

PERIMENOPAUSE PROGRAMME

Blood Sugar Balance Nutrition & Lifestyle



THE APPROACH

What you do and eat every day affects your body, mind and how you create habits. The nutrition and lifestyle programme's five-pillar approach will provide practical, manageable advice and resources to help you make changes that support your health in perimenopause. You will be encouraged to explore activities and foods that are not just healthy but also bring you joy. Find out more about the five pillar approach below:



- YOU** Create new healthy habits that fit into your life.
- NOURISH** Eat wholesome foods that balance your blood sugar levels.
- NURTURE** Spend more time doing relaxing activities you enjoy.
- REST** Explore different ways to improve your sleep quality.
- PLAY** Add new, fun physical activities into your day.

PERIMENOPAUSE



Perimenopause is a woman's transition through her final reproductive years as ovulation slows down and eventually stops with the menopause. During perimenopause women's levels of the hormones oestrogen (estradiol) and progesterone fluctuate and gradually decline (as shown in figure 1 below).

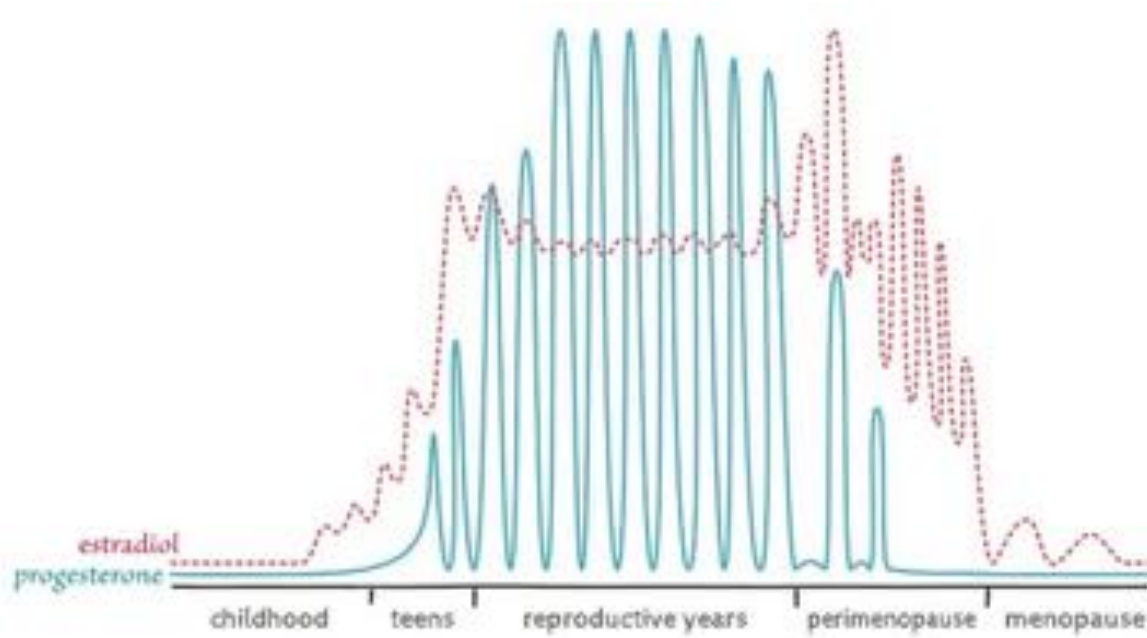


Figure 1: Levels of oestrogen (estradiol) and progesterone throughout a woman's reproductive cycle.

These hormonal changes can cause a diverse range of symptoms including hot flushes, brain fog, anxiety, low mood, poor sleep, fatigue, bloating, joint pain and weight gain. 75% of women experience some symptoms and 25% will experience severe symptoms which can profoundly affect their quality of life. Nutrition, sleep, relaxation and physical activity can help reduce the strain placed on the body by these hormonal changes, symptoms and the demands of daily life.

YOU

Creating healthy habits that fit into your life



Making changes can be challenging, however change is also something we desire and are committed to. The following strategies can help to make changing easier and more enjoyable:

Make small, manageable changes: start with just 5 minutes each day to get into the habit.

Do what you love: choose activities that you enjoy and be open to discovering something new.

Build new habits into your routine: such as walking to the shops or reading before bed.

Ask for support: do it with someone else, or ask a family member or friend to encourage you.

Be kind to yourself: don't feel disheartened if your good intentions don't go to plan, you will have another chance to get back on track at your next meal or the next day.

NOURISH

Nutrition



Optimal Nutrition

Your body requires fresh whole foods which contain an array of nutrients (vitamins, minerals, carbohydrates, proteins, fats and water) to support hormonal changes during perimenopause whilst also regulating its basic functions. Optimal nutrition involves balancing carbohydrates, protein and fats whilst minimising foods that place added stress on the body such as sugar, highly processed foods and alcohol. Whole foods all contain different nutrients, so eating a wide variety helps you to meet your nutrient needs and supports your gut health.



Aim for 30 different plant foods a week

including vegetables, fruit, pulses, wholegrains, herbs and spices. Increase your plant intake by trying to add just one more to each meal.

Carbohydrates and Blood Sugar Balance

As oestrogen levels decline in perimenopause your body becomes less efficient at clearing sugar from the bloodstream. Consuming high glycemic (GI) refined carbohydrates (white bread, pasta, pastries) cause your blood sugar levels to spike and then fall a few hours later (see figure 2). This can disrupt your hormones, lower your energy levels and mood, cause cravings and weight gain. Low glycemic wholegrain carbohydrates release energy slowly which keeps the body fuller for longer and can reduce mood swings.

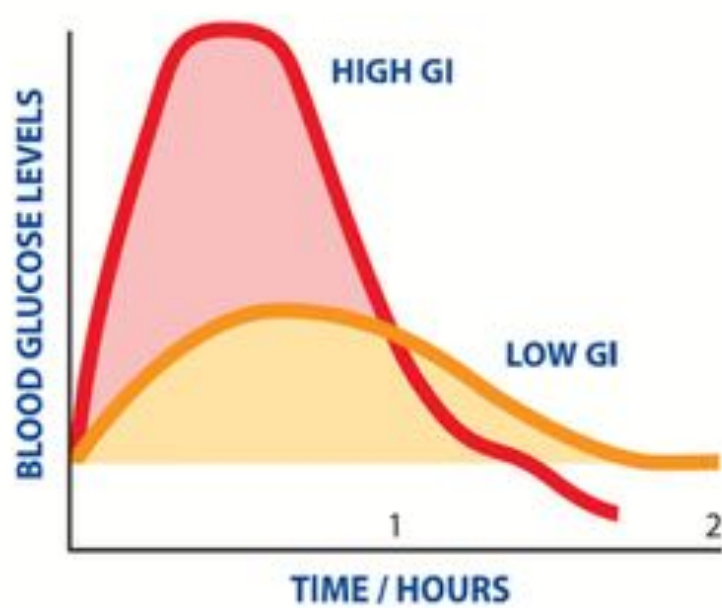


Figure 2: Blood sugar levels after high and low GI foods.



Tips for balancing your blood sugar levels

- Swap refined carbohydrates for wholegrain carbohydrates sourdough, spelt rye and seeded bread, jumbo oats, buckwheat flour, brown rice and quinoa.
- Eat a savoury or protein-based breakfast such as eggs or natural yoghurt and seeds.
- Eat carbohydrates with protein or fat such as fruit and nuts or toast and humous.
- Switch to +70% dark chocolate, which is lower in sugar, high in magnesium and polyphenols.
- Opt for whole fruit, especially berries which are full of nutrients and are low GI.

NOURISH

Nutrition

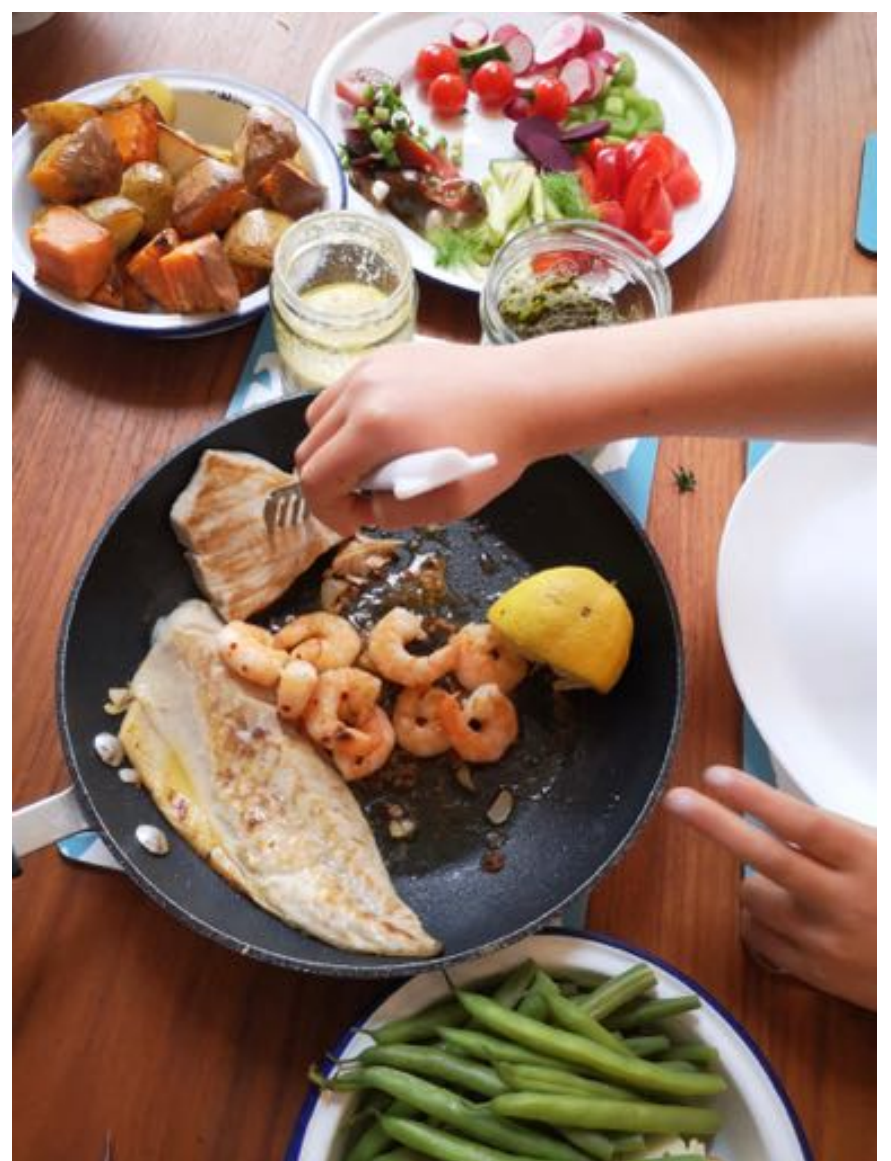


Protein

Protein helps you feel full, stabilises your blood sugar, improves your muscles and is required to produce hormones and neurotransmitters, which affect mood, motivation and concentration. Ground flaxseed and soy products (tofu, tempeh, miso and edamame) are high in protein and contain plant oestrogens which help balance oestrogen in the body.

Aim for a palm-sized portion of protein at each meal.

- A portion of protein is a chicken breast, 2 large eggs, half a block of tofu, a fillet of mackerel.
- Pulses (beans, lentils and chickpeas) and soy are plant proteins that support gut health and hormones.
- Choose unprocessed, organic foods which contain fewer chemicals that can disrupt hormones.
- Add nuts, seeds, cheese, eggs, greek yoghurt to your meals and snacks to increase the protein content.



Healthy Fats

Eating healthy fats help you feel full and balance your blood sugar which can support weight management. Fats are needed to absorb vitamins and your body requires essential omega 3 fatty acids (found in oily fish and linseed) for a healthy brain, heart, joints, hair, skin and immunity. Fats are especially important in perimenopause as they are needed to produce oestrogen and other hormones.

Include healthy fats such as avocados, olive oil, oily fish, nuts and seeds in all your meals.

- Eat oily fish (salmon, sardines, anchovies, mackerel, trout) twice a week.
- Choose full fat, unprocessed dairy products for more nutrients and no hidden sugars or additives.
- A portion is around 30g of nuts and seeds, a tablespoon of olive oil, half a small avocado.
- Keep a jar of ground linseed and other seeds in the fridge to sprinkle on porridge, soups, salads.

NOURISH

Nutrition



Greens

Leafy green vegetables are rich in nutrients that support your body in perimenopause including: magnesium for improved sleep and energy levels; vitamin C to produce collagen for healthy skin and ligaments and iron to support heavy bleeding and reduce tiredness. Cruciferous vegetables (broccoli, cabbage, cauliflower, kale, Brussel sprouts) help the liver to detoxify excess oestrogen which can cause painful or heavy periods, mood swings, bloating and headaches.



Aim to eat a couple of handfuls of green and cruciferous vegetables every day.

- Keep a bag of rocket, watercress or spinach to add to sandwiches, soups, salad and pasta.
- Add frozen spinach or a handful of green to curries, soups, dips and smoothies.
- Lightly steam, sauté and roast your greens to preserve the nutrients.
- Choose organic or locally farmed greens for more nutrients and fewer chemicals.

Alcohol

During perimenopause your body may find it harder to detoxify alcohol which can worsen the effects of alcohol. Alcohol can also disrupt blood sugar levels and exacerbate perimenopause symptoms including night sweats, poor sleep and tiredness.

Aim to have a few alcohol free days a week and consume fewer than 14 units per week.

- Focus on the benefits of not drinking and how much better you could feel.
- Use smaller glasses.
- Drink alcohol with a meal and plenty of water.
- Choose non-alcoholic or less sugary soft drinks, kombucha or soda and fresh lime.
- Switch to organic or biodynamic wines which contain fewer toxins.



NURTURE

Relaxation



In today's culture many women are busy and stressed with work, family and social commitments and often forget to spend time on activities that help them feel calm and relaxed. As stress can make perimenopausal symptoms worse it is important to allow your body to unwind. Spending time outdoors is particularly beneficial as it can help reduce stress, improve sleep and mood.



There are many simple, inexpensive activities that can help with relaxation, such as reading a magazine, listening to a podcast or music, gardening, drawing, knitting, taking a bath, picking flowers, coffee in the garden, meeting a friend, going to see an exhibition, playing with your children or pet, phoning a relative, walking or cycling, yoga, tai chi, breathing exercises or meditation.

Aim to:

- Do something relaxing that you love or try a new relaxing activity (which does not involve a screen). Start with 5 minutes a day and build up to 30 minutes a day.
- Spend 15 minutes a day outdoors.



REST

Sleep



Hot flushes, insomnia, and other sleep issues are common in perimenopause which can make it more difficult to get enough good quality sleep. Declining oestrogen and progesterone levels in perimenopause affect the body's natural sleep-wake cycle. Oestrogen helps control body temperature therefore fluctuations can cause night sweats which disrupt sleep. Lack of sleep can make perimenopause symptoms worse as it can affect your mood, focus, cognition and ability to cope with stress. Insufficient sleep also affects the hormones that control hunger and blood sugar levels which can cause cravings and weight gain.



Make getting a good night's sleep a higher priority with these sleep strategies:

1. Set your body clock by going to bed and getting up at the same time each day, even at weekends.
2. Plan to go to bed early enough to get at least 8 hours in bed.
3. Get some fresh air in the morning to reset your body clock with natural light.
4. Avoid caffeine (including coffee, tea, soft drinks and dark chocolate) after lunch as it can stay in your system for up to 10 hours.
5. Do some physical activity during the daytime, however try to limit strenuous exercise later in the evenings as it can make you feel alert.
6. Avoid alcohol, sugary drinks and heavy meals, especially later in the evening.
7. Avoid looking at screens at least an hour before bed-time as the blue light they emit can disrupt your body clock.
8. Do something relaxing to clear your mind before bed, such as reading a book, having a shower or bath, doing some gentle stretches, listening to music or meditating.
9. Make sure your bedroom and bedding is a comfortable temperature.
10. Switch off electronic devices, block out any lights or try a sleep mask if your room is too light.

PLAY

Physical Activity



Hormonal changes during perimenopause can affect your energy levels and weight which can be improved through physical activity. During exercise your body produces endorphins which can enhance your mood and lower stress. Reductions in oestrogen during perimenopause can affect the health of your bones and muscles, however strengthening exercises can help prevent muscle loss and support bone health.

It is important to increase your physical activity gradually and to notice how your body feels during and after exercise. Intense physical activity, such as high intensity interval training (HIIT) or long workouts, may not be suitable if you are stressed or tired as it can place added strain on the body. Instead consider physical activities that you also find relaxing, such as yoga, pilates, going for a walk, gentle cycle or swim.

Aim for:

- 5 minutes of physical activity per day during the first few days of the programme building up to 30 minutes of physical activity per day by the end of the programme. This could include any physical activity that you enjoy, want to try or is easy to fit into your routine, including: Walking, cycling, running, swimming, tennis, team sports, dancing, yoga, pilates, martial arts, aerobics.
- Muscle strengthening training twice a week, such as weights, exercises using resistance bands or your own body weight (sit-ups, push-ups), carrying heavy shopping, yoga, pilates, tai chi, digging, carrying children.

Tips

- Do something you enjoy or try something new.
- Seize opportunities to add more physical activity into your daily routine, going for a lunchtime walk, cycling to school or work, taking the stairs, gardening, housework, carrying heavy shopping.
- Make it a commitment by booking a class, meeting a friend for a walk, putting it in your diary.
- Exercise outdoors as it can help with sleep and stress and boost your Vitamin D levels.



NUTRITION

What will I eat and drink?



Enjoy as part of a balanced diet

Vegetables - a wide variety of colourful, cruciferous and green vegetables

Whole fruit - colourful, seasonal fruit, especially berries (including frozen)

Nuts - different types of whole nuts and nut butters (no added sugar or oil)

Seeds - ground flaxseed, chia, hemp, pumpkin, sunflower, sesame

Dairy - full-fat, unsweetened greek, natural yoghurt, cheese, unsalted butter

Wholegrain - pearl barley, quinoa, wild rice, buckwheat, oats, millet, spelt

Eggs - poached, scrambled, omelette, frittata, boiled, shashuka

Fish and seafood - fresh, smoked or tinned, especially oily fish

Pulses - dried, canned or packets of unsalted lentils, chickpeas, beans

Soy - tofu, tempeh, frozen edamame beans, miso, tamari

Meat - unprocessed, free-range or organic meat

Oils - extra virgin olive oil for everyday, coconut oil for baking and frying

Fermented foods - contain live cultures: sauerkraut, kimchi, kefir, sourdough

Herbs - fresh or dried basil, rosemary, mint, coriander, oregano, tarragon etc

Spices - fresh or dry ginger, turmeric, rosemary, cloves, cinnamon, cumin)

Sweetness - cinnamon, cacao, cocoa, +70% dark chocolate, fruit



Avoid and minimise

Alcohol - reduce your intake as much as possible.

Caffeine - avoid caffeine after midday especially if you aren't getting enough good quality sleep. You may also be sensitive to caffeine in dark chocolate.

Refined carbohydrates - bread and wraps which contain lots of added ingredients, white rice, white pasta, crisps, crackers.

Sweetened foods - cakes, biscuits, pastries, ice-cream, sweets, dried fruits, flavoured yoghurt, chocolate, deserts, cereals, flavoured porridge, sauces.

Highly processed meals - ready, frozen and microwave meals, chicken nuggets, ham, pizza, sausage rolls, fake meats, instant noodles.

Unhealthy oils - deep fried foods, sunflower and vegetable oil, margarine.

Sweetened drinks - fizzy, sugar-free drinks, sweeteners, added sugar, fruit juices, supermarket smoothies.