

## MENOPAUSE DIET SHEET

The menopause is part of a natural plan for the end of a woman's fertility. Menopause can be a very difficult time for women. It can often be blamed for ageing symptoms such as lines on the face and greying hair. These are part of the natural ageing process which happens to men as well. Herbalists view menopause as a normal transition rather than a deficiency disease. They encourage women to adopt positive lifestyle changes, good eating patterns and a positive attitude to this phase.

Diet has a direct influence on menopausal symptoms and is believed to contribute to the marked difference in symptoms experienced by women from other cultures, especially hot flushes.

### PLANT OESTROGENS

Phyto or plant oestrogens are structurally similar to animal oestrogens and are found in a large number of common foods and medicinal plants. Food sources include: legumes, alfalfa and other sprouts, soya products, linseeds, fennel, carrots, cabbage, wholegrains such as rye, buckwheat and millet, nuts and seeds, rhubarb, apples, plums. Adding just 100g of tofu and 1 tablespoon of ground linseeds to daily diet can reduce flushes and improve vaginal dryness. There are several menopause recipe books available.

### RELAXATION

To help yourself through a natural menopause it is really necessary to have some means of relaxation and rejuvenation - anything you find enjoyable.

### EXERCISE

Exercising even once a week is associated with fewer menopausal symptoms. Prevention of osteoporosis is easier than cure. A combination of strength and aerobic activities is recommended. Target key areas which are vulnerable to fractures such as upper spine, wrists, hips and ankles. Pelvic floor exercises are useful for bladder and vaginal symptoms.

### GENERAL HEALTH

Food sensitivity or allergy can disrupt hormone balance, as can chronic illnesses such as chronic candidiasis. Conversely existing conditions e.g. migraines will often change around this time and can be aggravated by hormone changes. Prescribed medication may also affect menopausal symptoms.

### HOT FLUSHES

One of the most debilitating menopausal symptoms is hot flushes and night sweats. Alcohol can bring on hot flushes. Cut down number of hot drinks consumed. Don't have a hot drink on an empty stomach. Avoid hot spicy foods and fatty foods. Cut down on coffee and tea intake and drink plenty of water. Wear light, loose-fitting clothing made from natural fibres and layers which can be removed and replaced. Sleep on a towel. Carry a fan. Hot flushes may be caused or heightened by episodes of low blood sugar so avoid refined carbohydrates. Stress and anxiety are also known triggers.

### NUTRITIONAL SUPPLEMENTS

Large doses of calcium are not the answer to osteoporosis prevention and some women with osteoporosis have shown normal calcium levels in blood tests. Calcium taken alone depletes zinc and iron levels in the body. Other minerals are important and a high intake of vegetables, especially green leafy ones like watercress, spinach, broccoli, sprouts and cabbage, will deliver plenty of minerals to the diet. Substances such as caffeine, alcohol and cigarettes interfere with mineral absorption and increase bone demineralisation. A calcium, magnesium and boron supplement can help keep bones healthy.

Vitamin E and selenium work well together to regulate body temperature and can help with hot flushes. They also play an important role in cardiovascular health and prevention of heart disease. Dietary sources of these nutrients include nuts, seeds, wholegrains, wheatgerm, avocados, green leafy vegetables and eggs. Vitamin E and selenium are available in supplement form. Vitamin E

capsules can be broken open and used topically for vaginal irritation and dryness.

Essential Fatty Acids are hormone balancing and often lacking in our diets. They can be found in nuts and seeds; cold-pressed oils such as flax, hemp, walnut, sesame; oily fish; sprouted seeds and avocados (similar foods to those rich in phytoestrogens and vitamin E) There are many different essential fatty acid supplements available. Ask your herbalist to recommend you one.