

Nutrition During Menopause

2026 EDITION



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We all know the importance of taking vitamins and minerals to support good health. You probably also know that whole foods are the best source of essential nutrients. However, it can be so difficult to make sure you are getting enough nutrition from the foods you eat. Nutritional supplements can help fill real gaps in our diet, so we get the nutrients our bodies need to stay strong and well.

During menopause, hormonal shifts cause changes in our bodies, and as a result, our nutritional needs change as well. This booklet will guide you through vitamins, minerals, and herbs to support your body through menopause.



Vitamins for Menopause



VITAMIN A

Why You Need It

Vitamin A is a fat-soluble vitamin that is essential for many processes, including healthy vision, normal immune function, cell growth, and healthy skin, and it plays a role in bone health.

Vitamin A helps keep skin and the moist linings of the body healthy, but more is not better: too much preformed vitamin A may weaken bone.

Where You Get It

You can get vitamin A from animal sources, such as liver, fish, eggs, and dairy. While plants don't contain preformed vitamin A, they do contain carotenoids, which your body can convert into vitamin A.

Pharmacist's note The upper limit for preformed vitamin A is 3,000 mcg RAE a day. If you smoke, do not take beta-carotene supplements.



VITAMIN B12

Why You Need It

Vitamin B12 is a water-soluble vitamin that our bodies need for red blood cell formation, DNA synthesis, and healthy nerve and brain function.

As we age, our bodies lose some ability to absorb vitamin B12. Low B12 in older adults is linked to cognitive problems such as memory loss and mental fatigue, and it is easy to check with a simple blood test.

Some studies also link low B12 to lower bone mineral density, though the evidence is mixed. Vitamin B12 deficiency can also cause numbness/tingling in the extremities, fatigue, muscle weakness, and anemia.

Where You Get It

Foods high in vitamin B12 include meat, eggs, poultry, and dairy products. Vegans and vegetarians should look for foods fortified with vitamin B12 or take a nutritional supplement.

Pharmacist's note Metformin and acid reducers lower vitamin B12 absorption.



VITAMIN B6

Why You Need It

Hormone fluctuations during menopause can wreak havoc on your mood, emotions and energy levels. Vitamin B6 is needed to make serotonin and other neurotransmitters that help regulate mood, and it plays a role in energy metabolism.

Where You Get It

Animal sources of vitamin B6 include beef liver, salmon, tuna, poultry, eggs, and milk. Plant sources include bananas, cantaloupe, papaya, chickpeas, potatoes, spinach, kale, and chard.

Pharmacist's note High-dose vitamin B6 supplements can cause nerve damage. Stay under 100 mg a day.



VITAMIN D

Why You Need It

Vitamin D is essential for bone health and plays roles in immune function, muscle function, and the regulation of inflammation. Its primary job is to help you absorb calcium, which is why deficiency can lead to soft, weak bones. Low vitamin D is also linked to cancer, diabetes, and heart disease, but large trials show supplements do not prevent these conditions.

In one large study, women who ate more vitamin D and calcium from food had a modestly lower risk of early menopause.

Where You Get It

Sunlight is the best source of natural vitamin D. A little sun helps, but skin cancer risk means sunscreen matters, and many people, especially in winter, do not make enough vitamin D from sunlight. Few foods contain much vitamin D (mainly fatty fish, egg yolks, and fortified milk), so it can be hard to reach 600 IU a day from food alone. If your diet falls short, a modest supplement is a sensible way to close the gap.

Pharmacist's note The upper limit for vitamin D is 4,000 IU a day.



VITAMIN E

Why You Need It

Vitamin E is a fat-soluble vitamin that acts as an antioxidant that protects cells from free radical damage. It also supports immune function and helps keep cell membranes healthy, though supplements have not been shown to protect the heart.

In one small trial, 400 IU of vitamin E reduced hot flashes by about one a day, but the Menopause Society does not recommend it for hot flashes.

Where You Get It

Dietary sources of vitamin E include wheat germ, almonds, sunflower seeds, hazelnuts, avocados, broccoli, spinach, squash, and shellfish.

Pharmacist's note The upper limit for vitamin E is 1,000 mg a day. It adds to bleeding risk if you take a blood thinner.



Minerals & Other Nutrients for Menopause



CALCIUM

Why You Need It

Of course we know calcium is important for maintaining bone and skeletal health, but this mineral is also necessary for many vital processes in the body. Your nervous system, muscular system, and heart all need calcium to function properly. Your body keeps blood calcium steady, so when your diet runs short, it pulls calcium from bone.

During menopause, falling estrogen reduces calcium absorption and speeds up bone loss. This is why menopausal women have an increased risk of osteoporosis and other skeletal problems.

Where You Get It

Good sources include dairy, calcium-set tofu, canned salmon or sardines with bones, kale, bok choy, beans, almonds, and fortified foods.

Pharmacist's note Food first. The upper limit for calcium is 2,000 mg a day after age 50. If you take levothyroxine, take calcium at least 4 hours apart from it.



MAGNESIUM

Why You Need It

Magnesium and calcium are partners when it comes to building bones. Magnesium is needed for bone formation, and low magnesium intake is associated with lower bone density, especially in later life.

Magnesium also helps muscles and nerves relax after they contract, which is one reason it is often studied for sleep and anxiety in midlife. In fact, low magnesium intake is associated with fewer hours of sleep, decreased sleep quality, and a higher incidence of stress and anxiety.

Where You Get It

Magnesium is available in a wide variety of foods, including avocado, bananas, beans, broccoli, dark chocolate, fish, leafy greens, nuts and seeds, soybeans, and whole grains, such as oatmeal, rice, and quinoa.

Pharmacist's note The upper limit for magnesium from supplements is 350 mg a day. If you have kidney disease, check with your doctor first.

SELENIUM

Why You Need It

Selenium is part of antioxidant enzymes that help protect cells from free radical damage, but supplements have not been shown to prevent cancer or heart disease. It is also vital for thyroid function. Thyroid problems become more common in women as we age, so it makes sense to get enough selenium and iodine from food, and to ask your doctor for a thyroid test if you have symptoms. Selenium has not been shown to help hot flashes.

Where You Get It

One Brazil nut can cover your daily selenium; a handful a day can be too much. This mineral is also found in tuna, crab, and lobster.

Pharmacist's note The upper limit for selenium is 400 mcg a day. Keep Brazil nuts to one or two a day at most.



IODINE

Why You Need It

Iodine is known as a key mineral for thyroid health. Your thyroid uses iodine to make thyroid hormones, which help control metabolism, energy, heart rate, and body temperature. Because iodine deficiency is so common, table salt is often iodized, or fortified with iodine.

Symptoms of a sluggish thyroid include fatigue, depression, weight gain, poor concentration, hair loss, and feeling cold. Too much iodine, often from kelp supplements, can also upset the thyroid, so more is not better.

Where You Get It

Iodized salt, dairy, seaweed, cod, shrimp, tuna, eggs, prunes and lima beans all contain iodine.

Pharmacist's note The upper limit for iodine is 1,100 mcg a day. Kelp supplements can trigger thyroid problems.

ZINC

Why You Need It

Hormonal changes in menopause may cause dry skin, hair, nails and eyes. Zinc is needed for healthy skin, wound healing, and immune function. Low zinc levels have been linked to depressive symptoms in postmenopausal women, though supplements are not proven to help mood. Zinc also plays a role in bone formation, and women with osteoporosis tend to have lower zinc levels. Zinc supports immune function, too, but it has not been shown to prevent cancer.

Where You Get It

Meat, shellfish (especially oysters), eggs and dairy products contain zinc, as well as legumes, nuts and seeds, whole wheat, quinoa, rice, oats, potatoes and dark chocolate.

Pharmacist's note The upper limit for zinc is 40 mg a day. Too much over the long term causes copper deficiency.



ESSENTIAL FATTY ACIDS

Why You Need Them

Essential fatty acids, or EFAs, are fats your body cannot make, so they must come from food. Omega-3 fats in particular are linked to a range of health benefits at every stage of life.

- Build healthy cell membranes
- Support brain and eye structure (DHA)
- Support heart health
- Help regulate inflammation
- Support healthy skin

Where You Get Them

Good sources include salmon, sardines, and other fatty fish, plus flaxseeds, chia seeds, walnuts, hempseeds, soybean oil, canola oil, and pumpkin seeds.



Herbal Supplements for Menopause



Herbs are drugs too: check interactions with your pharmacist, and tell your doctor about everything you take.

BLACK COHOSH

Benefits

Black Cohosh is a traditional Native American remedy used to provide relief from menstrual irregularities. In addition, many women report that black cohosh improves sleep quality and even brings relief from hot flashes. On the other hand, there are a ton of studies that suggest that black cohosh has no effect on menopausal symptoms. If it helps you, great; if not, move on. Stop it and call your doctor if you notice dark urine or yellow skin.

Pharmacist's note Black cohosh has been linked to rare cases of serious liver injury.

DONG QUAI

Benefits

Dong quai is a traditional Chinese remedy long used for women's health. Some women report fewer hot flashes or better sleep, but a placebo-controlled trial found no benefit over placebo.

Pharmacist's note Dong quai can interact with warfarin and can make your skin more sensitive to the sun.



GINSENG

Benefits

Ginseng is traditionally called an adaptogen, an herb believed to help the body adapt to stress. Trials in menopausal women are small and mixed. A 2016 review of placebo-controlled trials found some evidence that ginseng may improve sexual arousal and well-being in menopausal women, but no clear effect on hot flashes. Ginseng can lower blood sugar and may interact with warfarin, so check with your pharmacist.

Pharmacist's note Besides its effects on blood sugar and warfarin, ginseng can cause insomnia.

MUIRA PUAMA

Benefits

Muira puama is a Brazilian herb traditionally used as an aphrodisiac. Decreased sex drive, vaginal dryness, and painful intercourse are common complaints during menopause. In one small study without a placebo group, women who took muira puama with ginkgo for a month reported better sex drive and satisfaction. Better trials are still needed.

PREGNENOLONE

Benefits

Pregnenolone is a hormone your body makes from cholesterol and turns into other hormones, including DHEA, progesterone, estrogen, and testosterone. It is sold over the counter in the US, but it is still a hormone. There is no good clinical evidence it relieves menopause symptoms, so talk to your doctor first.

Pharmacist's note Avoid pregnenolone if you have a history of hormone-sensitive cancer.



SOY

Benefits

Soy isoflavones are plant compounds that act weakly like estrogen in some tissues. Some trials of isoflavone supplements show modest hot-flash relief, but results are mixed. Soy foods are a healthy protein either way.

Pharmacist's note Soy foods are safe. If you have a history of hormone-sensitive cancer, discuss high-dose isoflavone supplements with your oncologist.

TURMERIC

Benefits

Lab studies suggest curcumin, found in turmeric, has mild estrogen-like activity, but this has not been shown in women. Small trials suggest curcumin may help mood. Curcumin is being studied for inflammation, heart, and bone health, and for cancer, but most of that research is still in the lab. Enjoy it as food.

Pharmacist's note Turmeric supplements have been linked to liver injury and can add to bleeding risk.

WILD YAM

Benefits

Related yam species have long been used in Chinese medicine. Lab studies show some yam proteins can stimulate estrogen production in cells, but your body cannot turn wild yam into hormones, and human trials are lacking.



Recipes for Menopause

CRISPY TOFU, BROCCOLI AND GREEN BEANS

Over Midnight Grains with Sesame-Miso Dressing

Ingredients

For the Crispy Tofu, Vegetables, and Midnight Grains

- 32 ounces organic, extra-firm tofu
- 1 ½ cups midnight grains
- 3 ½ cups of water
- 1 tablespoon olive oil
- 1 tablespoon ground coriander
- 1/4 teaspoon salt
- 1/4 teaspoon pepper
- 1 ½ cups broccoli florets
- Two handfuls green beans, trimmed of stems
- 1 tablespoon olive oil
- 3 lemons

For the Sesame-Miso Dressing

- 3 tablespoons white miso paste
- 2 tablespoons sesame seeds
- ¾ cup hemp seeds
- 6 tablespoons fresh lemon juice
- 1/3 cup water
- 1/4 cup olive oil
- Salt, to taste

To Serve

- ¾ cup kimchi



Instructions

For the Crispy Tofu, Vegetables, and Midnight Grains

Preheat the oven to 425°F. Open and drain the tofu, and then wrap in a clean towel to remove excess water; set aside. Line 2 sheet pans with parchment paper, and set aside.

Place a medium saucepan over high heat, add the midnight grains, water, and salt and cover. Bring to a boil and then reduce to a simmer for 30–35 minutes, until water is absorbed.

Remove tofu from cloth and tear into bite-sized pieces. Toss with olive oil, coriander, and season with salt and pepper. Bake until brown and crispy 30–35 minutes.

Add broccoli and green beans to one of the sheet pans and toss with olive oil. Season with salt and pepper. Add to oven with tofu and bake for 20–25 minutes until browned in places.

Zest and juice the lemons, saving the juice for the dressing. Once vegetables are roasted, toss with lemon zest.

Make the Sesame-Miso Dressing.

For the Sesame-Miso Dressing

Combine all ingredients in a Vitamix or high-speed blender, and blend until smooth.

To Serve

Spread the Sesame-Miso Dressing onto large plates. Top with midnight grains, tofu, vegetables, and kimchi.



CARAMELIZED ONION, FIG, AND ARUGULA PIZZA

Ingredients

For the Socca Pizza Crust

- 1 cup chickpea flour
- 1 cup water
- ¼ cup olive oil, divided
- 1–2 garlic cloves, pressed or minced
- ¼ teaspoon sea salt

For the Topping

- 3 tablespoons vegan butter
- 2 medium sweet onions, sliced
- 2 cups fresh arugula
- 1½–2 tablespoons olive oil
- 1 tablespoon lemon juice
- Salt and pepper
- 3 large fresh or dried figs, halved

For the Base

- ¾ cup vegan ricotta
- 1 tablespoon agave nectar
- Pinch of salt

Instructions

For the Crust

In a bowl, whisk together the chickpea flour, water, 2 tablespoons of the olive oil, garlic, and salt. Let the mixture rest at room temperature for 1 hour.

Turn on the broiler with a rack positioned 8 inches from heat.



Place a 12-inch ovenproof skillet (preferably cast iron) in the oven to preheat.

Once the skillet is hot, carefully remove it from the oven (it's crazy hot, wear oven mitts!) Pour in 1 tablespoon olive oil and swirl the pan around so the oil is evenly distributed. Next, pour in the chickpea batter and return skillet to the broiler. Cook for 5–8 minutes, until the socca is set and edges are browning and pulling away from the sides of the pan.

Remove from oven, turn off broiler and turn oven to 425°F.

For the Topping

Place a cast iron skillet over medium-low heat and melt butter.

Add onion to the pan and stir to coat with butter.

Check and stir the onions every 5–10 minutes.

Slowly caramelize onions for 50 minutes. If onions begin to burn, lower the heat. Err on the side of too low versus too high.

Then toss arugula with olive oil, lemon juice, and salt and pepper to taste.

For the Base

Combine ricotta, agave nectar and salt.

Assemble the Pizza

Keep the socca crust in the skillet, and top with onions and figs.

Return the skillet to the oven and bake for 8 to 10 minutes, until socca is crisp.

Then remove from oven, and carefully remove socca from skillet.

Top with arugula and vegan ricotta.

Finally, cut into slices and serve warm.

Reheat leftovers in the oven at 425°F for 8–10 minutes.



CARROT, GINGER AND TURMERIC SOUP

with Sweet and Spicy Carrot Chips

Ingredients

For the Soup

- 1 tablespoon olive oil
- 1 medium yellow onion, diced
- 3 cloves garlic, finely minced
- 1-inch piece of ginger, finely grated on a microplane
- 2-inch piece of turmeric, finely grated on a microplane
- 4 large carrots, peeled and cut into 1-inch pieces
- 1 teaspoon fresh thyme, chopped
- 4 cups vegetable stock
- Juice of half a lemon
- Coconut milk, for garnish
- Salt and pepper to taste

For the Chips

- 2 large carrots, sliced very thin on a mandolin
- ½ tablespoon coconut oil, melted
- ¼ teaspoon salt
- ½ teaspoon ground pepper
- ¼–½ teaspoon cayenne pepper, to taste



Instructions

For the Soup

Place a medium stockpot over medium-high heat and add olive oil. Add onions and garlic and sauté until translucent, approximately 3 minutes. Add ginger and turmeric and sauté for another 2 minutes. Season with salt and pepper.

Add carrots and thyme and cover with broth. Bring to a boil and reduce heat. Simmer for 20–25 minutes until carrots are thoroughly tender.

Use an immersion blender to puree soup until smooth. Stir in lemon juice. Taste and season with salt and pepper.

Garnish with a swirl of coconut milk and carrot chips. Reserve remaining coconut milk for another recipe.

For the Chips

Preheat oven to 425°F and line a baking sheet with parchment paper.

Add sliced carrots to a bowl, drizzle with coconut oil, and season with salt, pepper, and cayenne.

Transfer to the baking sheet and arrange in a single layer.

Bake for 10–12 minutes, watching carefully.

Remove from oven and serve immediately atop soup.



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About Lindsey Elmore



BACHELOR OF CHEMISTRY

DOCTORATE IN PHARMACY

Lindsey Elmore is a pharmacist, educator, author, international speaker, and host of The Lindsey Elmore Show. For more than fifteen years she has helped people understand their health and make more informed decisions, and her work has taken her onto stages around the world and into hundreds of long-form conversations with physicians, researchers, and authors. She teaches on health, science, faith, and what changes a life.



Where to Go from Here

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