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# THE MENOPAUSE DIET

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This natural biological change leads to several issues in many women. Good health habits, including the right foods, can make a big difference.

BY MARY SAVAGE

Some women seem to navigate menopause better than others, and it's often linked to diet and lifestyle. For the small subset of women who do everything right—from eating a healthy diet and exercising daily to sleeping soundly and gracefully managing stress—their life rolls on with few disruptions. But, this is not how the majority of women roll... especially through menopause.

Weight gain, hot flashes, irritability, loss of concentration and memory, night sweats, low libido, and vaginal dryness

are a few things that occur during menopause. And if you've tried to self-educate and manage menopause naturally, undoubtedly you've found bits and pieces of wisdom—some worked, others didn't.

One of the more challenging aspects of menopause is weight gain, and it seems to happen almost overnight.

There are three times in a woman's life when she's going to gain weight: as a teenager, during pregnancy, and with the onset of menopause. Here's the bad news: the average weight

gain during menopause is about 20 pounds, which is considered normal and healthy. Here's the really bad news: your fat cells literally divide and multiply. And the more fat cells you have, the more weight you will likely gain.

So, how do you reclaim your body during this time? By revamping your daily diet. Through dietary and lifestyle changes, the weight gain is manageable and even preventable (or reversible) as your body adjusts to the decline in hormones.

“ Hello world, I’m back:  
audacious, magnificent, wiser  
and naturally gorgeous! ”



There is growing research that suggests an alkaline-based diet combined with low carbs and low sugar can benefit menopausal women in several areas including weight management, improved growth hormone levels, memory and cognition, and sleep quality.

Acidity and alkalinity refer to the pH range in your blood. Your body works incredibly hard to keep the pH in the normal range between 7.35–7.45. When you fall below 7, it indicates you're too acidic. When you're above 8, you're too alkaline.

The body will do whatever it takes to keep the pH levels in balance and for women in menopause, that sometimes means stealing from one area, such as calcium from the bones, to rebalance the pH.

Most acidic foods are high in protein, carbohydrates and sugar. All of which can lead to weight gain if eaten in excess, so choose wisely and consume in moderation. Here's a snapshot of a few acidic foods: whey (in protein powder), peanuts, several vegetarian (meatless) burgers, soybeans, colas/sodas, energy drinks, dried fruit, meat, poultry, shellfish, dairy, eggs, coffee and alcohol, to name a few.

You will find most alkaline foods are plant-based and they're loaded with fibre, vitamins and minerals. They are also lower in carbs and sugar, and offer a decent amount of protein and healthy fats.

Shifting to an alkaline-based diet is fairly easy. After a brief search online, you'll turn up several charts that outline alkaline vs. acidic foods. The trick is to simply swap the acid-forming food for an alkaline-forming food.

Take citrus as an example: lemons, limes, oranges and grapefruit are all alkaline-forming, so pucker-up! Cut up lemon or lime wedges and drop them into your water bottle or try eating one. Sounds crazy, but your body will love it.

The alkalinity in lemons and limes also provides a gentle liver detox when consumed regularly. During menopause, excess estrogen can overload the liver, causing it to become sluggish and underactive, which exacerbates weight gain, hot flashes and irritability.

Citrus also contains bone-building calcium, so go ahead and enjoy your favourite mid-afternoon coffee, but counter the coffee's high acidity with an alkaline-rich fruit for dessert after dinner.

Pumpkin and flax seeds work overtime for a menopausal body: both are high in alkaline and fibre, and both are nutritionally dense. But flax seeds contain phytoestrogens, which are very effective at reducing—and often eliminating—hot flashes. They help to balance the estrogen receptors by blocking unwanted chemicals (largely found in plastics) that wreak havoc with your hormones.

Add a heaping tablespoon to your smoothie, stir into oats or sprinkle liberally over a salad. These provide true dietary excellence! But flax seeds must be ground for optimal absorption and stored in the fridge. Grind in small batches for maximum freshness.

Raw nuts are a different story and although they are a superb staple in any diet, many are acid-forming. Alkaline-forming nuts include almonds, cashews, chestnuts and fresh coconut. They are also loaded with healthy fats, protein and fibre, but enjoy in moderation: a handful a day!

In addition to nuts and seeds, here's a list of alkaline-forming foods to get you started: sweet potato, sea vegetables, kale, parsley, endive, broccoli, cucumber, onion, daikon radish, ginger root, garlic, cabbage, celery, turnip, and dandelion greens—most vegetables, in fact.


Other foods include avocado, berries, watermelon, sprouted seeds,

wheatgrass, barley grass, coconut, flax and olive oil, and sunflower and sesame seeds.

Okay, this is fine if you're a vegetarian or a vegan, but what if your body loves a burger or a steak? Go ahead and grill away, but balance it with an alkaline-green salad or grilled veggies.

If you enjoy smoothies, start adding a scope of spirulina and chlorella to the blender. Both are chlorophyll-rich alkaline superfoods that pack tremendous nutrients and trace minerals. Chlorophyll is considered highly alkaline and helps to not only detox the body, but also to assist in building new blood cells.

Now, you are starting to get serious about alkalinity, and it's easy to check and monitor your levels. Look for pH test strips at a local health food store—they're not expensive and simple to use.

And after a week or two of swapping the acidic-forming foods for healthy alkaline-based ones, along with a bit of exercise, perhaps you should keep those skinny jeans close at hand. Hmm. If only your body could talk, what would it say now? "Hello world, I'm back: audacious, magnificent, wiser and naturally gorgeous!" 

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