

Dietary Guidelines after Menopause

What are some basic dietary guidelines?

Eat a variety of foods to get all the nutrients you need. Since women's diets are often low in iron and calcium, follow these simple guidelines:

- **Get enough calcium-** Eat and drink 2 to 4 servings of dairy products and calcium-rich foods a day to ensure that you are getting enough calcium in your daily diet. Calcium is found in dairy products, curds, *paneer*, broccoli and legumes.
- **Pump up your iron intake-** Eat at least 3 servings of iron-rich foods a day to ensure that you are getting enough iron in your daily diet. Iron is found in lean red meat, poultry, fish, eggs, leafy green vegetables, nuts and enriched grain products.
- **Get enough fibre-** Help yourself to foods high in fibre such as whole-grain breads, cereals, pasta, rice, fresh fruits and vegetables.
- **Eat fruits and vegetables-** Include at least 2 to 4 servings of fruits and 3 to 5 servings of vegetables in your daily diet.
- **Read labels-** Use the package label information to help you to make the best selections for a healthy lifestyle.
- **Drink plenty of water-** Drink at least eight 8 to 10 glasses of water a day.
- **Maintain a healthy weight-** Lose weight if you are overweight by cutting down on portion sizes and reducing foods high in fat, not by skipping meals. A registered dietician or your doctor can help you determine your ideal body weight.
- **Reduce foods high in fat-** Fat should provide 30 percent or less of your total daily calories. Also, limit saturated fat to less than 10 percent of your total daily calories. Saturated fat raises cholesterol and increases your risk of heart disease. Saturated fat is found in fatty meats, whole milk, ice cream and cheese. Limit cholesterol intake to 300 milligrams (mg) or less per day.
- **Use sugar and salt in moderation-** Too much sodium in the diet is linked to high blood pressure. Also, go easy on smoked, salt-cured and charbroiled foods – these foods contain high levels of nitrates, which have been linked to cancer.
- **Limit alcohol intake-** Women should limit their consumption of alcohol to one or fewer drinks per day (3 to 5 drinks per week maximum).

Can foods reduce menopausal symptoms?

Plant-based foods that contain isoflavones (plant estrogens) work in the body like a weak form of estrogen and may help relieve menopausal symptoms in some women. Some lower cholesterol levels and have been suggested to relieve hot flashes and night sweats. Currently, most research indicates that soy isoflavones are not particularly effective for treating several menopausal symptoms. Aside from soy products, isoflavones can also be found in foods such as **whole grains and beans**.

The phytoestrogens that have been isolated from a variety of plant food are phenolic (rather than steroidal) compounds; the major categories of phytoestrogens include isoflavones, lignans, and coumestans. **Soy**, other beans, clover, and **alfafa** contain isoflavone precursors, which are converted to genistein, daidzein, and equol by intestinal bacteria. **Flax seeds**, other seeds, legumes, whole grains, and some fruits and vegetables contain lignan precursors that can be converted to enterolactone and enteridiol by intestinal bacteria. Phytoestrogens can have estrogenic activity as potential dietary derived modulators with endocrine function.

Should I avoid certain foods while I am going through menopause?

If you are experiencing hot flashes, you may find that consuming certain “trigger” foods and beverages – spicy foods, caffeine, and alcohol – may increase the severity and frequency of hot flashes.

Are there dietary supplements I can take to ease symptoms/prevent manifestations of menopause?

Because there is a direct relationship between the lack of estrogen after menopause and the development of osteoporosis, the following supplements, combined with a healthy diet, may help prevent the onset of this condition.

- **Calcium**-If you think you need to take a supplement to get enough calcium, check with your doctor first. Calcium carbonate and calcium citrate are good forms of calcium supplements. Be careful not to get more than 2,000 mg of calcium a day. That amount can increase your chance of developing kidney problems.
- **Vitamin D3 (Cholecalciferol)** - Your body uses vitamin D to absorb calcium. People aged 51 to 70 years should have 600 to 800 IU each day and those over age 70 years should have 800 IU. More than 2,000 IU of vitamin D each day is not recommended because it may be too much for your body.