Manchester University
NHS Foundation Trust

Saint Mary's Managed Clinical Service Division of Gynaecology

PATIENT INFORMATION LEAFLET

EXERCISE, NUTRITION, AND LIFESTYLE IN MENOPAUSE

Exercise and nutrition are essential at any time of our lives, however it really is important during perimenopause and menopause. The reducing level of hormones leave women at higher risk of health problems such as osteoporosis (a condition that weakens bones), weight gain (especially around the middle) and cardiovascular disease (such as heart disease and stroke).

The NHS recommends at least 150 minutes of moderate intensity activity a week and 75 minutes of vigorous intensity activity a week. Strengthening activities that work all major muscle groups are recommended however any movement is a great place to start. It is important to remember there are different ways to exercise, it does not always have to be sweaty, high intensity or weightlifting. Yoga, pilates or long walks are all great ways to get moving.

BENEFITS OF EXERCISING

It is important to find exercises that you enjoy, as you are more likely to stick to them. You can start at any level and gradually build up over time. Remember to get plenty of rest and recovery between workouts as exercising without adequate recovery can leave the body exhausted.

- As oestrogen reduces during the menopause, you absorb bone minerals quicker than building them. This results in bone density reduction which can be a contributing factor to osteoporosis. We recommend a combination of weight-bearing exercise with impact and strength training exercise as this improves bone health and bones become stronger when using them and giving them work to do.
- As you get older muscle mass is lost and exercising regularly slows this down, reducing your risks of falls and fractures. Maintaining your muscle mass also increases metabolism.
- Exercise supports good heart health by controlling blood pressure, maintaining cholesterol, and reducing heart disease. The risk of health disease increases during menopause due to the loss of oestrogen which is thought to be protective against heart disease.
- Exercise helps you stay in a healthy weight. Falling levels of oestrogen can lead to a greater weight distribution around the middle, which increases the risk of heart disease, diabetes and cancer.
- Exercise can help lift your mood, reduce stress, increase energy levels and motivation. You may experience increased fatigue, irritability and low mood during menopause, exercise has been shown to release endorphins which is a happy hormone that boosts your mood.

BENEFITS OF NUTRITION

Eating a healthy, balanced diet and exercising regularly can help to support a healthy weight and relieve some menopausal symptoms. It can also help lower the risk of some of the long-term health concerns linked with the menopause such as osteoporosis and cardiovascular disease.

The right foods can help fight fatigue and boost energy levels when needed.

- Following a diet that is high in vegetables, whole grains, lean meats, and good fats (oily fish, avocado, olive oil, nuts, and seeds). Bone health is important during menopause as there is a decline in the bone remodelling process caused by the drop of oestrogen. Therefore, it is important to have sufficient calcium in the diet (green leafy food, tofu, dairy products, bony fish, and plant-based milks). The Royal Osteoporosis Society has an online calculator to check if you're getting enough calcium.
- Low glycaemic carbohydrates should be considered for those who may be susceptible to insulin resistance, to help maintain blood sugar levels and keep mood swings in check. White refined carbohydrates such as white bread and white rice should preferably be swapped to wholegrain bread, brown rice, pulses or sweet potatoes.
- One of the symptoms for perimenopause and menopause is bloating, cramps and other irritable bowel syndrome (IBS) symptoms. There is research about the importance of a healthy gut and the influence on hormone health and emotional wellbeing. Eating a diet rich in fibre encourages the growth of friendly bacteria, keeps bowel motions regular, reduces the risk of bowel cancer, control blood sugar and cholesterol levels. UK adults should aim for 30g/day of fibre.
- Protein foods provide important vitamins and minerals such as iron. A variety of foods such as eggs, lean red meat, poultry, fish and vegetable sources of protein like beans, pulses and nuts are sources of protein you can include in your diet. With a combination of strength training and eating good quality protein will support the body in building new muscle. Vegetarian and vegans should consider different types of beans, pulses, tofu and meat alternatives to cover nutritional needs and if you don't eat fish (missing out on omega 3), rapeseed oil, flaxseeds and chia seeds are plant-based sources of omega 3.

LIFESTYLE CHANGES

Lifestyle and behavioural modifications can help you manage your menopausal symptoms.

- Smoking is known to increase the frequency and severity of hot flushes. Stopping smoking may help to alleviate mild symptoms. Smoking is also associated with an increased risk of cardiovascular disease, osteoporosis, breast and other cancers. If you stop smoking the benefits for your heart and lungs are immediate.
- Spicy foods can trigger hot flushes and sweating by stimulating nerve ending which dilates blood vessels.
- Vitamin D is important for bone health as it helps the body absorb calcium from foods. You can increase vitamin D by getting sunlight to your skin (ensuring sun safety). It is recommended between October and March for adults to take 1000iu of Vit D supplement. For people with darker skin tone (such as African, South Asian, and Caribbean backgrounds) or people with limited exposure to sunlight, it is recommended to take a daily supplement all year round as you are at an increased risk of Vitamin D deficiency.

- Handheld fans are convenient to combat heat as they provide instant relief from warmth and humidity and can be used at work or on the move.
- Avoiding alcohol can have a positive effect on your sleep and hot flushes. Alcohol is high in calories and stimulates appetite which may lead to weight gain. NHS website advice recommends you do not to drink more than 14units a week on a regular basis.
- Sleep and awake time are regulated by hormones. It is important to have regular bedtime and wake up time to create a consistent bedtime routine.
- Keeping a 'hot flushes' diary to try and identify a pattern of triggers and avoiding them.
- Adjust clothing such as dressing in layers so that if you have a hot flush when you are out, you can take off a layer without feeling too exposed.
- The importance of recognising the bedroom should be for sleeping. Ideally the TV should not be watched in the bedroom and electronic devices turned off one hour before sleep.
- Wearing cotton or non-synthetic materials are proven to keep you cooler and drier.
- Drinking cool liquids such as iced water.
- Keeping a window open in the bedroom promotes better sleep and lowers the temperature.
- Avoiding napping in the day as this can affect a goodnight sleep.
- Cooling gel mats or pillow can be helpful as they automatically react to your body heat by instantly cooling down. They fit under fitted sheets and pillows.
- Using apps such as Calm or Headspace before going to bed to help with relaxation.

If you require any further information or clarification, please do not hesitate to talk to one of the doctors or nurses, who will be happy to discuss your concerns with you.

CONTACT DETAILS

☎ 0161 276 6000: please select Option 1.

✉ menopause.support@mft.nhs.uk

https://www.mft.nhs.uk/saint-marys/services/gynaecology/menopause

https://www.nhs.uk/conditions/menopause/ https://www.themenopausecharity.org/

or https://www.womens-health-concern.org/