

NUTRITION AND PREMATURE OVARIAN INSUFFICIENCY FACT SHEET

The importance of a good diet

There has been much publicity recently about the importance of healthy eating – the government has even put its weight behind the ‘Five Portions of Fruit and Vegetables a Day’ initiative and it’s getting increasingly hard to enter any supermarket without feeling under pressure to buy at least a bunch of bananas and some celery! However, it is particularly sensible to take this advice seriously when you’re facing the menopause and a whole series of unpleasant menopausal symptoms. Some nutritionists even suggest that, if HRT alarms or does not suit you, it might be worth trying dietary measures instead to boost your body’s flagging hormone levels. Yet whether or not you take HRT, there is no doubt that thinking about your diet seriously is a good idea.

What is not in dispute is which foods or habits will aggravate rather than alleviate your symptoms. These ‘enemies to health’ are all very familiar and the chief among them is smoking, which robs the body of Vitamin C and can lead to heart disease and brittle bones all by itself. Moderation is strongly advised in the consumption of salt, alcohol, caffeine and fizzy drinks, all of which interfere with the body’s absorption of iron, calcium and other minerals. Also avoid refined and processed foods, junk food and foods containing additives and preservatives.

Healthy eating

The most important consideration when adapting your diet is how to achieve balance. What you are aiming for is to eat a rich variety of different foods and particularly to up your intake of fruit, vegetables and grains. The old adage ‘everything in moderation’ is perhaps the best advice.

Fears have been expressed that a high-protein diet may be linked to an increased loss of calcium in urine and so the general recommendation is to cut down on meat, particularly red meat. In her book ‘Natural Solutions to Menopause’, Marilyn Glenville says that the first dietary step should be to eliminate all those foods which interfere with the body’s acid and alkaline balance. The ‘villains’ she singles out are sugar, caffeine and meat.

Like anyone aiming to be healthier, you want to avoid too much saturated fat and too many ‘empty calories’ in products made with sugar and white flour. Let’s examine these in turn.

Fat

You can’t get far down the supermarket aisle without seeing low fat this, that and the other, so what is the significance to us? Too much fat in the diet can lead to heart disease and various types of cancer (notably ovarian, breast and colon cancer). However, we do need fat for our general well-being and very low fat or no fat diets can cause health problems.

What we should all aim to do is to reduce the amount of saturated fats in our diets. This means cutting down on red meat (pork, beef and lamb) and full fat dairy products (cream, whole milk and cheese). Coconut and palm oils are also high in saturated fat as is chocolate.

(It is so unfair!) Saturated fat should form no more than 10% of your total calorie intake in a day.

But not all fat is bad for you. In reducing saturated fat you will probably switch to using monounsaturated or polyunsaturated oils such as olive oil. Though just because it isn't a saturated fat does not mean that you can drown your food in it!

The types of fat we should eat more of, is omega 3 and 6. These essential fatty acids are vital for heart protection and help brain function. Foods rich in essential fatty acids include oily fish such as sardines and mackerel, nuts such as almonds and brazils and seeds such as sesame, sunflower and pumpkin.

Sugar and white flour

When sugar is in its natural form, the whole sugar cane, it contains fibre, vitamins and minerals. However, the refining process strips these away as it does with white flour. Your body then has to use its own vitamins and minerals to digest these products, thus running down its supplies.

Most of the convenience or processed foods we buy are laden with sugar. It is in ketchup, baked beans, etc. The foods labelled low fat are often high in sugar, so watch your labels. Try and beat sugar cravings by eating fruit, fresh or dried, or substituting honey for sugar.

White flour should be avoided for the reasons above. Most of us need to increase the amount of fibre in our diet. So reduce the amount of white bread, biscuits and cake you eat. Whenever possible increase the amount of fresh fruit and vegetables, whole grains (such as wholewheat, oats and brown rice), beans, nuts and seeds.

What should you eat?

Soy

Recent studies in Japan and Indonesia have suggested that women in these countries have far fewer menopausal symptoms, as well as lower rates of breast cancer and heart disease, than women in the West. The wonder food responsible for their improved health is thought to be soy, which contains high levels of isoflavones, one of the two main types of phytoestrogen. What are phytoestrogens? They are plant-based compounds which produce an oestrogenic effect. They were first identified in the 1930s when a type of clover containing phytoestrogens caused infertility in female sheep. Phytoestrogens are found chiefly in legumes, cereals, seed oils and grasses. Isoflavones and lignans are the most significant phytoestrogens in terms of their effect on menopausal symptoms. They are the subject of much research and are thought to reduce hot flushes and improve bone density.

Soy is found in lots of different forms and should be easily obtained in your local supermarket or health food store as tofu (made from soya beans) or miso (fermented bean paste), soya milk or yoghurt, or soya flour. You can buy Burgen bread from most supermarkets which is made from soya flour and linseeds and has high levels of phytoestrogens. Designer coffee shops sell soy lattes.

Experiment with different types of soy and different recipes until you find something that seems palatable to you. Nutritionist, Marilyn Glenville, comments that your recommended daily intake of 45g can easily be achieved with two glasses of soya milk or a portion of tofu. Have you tried to drink a glass of soy milk? In her book 'Sudden Menopause', Debbie DeAngelo describes her experience with soy:

When I decided I wanted to try soy, I made the mistake many soy novices make. I went out, purchased the first brand of soy milk I could find, brought it home, poured it into a glass and drank it. Ugh! I hated it. I did not care for the taste, sight, or smell of it, but what was I going to do with the carton I had just bought? I decided to cook and bake with the soy milk until it was gone, and soon I discovered that it was pretty good this way. Initially, that is all I did to get soy into my diet, and if that is as far as you get, that's okay

After a few months of cooking and baking with soy milk, I decided I wanted to do more, so I experimented with different brands and found one that I liked even better. Then I became really brave and poured it over my cereal – not straight, at first. I started out mixing it half and half with skimmed milk, and over the course of six months, I gradually increased the proportion of soy milk until I arrived at full strength.

Do I drink soy milk straight out of the glass? No, I still don't like it that way!

Another way to incorporate soy products into your diet is to make 'The Daisy Network HRT Cake!'

Recipe for 'The Daisy Network HRT Cake'

This recipe contains the helpful hormone balancing elements of soya and essential fatty acids provided by seeds. Eaten regularly (a few slices per week), this cake can bring improvements to some women's symptoms.

4oz (100g) soya flour	2oz (50g) sesame seeds
4oz (100g) wholemeal flour	2oz (50g) flaked almonds
4oz (100g) rolled oats	2 pieces stem ginger, finely chopped
4oz (100g) linseeds (flaxseeds)	8oz (200g) raisins
2oz (50g) sunflower seeds	½ tsp nutmeg
2oz (50g) pumpkin seeds	½ tsp cinnamon
15fl oz (425ml) soya milk	½ tsp ground ginger
1 tbsp malt extract	

Use either imperial or metric quantities when weighing out the ingredients.

Put all the dry ingredients into a mixing bowl. Add the soya milk and malt extract, mix well and leave to soak for 30 minutes. Heat the oven to Gas 5, 190C or 375F. Line a small loaf tin with baking paper. If the mixture is too stiff - it should have a soft, dropping consistency – stir in more soya milk. Spoon the mixture into the tin and bake for 1 hour 15 minutes. Turn out and cool. Eat in thick slices with soya spread.

Do let us know if you have any other tips on how to incorporate more soy into your diet.

Foods containing Calcium

A good calcium intake will not necessarily prevent osteoporosis but it does help reduce the rate of bone loss. For adult women the recommended daily intake is 1000mg but this rises to 1500mg for women who are over 45 or who are menopausal and not on HRT. The table below sets out the calcium content in food which is readily available.

FOOD	SERVING	CALCIUM CONTENT IN (MG)
Cheddar cheese	100gm	739
Skimmed milk	100ml	122
Semi-skimmed milk	100ml	120
Whole milk	100ml	118
Yoghurt low fat fruit	100gm	140
Yoghurt fruit	100gm	122
Watercress	100gm	170
Sesame seeds	100gm	670
Tinned sardines with bones in oil	100gm	500
Dried figs	100gm	250
White bread	100gm	177

Source of information for the above - National Osteoporosis Society www.nos.org.uk

The question of dairy products seems to be a controversial one. As primary sources of calcium, milk, cheese and yoghurt are all very effective in strengthening bones and helping to ward off osteoporosis. However, some experts are wary of the saturated fats found in butter and cheese and are reluctant to recommend products with a high fat content. Obviously it's up to you whether you choose to find your calcium in dairy products or look elsewhere, perhaps turning to green, leafy vegetables, almonds, sesame seeds or figs. It's worth remembering that low-fat dairy products (such as skimmed milk) actually contain more calcium than their whole-fat alternatives.

Drinking

Alcohol, coffee, tea and fizzy drinks are all on the drink less list!

Alcohol

Alcohol is an addictive drug. Alcohol in excess can have a detrimental effect on your body. It is high in calories and depletes the body of vitamins and minerals, notably it affects calcium absorption. It interferes with the chemicals in the brain which control moods and hot flushes. Alcohol is also a stimulant. You may feel that a glass of wine will help you to relax and go to sleep but this is incorrect. Alcohol can also act as a depressant. Although it may lift your mood temporarily, in the longer term it can cause a lowering of mood.

The recommended government guidelines for women are 14 units per week, (that is two glasses of wine a day). Binge drinking should be avoided.

Tea and Coffee

Caffeine in tea and coffee acts as a diuretic and may flush nutrients and vitamins out of the body before the body has a chance to absorb them. Caffeine can also exacerbate hot flushes and night sweats so try and reduce the amount you drink or switch to decaffeinated brands. If you still love coffee try drinking skinny lattes to boost your calcium intake. Herbal and green teas are also a good option.

Carbonated Drinks

There is a link between carbonated cola drinks and deterioration in bone density but there is no evidence that carbonated water has the same effect. Fizzy drinks can often contain high amounts of sugar which can be detrimental to the cardiovascular system.

Useful Addresses

<p>British Association for Applied Nutrition and Nutritional Therapy 27 Old Gloucester Street, London WC1N 3XX Tel/Fax: 0870 606 1284 E-mail: theadministrator@bant.org.uk www.bant.org.uk</p>	
<p>Institute of Optimum Nutrition Avalon House, 72 Lower Mortlake Road Richmond, Surrey TW9 2JY Tel: 020 6814 7800 Fax: 0870 979 1133 E-mail: reception@ion.ac.uk www.ion.ac.uk</p>	<p>National Osteoporosis Society Manor Farm, Skinners Hill, Camerton, Bath BA2 0PJ Tel: 01761 471771/0845 130 3076 (Mon - Thurs 9 – 4.30pm and Fri 9 – 4pm) Helpline: 0845 450 0230 (Mon - Fri 9 –5pm) E-mail: info@nos.org.uk www.nos.org.uk</p>

Useful Books

- 'Natural Solutions to Menopause' by Marilyn Glenville
- 'Healthy Eating for the Menopause' by Marilyn Glenville
- 'Eat to Beat Menopause' by Linda Kearns
- 'Ten Steps to a Natural Menopause' by Leslie Kenton
- 'Eat Well for a Healthy Menopause' by Elaine Moquette
- 'Beat the Menopause without HRT: The Nutritional Answer for Health' by Maryon Stewart
- 'The Phyto Factor' by Maryon Stewart