dietary advise and if symptoms persist. Speak to your medical team and request a referral to a dietitian.

<https://www.bda.uk.com/resource/irritable-bowel-syndrome-diet.html>

The British Dietetic Association have a helpful factsheet on menopause.

<https://www.bda.uk.com/resource/menopause-diet.html>

Croi Cholesterol Factsheet

https://croi.ie/wp-content/uploads/2022/08/Croi-Cholesterol_2018.pdf

The British Dietetic Association have a helpful factsheet on bone health.

<https://www.bda.uk.com/resource/osteoporosis-diet.html>

Irish Vitamin D Guidelines

Under 65 years of age

https://www.fsai.ie/news_centre/press_releases/vitamin_D_report_14022023.html#:~:text=For%20healthy%20teenagers%20and%20adults,those%20of%20fair%2Dskinned%20ethnicity

Over 65 years of age

<https://www.fsai.ie/faq/vitaminD.html>