



# TUNE IN TO YOUR MENOPAUSE

Breeze through the menopause with our expert-approved guide

*Tales of hot flushes, night sweats and mood swings have made the menopause sound far scarier than it actually is.*

Fundamentally, it's a natural transition that every woman goes through. "There's more awareness around this period of life nowadays and a willingness to share how we're feeling," says Dr Marilyn Glenville, a leading expert in women's health ([marilynglenville.com](http://marilynglenville.com)). "I think a major misconception about the menopause is that the symptoms don't start until your periods stop, which is an average of 51 in the UK. Many women won't realise that they can start to experience hormonal changes from around the age of 40 and these symptoms can include: irritability, crying spells, tension and anxiety, indecisive and fearfulness as well as physical symptoms such as weight gain, aches and pains, tiredness, lack of sex drive and weight loss or gain. The earlier a woman can prepare for the menopause the better." Giving yourself a bit of extra TLC during this period is the best course of action, so here's our guide to help you tune in to what your body needs.

## WEIGHT GAIN

### WHAT'S GOING ON IN YOUR BODY

"The hormonal changes that happen during the menopause might make you more likely to gain weight around your abdomen than around your hips and thighs," says Dr Larisa Corda, a leading obstetrician, gynaecologist and fertility expert ([drlarisacorda.com](http://drlarisacorda.com)). "But genetics and lifestyle have a big role in influencing this. As we age, fat increases and as we lose our muscle mass, it slows the rate at which your body uses calories (otherwise known as your metabolism). This can make it more challenging to maintain a healthy weight."

## HOW YOU CAN HELP IT

"In order to try and reduce the impact of age and genetics on your weight, it's important to have a healthy, predominantly plant-based diet, to exercise regularly with a mixture of aerobic (cardiovascular) and anaerobic (strength) exercises, to improve your sleep pattern and reduce your alcohol intake," advises Dr Corda.

## MOOD SWINGS

### WHAT'S GOING ON IN YOUR BODY

"Mood swings are a common symptom during the menopause, so you need to make sure that your blood-sugar is balanced," says Dr Glenville. "When your blood-sugar drops, your body will release the stress hormones, adrenaline and cortisol, and this can trigger mood swings, irritability and aggressive outbursts. This means not only thinking about the quality of the food that you eat but also the timing." Signs that your blood-sugar might be low include feeling hungry, sweating, tingling lips, feeling shaky or trembling, dizziness, a fast or pounding heartbeat (palpitations), or becoming easily irritated, tearful, stroppy or moody.

## HOW YOU CAN HELP IT

"Eliminate added sugar, refined carbohydrates and eat little and often," advises Dr Glenville. "What you eat at this stage can make the difference between having difficult or easy menopause. Try and avoid going more than three hours without eating."

## HOT FLUSHES

### WHAT'S GOING ON IN YOUR BODY

"Increased blood flow to the face, triggered by hormonal reactions to certain foods or situations can cause hot flushes and these can include spicy foods, caffeinated drinks, alcohol and stressful situations," says Dr Glenville.

## HOW YOU CAN HELP IT

"There are a number of herbs that are helpful for the menopause including soya, sage, flaxseeds, hops and red clover," explains Dr Glenville. "Sage has been shown to decrease hot flushes by 50

percent after four weeks and by 64 percent after eight weeks. It also helps with reducing insomnia, irritability, anxiety, physical and mental exhaustion by up to 47 percent. Hops have been shown to help with both hot flushes and night sweats and red clover is proven to significantly reduce the vasomotor symptoms mentioned previously."

## SLEEP

### WHAT'S GOING ON IN YOUR BODY

"Your oestrogen and progesterone levels decrease during menopause," says Dr Corda. "This is partly because progesterone is our chill-out hormone. Hot flushes and night sweats can also add to the problem as they're caused by a surge of adrenaline, the same chemical responsible for your reaction to stress or a fight-or-flight scenario. Your body may have a hard time recovering from this sudden surge of energy, which makes it difficult for you to fall back to sleep."

## HOW YOU CAN HELP IT

"You can naturally help improve your chances of falling asleep by being mindful of the environment you're creating in your bedroom, lowering the temperature, shutting out all light, removing electrical appliances, staying hydrated, reducing alcohol, changing your sleep patterns to ensure you get eight hours of sleep and eating food rich in tryptophan, such as oily fish, which naturally induces sleep," says Dr Corda. "If this doesn't help, HRT may benefit, but do consult with your GP first."

## MENOPAUSE MARVELS

**FOR VAGINAL DRYNESS**  
YES VM, £9.99, [yesyesyes.org](http://yesyesyes.org)



**FOR DISCOMFORT**  
Holland & Barrett  
Natural Evening  
Primrose Oil  
120 Capsules, £19.99,  
[hollandandbarrett.com](http://hollandandbarrett.com)



**FOR MOOD SWINGS**  
Magnesium Oil Body Spray,  
£12.95, [betteryou.com](http://betteryou.com)



Photo by Georgia Glynn Smith

## LIZ EARLE'S TOP TIPS

Wellbeing entrepreneur, TV presenter and author Liz Earle has some sage advice for anyone approaching the menopause.

### What does wellbeing mean to you? And how do you think it changes during middle age?

In a nutshell – health and happiness. As we age, we need to take care of ourselves to help ensure our continued wellbeing. For me, this means feel-good food and embracing seasonal, local, organic produce wherever possible as the mainstay of my meals and starting my day with some form or exercise, whether it's a quick jog around the park or following a Pilates app at home.

### What are your tips for menopause?

Now is a good time to look at your diet and to think about avoiding sugar (which quickly gets converted into fat), cutting back on caffeine and alcohol, eating foods rich in calcium and vitamin D (to help compensate for bone density loss), exercising daily and considering talking to your doctor about HRT.

### Can exercise help with easing some of the symptoms of the menopause?

Many women are defying outdated stereotypes of what it means to be menopausal, and are stronger and fitter in their 50s than they have been for decades. Stretching every single day at this time of our lives helps protect back, leg and hip mobility and I'd also recommend a few weight-bearing exercises every day. These exercises help maintain our strength and strong muscles are vital for protecting our bones and preventing fractures as we age.

Liz Earle, wellbeing entrepreneur and founder of Liz Earle Wellbeing, is a speaker at Live Well London taking place February 2020 at Old Billingsgate. Find out more at [livewellondon.com](http://livewellondon.com)