

# Eat yourself happy & healthy

What we eat in menopause can influence how we feel. In *Superfoods to Superhealth*, Dr Johanna Ward offers dietary advice and inspiring recipes



**T**he golden rule for surviving menopause is to eat well. There is significant evidence now to show that certain foods and diets can help to calm and relieve the symptoms of menopause, and mindful daily choices can help you to maintain a sense of health and vitality.

Diets rich in fruit, vegetables, nuts, seeds, legumes and omega-3 healthy fats are known to support women through this time.

So, what's the bottom line? It's to eat mainly plant-based foods, avoid processed foods, increase your fibre intake, reduce your alcohol and sugar intake – and, as a result, protect your body and preserve your hormone health during the years of change.



**The trouble with the way we eat**

The last 100 years have seen an abrupt and radical change in our relationship with food – changes that we haven't adapted to or evolved to cope with.

In the UK, 50% of all foods consumed are processed. This means they're made in a lab and are manipulated, changed, preserved and tampered with to get a better shelf life and taste.

With the processing of food, however, comes added salt, sugar, damaged fats, toxins, preservatives, emulsifiers and hundreds of other chemicals. None of these serve human health in any beneficial way, and unless we rapidly develop some kind of superhuman system to cope with these toxins, we will continue to damage our health with the foods we choose to eat.

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of all foods consumed are processed

**Pile your plate with plants**

Start by replacing processed foods with wholefoods as far as possible. Wholefoods are those that are in their most nutritious state.

All plant foods are superfoods because they contain an incredible combination of vitamins, minerals, phytochemicals, antioxidants and fibre that work to protect humans in an exquisite biological feat of nature.

Plant-based foods have thousands of substances that are powerful, hormone-supporting, anti-ageing and anti-cancer, too. These include carotenoids, isoflavones, vitamins, minerals, retinols, bioflavonoids, phytoestrogens and polyphenols. With a few exceptions, these super substances are found in vegetables, fruits, nuts, seeds, beans and legumes, so pile these high on your plate and ditch processed, nutrient-depleted foods for good.



Edamame beans are good for the brain

## Why hormones matter

**1** The average age of menopause in the UK is 51. This means that many women will live their last 30 or more years without oestrogen, progesterone and testosterone – all important anabolic hormones.

**2** Hormones are powerful chemical communicators and signal some of the most important life events, such as birth, growth, puberty and ageing. As a society, we have historically failed to understand the importance of female hormone health. Women who are low, exhausted or prone to mood swings have been labelled 'hard work' or even 'crazy'! But the importance of hormone health cannot be overestimated.

**3** Hormones affect everything from brain function and heart health to mood and libido, and when they are crashing, women can feel overwhelmed and out of control. Balancing hormones is critical to bringing a sense of calm, empowerment and wellbeing to women in menopause. Knowing how to support your hormones through diet and lifestyle can be life-changing.

## AN EXTRA BOOST

Improve your mind and body with:

- ◆ Valerian root or melatonin supplements for insomnia.
- ◆ Black cohosh, red clover and sage for hot flushes.
- ◆ Red clover and sage for night sweats.
- ◆ Ginkgo biloba to improve blood flow and brain health.
- ◆ Omega-3 to protect brain function.
- ◆ B6 for serotonin production.
- ◆ D3 for immunity and bone support.
- ◆ Marine collagen for joint, bone, skin and hair support.
- ◆ Johanna's own supplement, ZENii Rebalance – a blend of soya isoflavones, red clover, kelp, pfaffia, wild yam and sage leaf with ginseng, zinc and vitamin B6 – is £35 for 60 capsules (zenii.co.uk).



## Care for your gut

We have over 100 trillion microbes inside us. These essential microbes help guide, process, feed and even 'hijack' our own genetic material.

As we age, a lot of these beneficial bacteria deplete in number, impacting everything from our immunity to our ability to create hormones. That's why it's so important to nurture our gut health and to try and repopulate our microbiome with healthy food and lifestyle choices.

The profound connection between the gut and our immune and neurochemical systems is finally being recognised, and we are starting to understand the missing pieces of the puzzle that underpins health. The 'crosstalk' between all of our systems is huge. Gut microbiota help to regulate everything from our immunity and libido to brain health and hormone health.

Eating in a way that supports our gut is especially important during menopause,

Kimchi is great for gut health



with the emphasis on prebiotic, probiotic and fibre-rich foods. A plant-based diet will contain these three gut-boosting properties. Add in some fermented foods, like kimchi, miso, tempeh and kombucha, and you will be helping to feed and boost your microbial population.

Exposure to certain medicines, chemicals and foods can adversely affect your intestinal microbes. Medicines like antibiotics, the contraceptive pill, NSAIDs (for example, ibuprofen, neurofen) and acid blockers like omeprazole all deplete good bacteria. Antibiotics kill good and bad bacteria, so they decimate the general bacterial population, and it can take months to years to regain a healthy balance. Alcohol, chronic stress and exposure to pesticides can all harm our beneficial bacteria, so filter your water, reduce your alcohol intake and eat organic to improve your gut's functionality.









**Mind  
booster**  
Omega-3  
improves brain  
function

### Feed your brain

During menopause, many women experience brain fog, poor memory, low mood and fatigue. Cutting out processed foods, reducing sugar and eating low-GI foods can have profound benefits, as can increasing your intake of omega-3, antioxidants, phytonutrients, vitamins B, C, D and E, and good-quality protein.

Numerous studies prove that a higher omega-3 intake reduces the incidence of brain disorders, such as Alzheimer's and vascular dementia. Deficiencies in DHA, which comprises 90% of the brain's omega-3 fatty acids, have been linked to poor memory, attention span and learning.

Most of the body's serotonin – the happy hormone – is made in the gut and is produced more abundantly when we eat tryptophan. Chia seeds are a wonderful source, as are edamame beans, prunes, spirulina and natural yogurt.

Turn the page for recipes ➤

### Food for thought

Science behind the facts...

- ◆ In a study of over 17,000 menopausal women, those eating more unprocessed soy products, veg, fruit and fibre experienced a 19% reduction in hot flushes.
- ◆ Another study showed that omega-3 supplements decreased the frequency of hot flushes and the severity of night sweats.
- ◆ An ongoing study published in the British Medical Journal showed that three servings a day of whole grains like quinoa, brown rice and kamut wheat reduced the incidence of heart disease, cancer and premature death in menopausal women.
- ◆ High circulating blood sugars have been associated with increased incidence of hot flushes, weight gain and poor sleep. Opting for a low-GI diet is the best option.
- ◆ Alcohol and caffeine are known to trigger hot flushes and should be avoided if possible.

