



The Years of Change

A program dedicated to women in midlife to help them before,
during and after their menopause

By Ceri Barnes



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Introduction to
Years of Change



Introduction to the Years of Change

Thank you for joining me on your journey through your Years of Change and for putting your faith in me to help you manage this stage of your life. With my personal support along with the information I give you, we can make an impact on your wellbeing and your ongoing health during a stage which can present us with many challenges.

Why have I devised this program?

Having taught Exercise and Health & Wellbeing for over 30 years and having a keen interest in helping women feel good about themselves, I realised there just isn't enough out there to help women through midlife.

Having experienced some troublesome symptoms leading up to my menopause at the age of 47, I realised that if I had had access to more knowledge I may have managed my symptoms better and developed a different approach to my Years of Change.

I already specialised in Prenatal, Postnatal and Pelvic Floor Health but I wanted to be able to offer more to midlife Women. My study, combined with lots of other research, has lead me to be able to devise this program and fulfil my mission to really help women through what can be one of our most challenging stages of life.

I want to dispel the myth that Menopause has to be such an awful experience – it can actually be very positive. You only have to look around you to see many women who look vibrant, youthful and confident in their later life! You can improve on symptoms you may experience during menopause; feel positive about this transition; and enjoy these Years of Change.

I am going to show you how!

So, where do we start?

I know you will have so many questions.

Our first thought is often HORMONES!

What is happening to them? What are they doing to me? How can I stop the symptoms?

And

How can I get rid of these hot flushes and night sweats? Why do I ache so much? How can I improve my sleep? Why am I gaining weight? What should I eat? Where can I get help? Why am I feeling so irritable? Why can't I remember anything?

But perhaps you are on the journey to your menopause and want to be prepared? So, how can you prepare for menopause?

This program takes a holistic approach to how you can manage your Years of Change. As we slowly put the pieces together, you will see that there is not one easy solution to feeling your best at this stage of life, it's about addressing some habits and learning how you can **take control** so that you can feel at your best in your midlife and beyond.

HERE IS WHAT WILL BE COVERING

What is the Perimenopause?

Menopause

Hormonal Health and Balance

Menopausal Symptoms

Exercise

(and why it's important to choose the right kinds of exercise at this stage of life)

Nutrition, Gut Health and Weight Management

Stress Management

Sleep

Lifestyle Choices

Skeletal and Muscular Health

Heart Health

Pelvic Health

Brain Health

Bone Health

Life beyond Menopause

There is lots of information for you to digest but with my support you will be able to implement strategies that will help you feel more able to cope with what Menopause throws at you! Support is often the missing link. Just reading up on the subject doesn't always provide the help you need. I AM HERE FOR YOU!



How does the program work?

I have devised the program to make it as accessible as possible, depending on your preferred way of digesting information!

- Podcasts you can listen to wherever you are
- Written information
- Exercise and restorative sessions specific to this stage of life
- Dedicated Facebook group to open discussions, ask questions and to ensure you never feel alone!

(YOU HAVE LIFELONG ACCESS TO ALL OF THE ABOVE)

- Scheduled virtual sessions to support the program material with guest appearances from other specialists
- Complimentary access to my online website workoutangel.co.uk for 3 months with a huge library of various exercise sessions. There will be an option to continue with this membership
- PLUS my personal support throughout the program

Are you with me?

Then Let's make a start!





THE BEGINNING OF OUR 'YEARS OF CHANGE'

PERIMENOPAUSE- WHAT IS HAPPENING TO ME?

Most of us will notice some kind of signs that we have reached the beginnings of a change, maybe starting with those "I just need to throw my clothes off, I'm suddenly being overtaken by a heat wave" feeling. Maybe having irregular, lighter, or heavier periods; or maybe just feeling a bit 'bluuugh'.

This is termed the Perimenopause and can last any time from around 2 to 10 years. Often it will mirror how you were at puberty. Typically, we would expect this any time in our 40s or early 50s but we are all different so there is no 'expected' age. The average age of menopause is around 52, again this can vary hugely. As can the number of symptoms you may experience. You may sail through, barely noticing anything, so it's important to say that not every woman suffers with a pile of troublesome symptoms!

I remember the moment it dawned on me that I was having my first 'heat wave'. I was hoovering in my dressing gown and suddenly an overwhelming heat surged through my body, up into my head. I couldn't get my dressing gown off fast enough! It wasn't the kind of heat that you get during a workout, or when the weather is hot, it was just....well different. This is often how it begins for many women.

However, there is no standard procedure here. We are not all the same; our lives are different from each other's and how our perimenopause begins will be too. What we do know though, is that the better prepared we are for this stage of our life as a woman, and the more knowledge we can gain, the less we are likely to fear it.

WHERE ARE WE IN OUR LIVES AT THIS STAGE?

Let's start by looking at what stage of our life we are at as we approach our menopause?

- You may be Mum to children who may still be dependent on you;
- Your children may have left home to study, work or settle down in their own lives;
- You may be a daughter of ageing parents;
- You may be someone's Wife or partner;
- You may have some challenging relationships to deal with;
- You may be working;
- You may be financially more stable with more disposable income;
- You may be free to socialise more regularly;
- You may have more time to enjoy activities that give you pleasure;
- You may be enjoying new challenges in your life you have added to your life;

- You may have reduced your activity for various reasons and so may be more sedentary;
- You may be feeling lost and surplus to requirements – maybe your children have flown the nest

The above meaning you may drink more alcohol, eat out more often, feel less inclined to care (We Only Live Once - Sod It! attitude) and feel low in mood. However it could also mean that you may be adding value to your life, enjoying more freedom and being able to do things you can more easily afford.

So we can see already that where we are and what is happening in our lives can have an influence on our wellbeing now or at any stage in our life. We will cover this in greater detail later but briefly;

- Unhealthy levels of stress are likely to have a negative effect on our health and wellbeing. Excess stress hormones are undesirable for many reasons.
- Uncontrolled, unhealthy eating and drinking habits are detrimental to our health and wellbeing.
- Lack of exercise is likely to have a negative effect on our health & well being
- Changes to your life may be leaving you with feelings of loss or grief, lower self-worth and feelings of emptiness BUT they could also lead to a positive approach to life and a feeling of new, fresh and exciting times ahead
- New challenges and experiences can be life changing, empowering and extremely positive. This time of life can be a great time for taking up new hobbies, challenging yourself and thinking of it as a time of new beginnings.
- Try to make it your aim to ensure that instead of drowning in the sea of negatives of menopause, that you make it a time to take control, make changes as needed and enjoy what can be some of the best years of your life!
- Before the perimenopause women's periods are usually regular and ovulation occurs monthly. Oestrogen levels are steady and we continue with the pattern we have had throughout our reproductive life.

At the start of the perimenopause things begin to alter. Oestrogen levels begin to fluctuate unevenly. The menstrual cycle can begin to alter, some months we may not ovulate but still have a period. We can still become pregnant at this time.

The ovaries produce less and less oestrogen over time, eventually there are no eggs left and we head towards menopause which is, by definition, when we have not had a period for one year.

The time this takes varies and can last from just a few months to many years. This all typically happens in our 40s but can be before or after then.

There are some possible factors that may cause an earlier perimenopause such as:

- Being a smoker
- Family History



- Hysterectomy (removal of the uterus but not ovaries)

During this time we may begin to notice signals that our hormones are changing. We may begin to experience some of the following;

- Irregular periods that are shorter, longer, lighter or heavier
- Some vasomotor symptoms such as hot flushes or night sweats
- Sleep disturbances
- Lowered libido
- Drop in energy
- Weight gain
- Feelings of anxiety or low mood, irritability

For many women this can be a difficult time, especially if they don't understand what is happening and why. This is why it is so important to prepare for this time by learning about the natural transition we experience. We need to ensure that we are practicing good self care and arming ourselves with some strategies that can help us through the menopause.

Unfortunately, when we read anything about the menopause it can often sound fairly horrific and that everything about it is terrible. It doesn't have to be. The more positively women face this stage of life - the smoother it can be.

WHEN TO SEEK HELP

Although it is normal to experience some changes in the menstrual cycle in the perimenopause, it is important to seek advice from your health care provider if you notice any of the following:

- Very heavy bleeding
- Bleeding for longer than 7 days
- Bleeding in between periods
- Regular periods less than 21 days apart
- Bleeding after intercourse

THOUGHTS ABOUT THE PERIMENOPAUSE

When women struggle with unwanted symptoms it is natural that they become frustrated by them. Many women just put up with them because they assume it's just part of what the menopause brings. However, it is possible to control much of what is happening, and I am going to guide you through some strategies below that will help you take control!

Your first aim is to face these changes with the right mindset. Being stressed and anxious about what is a natural part of a woman's life is sure to exacerbate the symptoms you may be experiencing. If you can accept that this is a natural passage to the third stage of your



life, and that just as in puberty it could have its ups and downs, it will make for a more positive experience.

There is so much information in this program to help you to help yourself. You are not alone in this process so try to communicate with other female friends who are at the same stage of life to support each other. Women supporting women is something I strongly believe in.

Whether, like me, you have already been through menopause or are preparing for it, the information in the program is relevant to us all. Our aim should be to continue with good practices throughout our later years so that we all live our best possible life? have the best quality of life possible.





YOU'VE REACHED THE MENOPAUSE

I remember, growing up in childhood, hearing people talk about "The M word" Menopause was a subject so taboo that it was only given one letter to describe it!

Menopause is the word we generally use to describe the Years of Change; the word that seems to generate fear, resentment, loss and many other negative feelings; and the word that actually seems to be becoming more openly discussed...at last!

So what actually is "The Menopause"? It is in fact just a moment in time..... the moment that is exactly one year from your last period.

Menopause is defined as the time when you haven't had a period for exactly one year, so in theory it is just a moment!

The time leading up to this moment is called the Perimenopause. This can last anything from a few months to 10 years or more, although the average time seems to be around 4 years. It is during this time that we start noticing changes.

What do Women expect from Menopause?

As I have already mentioned menopause does not get good press. Many Women expect the worst and face this stage of life with a lot of negative thoughts. The stress that some women feel about what is happening makes their 'symptoms' worse. However, evidence shows that women who face this stage of life with more knowledge and positivity have a better journey along the Menopause path.

Some women seem to glide through the menopause. Why? Perhaps luck? But perhaps because of the way they live their lives; the way they think; or the way they are.

We can be an influence on our journey and I can show you how.

I have yet to meet a woman who jumps for joy at the thought of her menopause. Often women have been primed by friends, family or colleagues to expect the worst. Many women think of the menopause as something that will turn us into an irritable, sweating, moody,

forgetful, anxious, ageing female who is likely to get fat around the middle. All our clothes having 'shrunk in the wash'!

We will become unattractive because of our wrinkles and will never sleep again. Sex will be out the window along with any energy we once had.

We will be hot, then cold; up, then down; irrational and may resort to getting up at night to shower; put our head in the fridge or eat what's in it!

None of us HAVE TO be that woman. We are approaching what can potentially be one of the best stages of our life. No more periods, more freedom, we are wiser and you only have to look around you to see that the midlife woman of today can certainly give any younger woman a run for her money! Life is not ending. It is the beginning of a new and exciting stage of our life that can bring us great joy, perhaps Grandchildren, time to travel and to enjoy our freedom after bringing up our family.

Unfortunately, menopause doesn't get very good press! If we think we may be going into 'The change' as it's often referred to, what is the first thing we are likely to do?

Well, with good old Google we will most likely start there. One of the first things you may see is 'The 34 symptoms of menopause'. How many have you got? Is this it? How will I be? That's it; I'M OLD!

None of the symptoms listed are what you want to have to cope with. Now, possibly having convinced yourself it is all going to be awful, life is going to be full of dreadful things, you may already be feeling your stress levels rising.

Oh, here comes another heatwave. The possibilities of adding 'wine o' clock' to your day seems like a good idea as does comforting yourself with sugary foods or extra snacks. And another heatwave. Worse still you now have no idea what to do with this newly learned information.

However, if we could take a more positive approach to this stage of our life, educate ourselves so that we learn more before or while we are going through it, we will fare better. If we can talk more openly about it with our friends and family, seek the right help and support each other the journey along this sometimes, challenging path, will be smoother.

Let's make that our plan and create a less bumpy ride.

At this time, as women, we have so many questions. We often feel so much uncertainty. One thing we do know is that we are going to travel along this path to our 3rd Age. And it's not all bad news!

We are going to be older but wiser, have no troublesome periods to worry about and we potentially have many great things to look forward to as we enter what can be one of the best stages of our lives as a Woman! We are entering the prime of our lives – **THERE IS LIFE AFTER MENOPAUSE!**



Many women tell me that they feel that there is no help or information for them; that it's a subject that is kept rather quiet; that we just have to get on with it. Fortunately, that is changing.

My mission is to help you gain information that will arm you with the power to face this stage of life head on. We know that knowledge is power. You will learn new strategies to help you cope with symptoms you may be dealing with. You will find ways to manage this stage smoothly to help you emerge like a beautiful butterfly!

Even more importantly, you will not be in this process alone. I can bring you as much information as you wish for but without the help I will give you to understand how to use the information, my motivation to help you to make the changes you may need to make and my support it would be like me handing you a book to read then walking away! That is not how this program works!

Evidence shows that the better prepared we are for this stage of our life as a Woman and the more knowledge we can gain the less we are likely to fear it.

I am going to take you on quite a journey in this course! Through my studies I realised that I lacked so much knowledge myself as I went through my perimenopause and menopause but it has made me even more determined to share my knowledge with you now! Luckily, I seemed to work my way through it all reasonably well and in hindsight I know that exercise, good nutrition and several other factors helped me. However, there is still so much I know now that may have been of huge help and will be beneficial in my onward journey. Menopause isn't something we can hide from and we can't simply pretend it's not happening, so let's make it a better menopause!

What will you learn on this program?

- *What is the menopause and what is changing?*
- *What symptoms are common and why are they happening?*
- *How to develop strategies to deal with symptoms, emotions and the outcomes of menopause through an extensive library of information*
- *How to live a healthy, positive life beyond menopause*

It is so easy to assume that this stage of life is simply about hormonal changes, however the picture is much, much bigger than that! There are many factors that influence our health and wellbeing at midlife and beyond so we will be discovering lots more about the following;

- Hormonal health
- Nutritional health & weight management
- Exercise and restorative activities
- Pelvic floor health
- Bone health
- Musculoskeletal health
- Stress & stress management
- Sleep & sleep hygiene
- Brain health & cognitive health
- Breast health

We are going to think of it as a jigsaw, so that it doesn't become overwhelming. As we lay each piece down we will gradually build a big picture that consists of many pieces. It all fits together, we just need to figure out how.

Let's take one piece at a time, let the piece settle into place then add more pieces when you feel ready.

We need to be able to see what is happening in our lives and how this can have an influence on our wellbeing.

So we can see already that where we are and what is happening in our lives can have an influence on our wellbeing now or at any stage of our life. We will cover this all in greater detail but briefly:

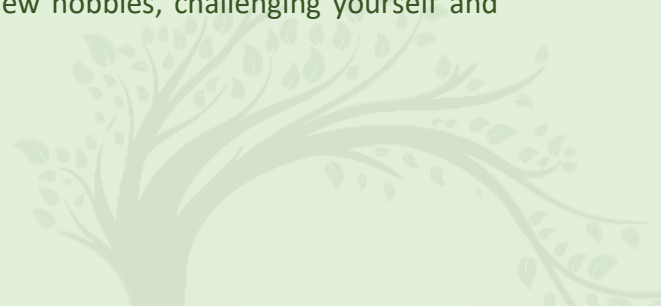
Unhealthy levels of stress are likely to have a negative effect on our health and wellbeing. Stress hormones in excess are undesirable for many reasons.

Uncontrolled, unhealthy eating and drinking habits are detrimental to our health and wellbeing.

Lack of exercise is likely to have a negative effect on our health and well being

Changes to your life may be leaving you with feelings of loss or grief, lower self-worth and lead to feelings of emptiness. But changes can also lead to a more positive approach to life and a feeling of new, fresh and exciting times ahead.

New challenges and experiences can be life changing, empowering and extremely positive. This time of life can be a great time for taking up new hobbies, challenging yourself and thinking of it as a time of new beginnings.



Try to make it your aim to ensure that instead of drowning in a sea of Menopause Negativity we can attempt to focus on it being a time for taking control and changing what we can change and living some of the best years of your life.





Section 1

Hormonal Health



“WHAT ARE MY HORMONES DOING TO ME?”

Many women expect the worst and face this stage of life with a lot of negative thoughts. The stress that some women feel about what is happening makes their ‘symptoms’ worse. However, evidence shows that women who face this stage of life with more knowledge and positivity have a better journey along the Menopause path.

WHAT IS YOUR PERCEPTION OF MENOPAUSE?

How we perceive things makes an impact on how they will affect us. Unfortunately, we seem to be surrounded by visuals that joke about the Menopause and all the possible symptoms that go with it, or suggest that the whole experience is miserable. It is little wonder that women anticipate this stage of their life with dread.

If you fully expect life to be full of misery as you approach menopause and don’t have any knowledge of how you can take control then yes, it could all become a bit of a battle.

There are as many as 34 ‘symptoms’ of menopause if you look it up. For sure, most of us women are likely to experience some of them. Sleep disruption is at the top of the list along with vasomotor symptoms such as night sweats and hot flushes.

I’ve been there, it’s not pleasant to wake up boiling hot and dripping, to fall asleep again only to be woken up again by another sweat - and then back to being cold again. This pattern really is disruptive to our sleep and results in feeling constantly tired. Tiredness often results in driving irritability, the need for sugary snacks to get you through the day, caffeine to help you stay alert, maybe some wine to help you relax. The result? More broken sleep, weight gain, more ‘symptoms’.

What we don’t always realise is that many of the lifestyle choices we make aren’t helping! It becomes a vicious circle!

Hormones are “Chemical Messengers”, affected by every action we take or thought we have. There will be a knock-on effect to thoughts of negativity. Feeling flustered or thinking that your world is becoming a terrible place to be, will affect your life on every level.

Yes, naturally our sex hormones are changing. That is exactly what this process is - natural. However, we have many other hormones to consider in this process. Stress hormones being of particular importance. Understanding the process will help you to cope better.

I have worked with many women through this challenging stage of life and the biggest message I give them is that the more negatively you face this natural process (and the less knowledge you have about it) the more troublesome it is likely to be.

Some women seem to glide through the menopause. Why? Perhaps luck? Or perhaps it is because of the way they live their life or the way they think or the way they are.

We can be an influence our journey and I can show you how.

We are lead to believe that we are likely to turn into a moody, stressed, unreasonable woman who is gaining weight, becoming wrinkled and who will no longer be attractive because she is “past her best”.

We will be constantly irritated by hot flushes, dry skin and clothes that feel too tight. None of us **have to** be that woman, we are approaching what can potentially be one of the best stages of our life. No more periods, more freedom, we are wiser and you only have to look around you to see that the midlife woman of today can certainly give any younger woman a run for her money!

Life is not ending, it's the beginning of a new and exciting stage of our life that can bring us great joy, perhaps Grandchildren, time to travel and to enjoy our freedom after bringing up our family.

Winston Churchill famously said as we turned a corner in the 2nd World War “This is not the end. It is not even the beginning of the end. But it is, perhaps, the end of the beginning”

It is very easy to blame our changing hormones on everything during the menopause! As hormone levels alter, we may start to experience signs that indicate we are entering the Perimenopause, the time leading up to our menopause. Whilst balancing our hormones is definitely on our “to do” list, it is important to remember that it is just part of the big picture. We may feel a mixture of emotions at this time; frustration; anxiety; fear; loss and resentment are all common to women as they acknowledge the changes that are taking place. I don't know of many women who have leapt for joy, excited at the prospect of hot flushes and whatever other ‘symptoms’ they expect from the menopause!

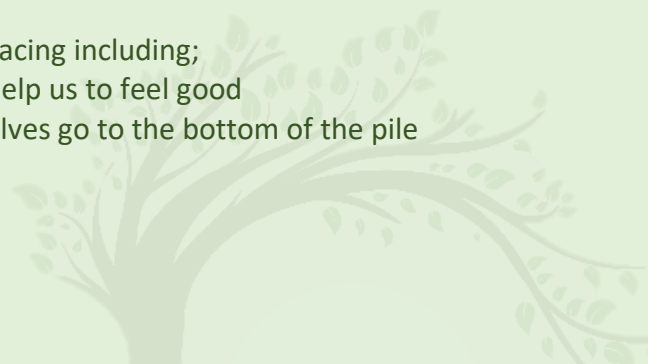
We may feel as though the feelings and symptoms we are experiencing are dominating our life and that life becomes a struggle, this is also a natural response to what we are going through.

The way we deal with this can be to:

- Hide how we are feeling
- Limit our focus to doing only what is essential, losing out on the very things that will help us feel good!

There are many positive ways to deal with what we are facing including;

- * Making time for ourselves and prioritising things that help us to feel good
- * Putting ourselves first, as women we so often let ourselves go to the bottom of the pile



- * Talking to other women and sharing our experiences and feelings
- * Accepting the changes and noting the positives that can come with them

I am sure every women would choose to live a fulfilling life and go through her later years feeling healthy and happy. Once you have reached menopause it is well worth putting the work and effort in to achieve health and wellbeing for what could be a third of your life.

What are hormones and which hormones affect us at this time?

Hormones are chemical messages in the body that bring about responses in tissues and cells. Thoughts affect hormones, so every thought we have, and many of the actions we take, will affect this finely tuned orchestra of messages!

It is not just our sex hormones that may become off balance.

Here is a list of the hormones that we need to consider;

oestrogen / progesterone / testosterone / cortisol / thyroxin / adrenaline / insulin

Because hormonal balance has such an effect on our whole being, it can be difficult to find the reasons as to why we may be experiencing certain symptoms. HRT is always a hot topic and everyone has their opinions on taking or not taking it. It can be a useful 'boat to the other side' to help us get through if we are having a tough time.

Much of the way we look after ourselves and live our lives contributes to hormonal balance, therefore we can explore alternative ways of managing our hormonal balance.

We are going to consider this as we go through the program.

Factors to consider in hormonal balance

Gut health

Nutrition

Weight management

Stress management

Exercise

Endocrine disrupting chemicals

Sleep patterns

As we address each area in this program, the pieces will start to come together. Once you can see the whole picture, everything will become clear and you will see the importance of looking beyond hormones.

Why not take a closer look at hormones, their functions, the effects of on them during midlife and the possible resulting symptoms in the hormone imbalance section.





HORMONAL IMBALANCE

At menopause we can become aware of symptoms that we just assume are 'part of the process' but there is always a reason why we are experiencing them, we don't just get symptoms! Hormonal imbalances have many effects on our systems and whilst menopausal symptoms are not just about hormonal imbalances, identifying where the imbalances are and what you can do about them will help you have a smoother menopause.

Let's look at the main 'culprits'!

For each hormone we will delve in and look at where they are produced, what they do and what to look out for in terms of an imbalance. Then we can begin to identify what we can do to create more harmony.

OESTROGEN

Predominantly produced in the ovaries (and in the placenta during pregnancy). However, oestrogens are also produced in the liver, adrenal glands, breasts (in smaller quantities) and also in fat cells, specifically in belly fat. Therefore, although Oestrogen produced by the ovaries is diminished we still produce oestrogens. **If we don't metabolise them well we may become oestrogen dominant.**

Functions of Oestrogen

- Stimulates growth of Breast tissue
- Maintains Vaginal blood flow and lubrication
- Causes the lining of the Uterus to thicken during the menstrual cycle
- Keeps Vaginal lining elastic
- Other functions - including preserving Bone mass, Brain health, Cardiovascular health

What happens as we age and go through the menopause?

During perimenopause, oestrogen levels fluctuate and become unpredictable. Eventually, production falls to a very low level.

Possible signs of low Oestrogen

- Hot flushes/ night sweats
- Vaginal dryness / thinning of tissues / decreased sexual response
- Bladder infections / pelvic floor issues - incontinence
- Mood swings / depression / irritability
- Mental fuzziness
- Headaches / migranes
- Sleep disruption
- Palpitations
- Bone loss
- Lower libido

NOTE: we can also suffer symptoms due to **oestrogen dominance**

PROGESTERONE

Produced in the ovaries and a crucial hormone in regulating our menstrual cycle. The balance of progesterone to oestrogen can often be significant in terms of symptoms. Therefore balancing the two is of great importance.

Functions of Progesterone

- Prepares the lining of the uterus for a fertilized egg and helps maintain early in pregnancy

What happens as we age and go through the menopause?

We gradually produce less progesterone as we go through the perimenopause then levels will fall naturally low post menopause.

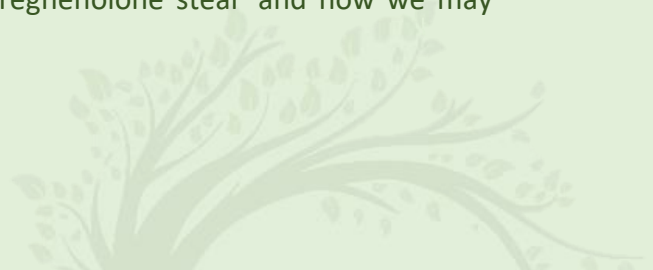
Possible signs of low Progesterone

- Premenstrual Migrain type symptoms
- Irregular and heavy periods
- Anxiety, nervousness or depression
- Aches & pains
- "Itchy twitchy" legs
- Heart palpitations

An imbalance between Oestrogen and Progesterone

Although levels naturally alter during perimenopause, many symptoms can arise due to an imbalance between oestrogen and progesterone.

Read in the section 'Oestrogen Dominance' about 'pregnenolone steal' and how we may become oestrogen dominant.



TESTOSTERONE

Although known as the “male” hormone, testosterone is also important to women’s health: Made from cholesterol in our ovaries and adrenal glands

Functions of Testosterone

- Plays a key role in women’s oestrogen production
- Contributes to libido
- Helps maintain muscle mass


What happens as we age and go through the menopause?

Levels peak in a woman’s 20s and decline slowly thereafter. By menopause, Testosterone level is at half of its peak. However, not all women’s levels drop, some may rise. Ovaries continue to make testosterone even after oestrogen production stops. Testosterone production from adrenal glands also declines with aging but continues after menopause.

Possible signs of Testosterone deficiency

- Feeling ‘blugghhh’ and lacking ‘joy’ in your life
- Unexplained fatigue
- Decreased libido
- Thinning or loss of pubic hair
- Decreased sensation sexually
- Loss of muscle mass
- Loss of bone density
- Achy joints

Signs of excess testosterone

- Facial hair above lip
 - Increased dreaming or nightmares
 - Difficulty falling asleep
 - Heightened sex drive
 - Irritability
 - Explosive moods or volatility
 - Aggressive behaviour
 - Increased muscle tension and edginess
 - Liver toxicity
 - Acne
 - Deeper voice
- 

THYROXIN

Produced in the thyroid gland, the 'Queen' of the endocrine system! If it isn't happy, the rest of the system won't be either! The thyroid gland does not like stress! There is a strong connection with the gut, brain, adrenal glands and ovaries so harmony between them all is essential.

Functions of Thyroxin

- Controls metabolism and regulates your body temperature
- Produces thyroxin (WITH IMBALANCE it can be over or under active)

What happens as we age and go through menopause?

Hormonal changes may have an effect on thyroid function. Thyroid function issues may be responsible for symptoms when it is assumed the symptoms are as a result of declining sex hormones.

Possible signs of an underactive thyroid gland

- Sluggishness
- Tiredness
- Weight gain
- Sensitivity to cold
- Depression
- Constipation
- Muscle aches and weakness
- Hair loss

Possible signs of an overactive thyroid gland

- Nervousness, anxiety and irritability
- Mood swings
- Difficulty sleeping
- Persistent tiredness and weakness
- Sensitivity to heat
- Swelling in your neck from an enlarged thyroid gland (goitre)
- An irregular and/or unusually fast heart rate (palpitations)
- Twitching or trembling

ADRENAL HEALTH

The adrenal glands produce several hormones including adrenaline and cortisol. These hormones have a connection with stress.



Adrenaline (Epinephrine)

We are all familiar with the term “adrenaline rush” or “adrenaline junkie”. I know we are NOT familiar with being chased by a tiger in the jungle or by a grizzly bear in a wood but if that happened you can be sure you would get an “adrenaline rush”!

As we go into any situation that is ‘stressful’ (a Bear chasing us) or wildly ‘exciting’ experiences or anything that creates extreme emotions the hormone adrenaline starts being pumped out by the adrenal glands. You may know this as the ‘fight or flight’ response. Our heart rate rises, pupils dilate, more blood and oxygen is pumped around the body along with glucose and then sent to our muscles to allow them to spring into action! We can suddenly find we have “superhuman powers”, we can run faster and feel like if we really needed to we could lift the weight of a car! The body’s ability to feel pain decreases so even if the Bear bit your bottom you’d still be able to run away!

However we also produce adrenaline when we are under stress and not in real danger.

CORTISOL

Cortisol is our main stress hormone and a key hormone to be aware of in menopause. Cortisol is produced alongside Adrenaline but not as quickly as during the ‘fight or flight’ response. We have many Cortisol receptors in our body so Cortisol affects many different functions in the body.

Our Cortisol levels fluctuate. They should rise in the morning to help wake us up and levels then vary during the day lowering in the evening to naturally unwind us. We do need stress hormones to drive us on and to make sure we are reactive to situations but if our Cortisol are out of balance it can spike in the evening leading us to feeling ‘wired’ but fatigued. This is certainly a sign it is out of kilter.

Functions of Cortisol

- Regulates blood sugar, metabolism and blood pressure. It also raises sodium levels to keep our blood pressure up
- Helps reduce inflammation

What happens during menopause and as we age?

Menopause can be a time of increased stress and sleep disturbances leading to increased levels of Cortisol. If we produce too much Cortisol our adrenals can become fatigued (adrenal fatigue). High Cortisol levels can also have an effect on our Progesterone levels, lowering them, possibly leading to pregnenolone steal creating Oestrogen dominance.

We may have ongoing stresses in our life, such as;

- Work stresses
- Commuting
- Challenging children (that’s all of them sometimes!)
- Challenging relationships
- Elderly relatives to care for
- Financial worries

Signs of over production of adreneline and cortisol

- Weight gain (especially around the middle)
- Irritability
- Lack of concentration or memory
- High blood pressure
- Extreme fatigue
- Depression
- Headaches
- Sleep problems
- Anxiety
- Thyroid imbalance

The constant revving of the engine means we have nothing left in the tank and this can affect our thyroid function.

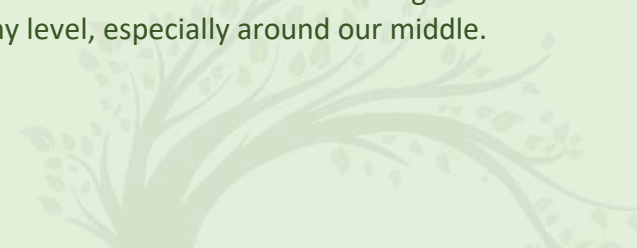
To continue providing this fast energy will result in cravings and increased appetite leading to the risk of weight gain. Insulin and Blood Sugar levels go on a roller coaster and, unless our body is making use of it, extra energy is stored as fat in the middle of our body deposited close to the liver for quick conversion to energy.

Possible signs of Cortisol imbalance

- Tendency to store fat around your middle
- Increased appetite
- Increased cravings for combination of carbs and fats
- Mid-afternoon slump – need coffee and/or snacks to get going
- Low immune system
- Headaches
- Blood sugar levels disrupted
- Problematic digestive system, bloating
- Muscle aches and pains / neck & shoulders
- Hair loss
- Difficulty concentrating
- Depression or feeling blugghhh
- Irregular or absent periods
- Increased PMS
- Slower metabolism
- Tiredness but can't sleep well
- 2nd wind in evening; wakeful at night; tired in morning

INSULIN

Insulin is produced by the pancreas. It regulates our blood sugar. In midlife, poor management of our blood sugar, having a diet high in refined sugar and gaining weight in our mid-section can all contribute to us developing type 2 diabetes. It is vital to our health at this stage of life that we don't let our weight creep up to an unhealthy level, especially around our middle.



Function of Insulin

- Controls blood sugar

What happens as we age and go through the menopause?

Change of eating and drinking habits can effect Insulin levels. This may lead to high blood sugar levels and an increased risk of Diabetes. Gaining weight (especially belly fat) can also have an effect on insulin levels.

During menopause there are so many drivers to going off track and craving sugary foods, alcohol and less nutritious foods;

- Stress
- Poor sleep
- Feeling low
- Boredom
- Having too many 'oh blow it, you only live once' moments!
- More socialising

What are the signs of high blood sugar and blood sugar fluctuations?

- Irritability
- Aggressive outbursts
- Palpitations
- Lack of libido
- Crying spells
- Dizziness (feeling edgy)
- Anxiety
- Brain fog; confusion; lack of concentration
- Fatigue
- Insomnia
- Headaches
- Muscle cramps; joint aches

The only way to truly know what your hormones are doing is by having a complete hormonal profile test. However, hormones fluctuate and alter according to external factors so our best starting point is to check out the big picture first and determine if there are any changes we need to make.

One thing will affect another, everything is linked in some way and once we restore some balance in our life through;

Optimising our nutrition, optimising our gut health, managing our stress, having a balanced approach to exercise, addressing sleep patterns and managing our weight, then we can begin to gain some hormonal balance.



SERATONIN

Serotonin is produced predominantly in the gut, and small amounts in the brain

Functions of Serotonin

- Stabilizes our mood, well-being and happiness
- Plays a role in digestion, sleep, libido and wound healing

What happens as we go through menopause?

- Levels decrease due to a drop in oestradiol (one of the oestrogens)
- If gut health deteriorates at this stage of life and if you develop gut dysbiosis (leaky gut) the production of serotonin will drop. Gut bacteria manufacture approximately 95% of the body's serotonin.

What are the signs of decreased Serotonin levels

- Low mood
- Anger
- Irritability
- Insomnia
- Anxiety
- Low libido


Notes and other influences on Serotonin levels

- Serotonin levels are a major influence on mood and emotions we may experience in the perimenopause. Many women wonder why they feel anger, anxiety and low mood as they go through this stage and serotonin can be a major influence.
- Low levels of Vitamin D can contribute to decreased levels of serotonin
- Lack of certain kinds of touch can affect production of serotonin to a small degree. The touch receptors we have in our skin when stimulated via stroking / massage produce small amounts of serotonin and if at midlife if this kind of touch declines it can be an influence on mood as a result. Touch also stimulates other hormones that influence mood. Food for thought!

As we can see, the symptoms we have can be influenced by different hormones. It can be difficult to determine what is out of kilter!

For example; are you suffering with low libido because of a drop in Oestrogen? Or is it a drop in Testosterone? Or is it because of Adrenal fatigue?

*But it could also be due to Stress? Lack of sleep? Or less confidence in your body?
This is another reminder that we need to look at the whole big picture!*





HORMONAL HEALTH

IS YOUR THYROID GLAND IN GOOD SHAPE?

Let's look at the thyroid gland in more detail.

The thyroid gland is a small butterfly-shaped gland in the neck, just in front of the windpipe. One of its main functions is to produce hormones that help regulate the body's **metabolism** (the process that turns food into energy.)

If the thyroid gland is off balance and our thyroid hormones are not working as they should be we may experience symptoms, though some of the early symptoms can go unnoticed or we assume "it's the menopause".

Although the change in levels of oestrogen and progesterone and also oestrogen dominance can affect the levels of thyroid hormones as we go through the Perimenopause and menopause, there are other factors that can affect them too.

Such as;

- Stress
- Infection
- Trauma
- Radiation
- Certain medicines
- Toxins
- Pesticides
- Mercury
- Lead
- Fluoride
- Autoimmune diseases
- Inflammation
- Liver and kidney dysfunction
- Low calorie diet

We can have different symptoms depending on whether our thyroid is under-active or over-active but any of the following should be checked out;

- Sluggishness
- Tiredness
- Unexplained weight gain
- Sensitivity to cold or heat
- Depression
- Constipation
- Muscle aches or weakness
- Nervousness
- Irritability
- Difficulty sleeping
- Enlarged thyroid gland
- Irregular heart beat / unusually fast or slow heart rate/ palpitations
- Twitching or trembling
- Dry, thinning hair

WHAT CAN WE DO TO HELP BALANCE OUR THYROID HORMONES?

- Reduce stress
- Reduce inflammation
- Reduce toxins
- Address your nutrition

GOOD NUTRITION FOR THE THYROID GLAND

Here are some foods to help support the thyroid through nutrition and their nutrient group

- Brazil nuts (selenium)
- Seafood (zinc)
- Legumes- chickpeas etc
- Cooked carrots, squash (vitamin A)

If you think that you are experiencing any of the symptoms mentioned do arrange a consultation with your health provider.





OESTROGEN DOMINANCE

Although oestrogen levels naturally decline in the perimenopause/menopause we can still become what we call 'oestrogen dominant' This can lead to unwanted 'symptoms'.

WHAT IS OESTROGEN DOMINANCE?

Oestrogen dominance is the term used to describe excess oestrogen in relation to progesterone and can produce some unwelcome symptoms such as;

- Bilateral pounding headaches
- Recurrent yeast infections
- Breast swelling and tenderness
- Nausea, bloating and vomiting
- Leg cramps and restless legs
- Yellow tinged skin
- Excessive vaginal bleeding, heavy periods

It can also include;

- Weight gain
- Insomnia
- Fatigue
- Fibroids
- Hair loss
- Cold hands or feet
- Low libido
- Mood swings
- Memory problems
- Anxiety
- Night sweats
- Sleep issues

Oestrogen levels naturally fall during the perimenopause and although the Oestrogen produced by the ovaries declines we still produce oestrogen from other tissues of the body. For example the liver and the adrenal glands. Oestrogen is also produced from fat (especially belly fat). We never actually stop producing oestrogen and these secondary sources of

oestrogen are particularly important as we become postmenopausal. If they are not metabolised and excreted as they should be they can have a negative effect on hormonal balance and health.

If progesterone levels fall dramatically in relation to oestrogen this makes us more dominant in oestrogen.

LET'S LOOK AT HOW WE CAN BECOME OESTROGEN DOMINANT

- **GUT HEALTH AND OESTROGEN DOMINANCE**

Poor gut health can disrupt the metabolism of oestrogens.

The oestrogens produced in the ovaries, adrenals, FAT/adipose tissue and other organs should be able to be excreted. However certain factors can disrupt this process and the oestrogens can end up being recycled. This will therefore increase the levels of oestrogen in the body.

- **POOR LIVER HEALTH**

Our Liver is essential for ridding the body of toxic substances and digesting food. Being very overweight and drinking excess alcohol can affect our liver health. This along with an unhealthy diet high in sugar, fatty foods and excess salt can permanently damage our liver.

- **CONSTIPATION**

It is important to have good, healthy bowel movements to aid the excretion of oestrogens.

- **POOR LYMPHATIC MOVEMENT**

The lymphatic system plays its part too.

- **MIDSECTION WEIGHT GAIN**

Storing fat around the middle is another contributing factor in oestrogen dominance. As well as increasing the risk of certain diseases we also produce oestrogen from fat cells, particularly from belly fat.

HERE ARE SOME OTHER FACTORS TO CONSIDER REGARDING OESTROGEN DOMINANCE

This can lead to toxic levels of oestrogen which can increase risks of certain oestrogen driven cancers. For example breast or endometrial cancer and also some conditions such as endometriosis.



THE ESTROBOLOME

The Estrobolome is a collection of bacteria in the gut important to the metabolism of oestrogens and excess oestrogens. We need to maintain the good bacteria to maintain good gut health.

What affects the Estrobolome?

- Age/Ethnicity
- Lifetime environmental influences
- The nature of your birth
- Diet
- Antibiotic use
- Exercise
- Sleep

Q: HOW CAN WE MAINTAIN A HEALTHY ESTROBOLOME?

A: THROUGH HEALTHY NUTRITION

The theories that come up regularly indicate that we should;

“Eat food, less of it, mostly plants” (quote from Michael Pollen) with plenty of variety.

- Plant foods are shown to be beneficial on every level.
- Plant foods provide great fibre levels which help us to have healthy bowel movements
- Animal protein and high fat diet - high levels of these in our diet can affect excretion of oestrogens.

WHAT TO EAT TO BENEFIT YOUR ESTROBOLOME

- Eat fermented foods (dairy or non dairy) if your body will tolerate them!
- Vitamin D levels need to be maintained (also important for bone health) – consider taking a supplement
- Foods containing Omega 3 – oily fish, nuts, seeds, plant oils
- Polyphenols have a prebiotic effect - dark berries, raspberries and grapes (grapes also help with inflammation)
- Plant allies - Rosemary, sage, curcumin (turmeric)
- Culinary spices - oregano, black pepper, ginger, cayenne pepper and cinnamon
- Intermittent fasting (gaps in eating so eating in a 8-10 hour window have shown to help have a healthy estrobolome and can have anti inflammatory influences)
-

***SO....What You Eat
When You Eat
How You Eat
has an influence on your GUT BACTERIA***

STRESS also affects gut health (including stressing about food!) and can imbalance oestrogen/progesterone

OTHER FACTORS TO CONSIDER

XENOESTROGENS (the bad guys!)

This is not produced by our body but xenoestrogens exist in certain products. Xenoestrogens mimic oestrogen and can cause hormone disruption and add to oestrogen dominance. These can be found in some plastics, pesticides, chemicals, cosmetics, adhesives, oils and paints. These products also have a very negative effect on our environment and so should be avoided.

OESTRONE

This type of oestrogen is the predominant oestrogen produced in post menopause and if produced in excess can be related to oestrogen driven cancers such as breast and endometrial cancer. It is produced by the ovaries but also by fat cells, especially belly fat. This gives us another reason to ensure we control any central weight gain.

PHYTOESTROGENS

These are the good guys! These are plant based and have the advantage of blocking the action of xenoestrogens. Another good reason to consider a plant-based diet.

PREGNENOLONE STEAL (stealing of progesterone!)

Progesterone levels can also fall lower than they should be, again creating an imbalance between oestrogen and progesterone. This can happen as a result of ongoing stress which contributes to adrenal fatigue. Progesterone is literally robbed to make cortisol (a primary stress hormone)

So it's vital we manage our stress to avoid adrenal fatigue

Signs of progesterone deficiency (in balance to oestrogen)

- Premenstrual migraine
- PMS like symptoms
- Irregular / heavy periods
- Anxiety and nervousness
- Itchy, twitch legs
- Heart palpitations
- Depression

- Fibromyalgia type symptoms

SO IN CONCLUSION

FOR OPTIMAL OESTROGEN EXCRETION WE SHOULD;

- *Eat a diverse and healthy diet, mostly plant-based*
- *Have a regular happy, healthy bowel movement*
- *Exercise and move more*
- *Manage your stress*
- *Avoid Xenoestrogens*





A QUICK REFERENCE GUIDE TO YOUR HORMONAL HEALTH SECTION

1. Hormones are chemical messengers that are influenced by our thoughts, actions, lifestyle & natural reproductive life
2. Hormonal changes can trigger symptoms in our menopausal years but so can stress, sleep disruption and poor lifestyle choices
3. Hormonal balance can be achieved by improving sleep, reducing stress, taking the right types of exercise, improving gut health & nutritional choices and making better lifestyle choices
4. Menopausal symptoms can be alleviated without necessarily resorting to HRT. It takes work but doesn't anything worth having?!!
5. HRT can help if really needed but should be used alongside addressing everything mentioned in 2 above
6. Hormone therapy is best explored by gaining a full hormonal profile so that the correct hormones are given to you
7. Sex hormones are not the only hormones we should be considering at this time of life
8. Oestrogen dominance is not uncommon and can bring unwanted symptoms. Mostly driven by things we can control and manage

Useful sections;

- *What are my hormones doing to me?*
- *Healthy hormone quiz*
- *Is your thyroid gland in good shape?*
- *Oestrogen dominance*
- *Hormone imbalance*
- *Alternatives & complimentary methods*
- *Herbs & plants*
- *Alleviating menopausal symptoms toolbox*



Section 2

Menopause



INTRODUCTION TO MENOPAUSE SYMPTOMS

The first thing that springs to mind as a we approach our Years of Change is how will it feel? Is it going to be as terrible as everyone makes out? Are all the things you've heard really going to happen to you? Will you get hot flushes, brain fog, feel irritable, put on weight?

We can probably remember seeing women older than ourselves getting red in the face, suddenly fanning themselves with the nearest magazine and looking flustered. I don't think we ever imagine that we could be that woman one day - until it hits....**IF IT DOES!**

Not all women suffer with symptoms!

And if you are already going through the perimenopause and noticing some symptoms, what can you do about them?

Why am I aching so much? Will I ever sleep again? How am I supposed to get through a working day feeling so tired? SO MANY QUESTIONS!

I think we all worry about what it's going to be like and how long we are going to be dealing with unwelcome symptoms. It's easy to get stressed when symptoms strike. As stress is one of the biggest drivers of symptoms that's not very useful! So it's always helpful to be armed with some information that may help, which is what this section is all about.

I know that I am repeating myself but it's so important to remind yourself that we are all different. This means our menopausal symptoms can last anything from a few months to over 10 years. Your friend may be telling you that she has suffered with hot flushes for years, but it doesn't mean you are going to! Especially if you take some control and work to lessen the pesky things!

What are the most common symptoms?

If you've already read up on menopause symptoms you are likely to find a list of at least 34 possibilities!

However we can identify the most common symptoms experienced by around 85% of women which are:

- Vasomotor symptoms such as hot flushes and night sweats
- Sleep disturbances
- Weight gain
- Low mood

- Brain fog
- Lower libido
- Vaginal dryness

Once you are post-menopausal your symptoms tend to ease off but some women report that they still suffer with them. This is likely to be because there are imbalances in your body but that doesn't necessarily mean it's down to your hormones. If you haven't made changes that will promote a better and healthier you then there is still work to be done. We really need to continue with the habits we create that lead to us being healthier and therefore happier!

There is so much discussion to be had regarding the best way to improve symptoms you may be experiencing but the most important reminder I can give you is that we are all different and we will all need to find our own way to deal with how we feel. I cannot give you a magic solution (I would be very wealthy if I could!!)

I believe we should avoid being drawn in by clever marketing of products and programs that make promises about losing weight, looking younger, banishing symptoms, sleeping better or be stress free as long as you follow the advice to the letter. I just don't buy this approach. Why? Well, I've seen endless amounts of women doing exactly that and then being extremely disappointed when they don't see long lasting results. And they have usually spent a lot of wasted money in the process.

This is not what this program is about, there are no wild claims. We work together to find the answers that you are looking for.

So what is the answer?

If I could wave a magic wand and make your menopausal symptoms vanish I would but sadly it isn't that easy!

We have to work for what we want in life and this is no exception! You may need to experiment or seek advice from a specialist but one thing is for sure, just making some simple, actionable changes and creating better habits can help enormously.

Throughout this program I will guide you to think about making changes that can help with symptoms you may be experiencing and these centre around ***exercise, nutrition, stress management*** and ***sleep***. Once you explore these avenues and make any changes you may just find that you have a natural reduction in menopausal symptoms and this in turn will help you to feel and live better.

In the following sections I have also provided some information regarding exploring alternative and complimentary methods for helping with menopausal symptoms.



What about HRT?

I am not a medical specialist so can only pass on limited information regarding the use of HRT.

I fully support the use of HRT if it is needed and you have tried everything you can to alleviate your troublesome symptoms. However, even if you decide to go down the HRT route you still need to do the necessary work to improve your habits or lifestyle to help you stay as healthy as possible.

What is Bioidentical HRT?

You may have heard the term bioidentical used in relation to HRT.

This is medication using hormones that are chemically identical to the hormones your body naturally produces.

You may also come across the term 'compound' bioidentical hormones. This type of treatment has is not currently being regulated.

Traditionally, HRT was produced with synthetic hormones including hormones taken from pregnant mares (Premarin). Things have moved on and you can now be prescribed bio identical hormones by your health provider.

You can obtain a full hormonal profile to ascertain your hormone levels. This has already been discussed in this program, it isn't just about lack of oestrogen. You can be oestrogen dominant, lacking in testosterone, have an imbalance in your thyroid hormones or in your insulin levels. These would be your best indicator of what exactly you need in terms of replacement therapy.

You can seek help from your NHS provider or choose to see a specialist privately but everything you choose to do should be driven by gaining as much information as you can and then deciding what is best for **YOU**. I am not in agreement with anyone being given medication without a full consultation, thorough discussion and careful consideration. That includes the offering of antidepressants and pain killers which I know are regularly suggested to women showing certain menopausal symptoms.

I cannot comment on what type of HRT you should take, as this should be discussed with your health provider.

Whatever route you choose to take, having support is going to make the world of difference. It is best to be open and honest with those nearest and dearest or who you live with and to let them understand how you feel and how they can help.

I saw a brilliant sketch of a menopausal Mum with her teenage daughter where Mum was ranting at her daughter whilst ripping off her jacket because the daughter had provoked an argument which had created stress, promoting a huge hot flush. Daughter asks Mum why she is such a moody cow.....**BOOM!!!!** she got it with both barrels from her Mum whilst she stood mouth open, eyes wide!

This reminded me that maybe some conversations need to be had!!



Seek support, even if you think you won't be understood (and in fairness how could any man understand what us women have to go through?!) and remember, ***Men have midlife crisis's too!!!***

So, let's find a way to help you to find some solutions in reducing any menopause symptoms you may be getting.





MENOPAUSAL SYMPTOMS

WHY THEY HAPPEN AND HOW TO DEAL WITH THEM!

As I have mentioned previously, I think we can be quick to blame our hormones for absolutely everything in menopause when there can be other drivers for them. It is always worth considering whether there are other factors that are contributing to how you feel and then exploring ways to make changes to help.

This section is a guide to some of the symptoms you MAY experience, why they may be occurring and some ideas of how you may be able to lessen them. Of course there are many more symptoms you may feel relate to this stage of life but I am highlighting the most common symptoms that women seem to experience and giving a brief overview of some simple strategies that can help you overcome them. As you go through the sections in the program you will discover more about how we can help ourselves and just how much everything has an affect on everything else!

There are herbs and plants that can also help alleviate symptoms if you want to explore that avenue but do check with your health provider before taking them along with any other medications that they are safe.

As always, this is not conclusive and not a replacement for medical advice and you should always seek the help of your health provider if you feel it necessary.

HOT FLUSHES / NIGHT SWEATS

Vasomotor symptoms are the most commonly reported symptoms of menopause. Hot flushes and night sweats are caused by a sudden increase in blood flow, often to the face, chest and neck. They last typically for 1 to 5 minutes and can become debilitating, embarrassing and a real nuisance! You may notice redness in your face, neck or chest and perspiration, not the best look. And then as you find you're getting stressed about it, it makes it even worse!

Most research suggests that vasomotor symptoms occur when decreased oestrogen levels cause your body's thermostat (hypothalamus) to become more sensitive to slight changes in body temperature. When the hypothalamus thinks your body is too warm, it signals to the body to cool you down which would be the hot flush. You can then cool right down afterwards and feel chilled.

They are one of the main culprits for sleep disturbance which in turn has its own knock-on effects so if we can find a way to manage or reduce the severity of them it makes a big difference.

NOTE: there can be other medical reasons for vasomotor symptoms.

Potential drivers

- Stress
- Low oestrogen
- Fabrics of clothing / bed linen
- Sugars / alcohol
- Caffeine
- Spicy foods
- Smoking
- Poor sleep / sleep hygiene

WHAT YOU CAN DO TO HELP

- Use breathing techniques/deep breathing/relaxation
- Visualisation combined with deep breathing – cool place – cold mountain stream, swimming in a cooling lake, cool shower
- Sipping iced water as a flush starts
- Meditations/positive self talk/Apps (eg “calm”)
- Keep still!
- Cool room at night
- Keep an ice pack on your bedside table
- Cooling bed linen/nightwear
- Nutrition – Japanese/Mediterranean diet can be beneficial
- Stress reduction
- Dressing in layers/mindful of clothing choices
- Herbal supplements
- Take away the potential triggers – alcohol, spicy foods, caffeine, smoking

BRAIN FOG

Lack of concentration, brain fog, loss of memory for things you know you should remember, even people’s names is another classic symptom of menopause. I can remember so well totally forgetting PINs to cards, names of people & places and all sorts of things!

However, like many of the ‘classic symptoms’ it may not be totally down to hormonal changes. Things may be happening in life (like for me I had recently lost my lovely Dad) that could be causing these symptoms.



Potential drivers

- Cortisol imbalance / blood sugar imbalance
- Dehydration
- Low Oestrogen
- Alcohol
- Low iron levels
- Stress

WHAT YOU CAN DO TO HELP

- Keep blood sugar steady by looking at your nutrition – include lean protein with every meal and snack – almonds, oatcakes with hummus, peanut butter on apple slices
- Eat regularly and enough as low energy intake can affect concentration
- Make sure you are well hydrated
- Include oily fish (salmon, mackerel, herring) as these fish have been linked to improved brain health
- B vitamins are essential for brain function – include dark, leafy vegetables, beans, eggs, nuts, seeds, wholegrains, cheese, meat and fish in your diet
- Balance hormones
- Take regular exercise to aid neurochemical delivery to your brain

WEIGHT GAIN

Many women do gain weight during the menopause but how much weight you gain is something you can control. As our hormones change this can promote fat storage, especially around the middle of the body but hormones are not the only reason for weight gain!

Potential drivers

- Cortisol imbalance caused by stress
- Changing sex hormones
- Sugar consumption / alcohol – check labels
- Poor nutrition and food choices
- Lack of movement
- Regular socialising!
- Poor sleep

ACHES & PAINS

As we age we tend to notice more aches and pains in our body. So much depends on lifestyle factors, how much wear and tear your body has been put through and physical changes due to changing hormones. Once again, we cannot blame our hormones only.

Potential drivers

- Lack of exercise
- Too much exercise of the wrong sort for you



- Hormonal changes
- Changes to soft tissue & tendons
- Stress
- Dehydration

WHAT YOU CAN DO TO HELP

- Address exercise balance
- Balance hormones
- Hydrate well
- Reduce and manage stress

IRRITABILITY - ANXIETY - LOW MOOD

We know from when we were teenagers going through puberty that irritability and mood swings are common with hormonal changes. As a woman you will have most likely experienced the ups and downs of your hormonal cycle. Because we tend to suffer with various other menopausal symptoms alongside mood changes it can seem to heighten the irritability we feel. Lack of sleep, having constant hot flushes and being forgetful is enough to change our mood!

Again, as you can see, nothing happens in isolation or just because our hormones are changing.

Potential drivers

- Stress
- Hormonal changes
- Life!
- Lack of sleep
- Poor Nutrition
- Blood sugar imbalances
- Lack of structure / purpose
- Lack of exercise

WHAT YOU CAN DO TO HELP

- Exercise
- Sleep hygiene
- Reduce and manage stress
- Look at your eating patterns and nutrition
- Reduce alcohol
- Restorative activities / nature

LOWER LIBIDO, VAGINAL DRYNESS AND DISCOMFORT

Another common complaint many women have is how the menopause is affecting their sex life.



Potential drivers

- Loss of interest
- Tiredness
- Discomfort
- Issues with pelvic floor health
- Loss of confidence in the way you look
- Night sweats

WHAT YOU CAN DO TO HELP

- Check testosterone levels
- Address sleep issues
- Use lubricants
- Explore the use of oestrogen pessaries – talk to your GP
- Address pelvic floor issues
- Try ways of reducing vasomotor symptoms
- Take time to implement strategies that can help you feel you are at your best – be kind to yourself!

SLEEP DISTURBANCES

Such a big subject! So many women report terribly poor sleep during their midlife years – but also at other stages of their life. This can have an effect on so many areas of our life so definitely worth exploring ways to help yourself.

Potential drivers

- Night sweats
- Worry and anxiety
- Hormone changes
- Poor sleep hygiene
- Nutrition and drinking habits
- Lack of exercise
- Lack of restorative activities and relaxation

WHAT YOU CAN DO TO HELP

- Manage your menopausal symptoms
- Look at your eating and drinking habits
- Take more exercise and fresh air
- Practice relaxation, breathing, meditation
- Practice good sleep hygiene habits

You can read more in the sleep section



These are just some of the most common symptoms that women experience.

There are, of course, many more symptoms that you may be experiencing, many of which we will look at in the various sections in the program.

I wanted to highlight that we should never just blame our hormones!

As always, if you are struggling with symptoms that are affecting your day to day life and you have tried to alleviate them through other methods, do seek help from your medical practitioner.





ALTERNATIVE AND COMPLIMENTARY METHODS TO HELP WITH MENOPAUSAL SYMPTOMS

Years ago, if someone had suggested that you meditate, eat nettle soup or practice Yoga to help you reduce menopausal symptoms you may have thought it all a bit 'out there'! But times have changed and embracing alternative or complimentary methods is now considered 'the thing to do' by many.

Whilst conventional medicine will always have its place, if you could improve symptoms and life quality with natural products, the right type of activities and good nutrition wouldn't that be the better choice?

Even if you do choose to take conventional medicines at this time, adding in complimentary methods will further improve the whole situation, so a win win! Practitioners are generally much more open minded about using alternative or complimentary methods these days, some offering only these methods.

I say this a lot, but **YOU** are in control here. It is **YOUR** choice what you do to help yourself live well. I am passionate about encouraging you to ask questions if you seek help from any type of practitioner. Take the information and give yourself time to digest it, consider it then make an informed choice about how you want to go forward.

The thing is, you only know what you know. This is why, in this program, I aim to bring you as much information as I can to help you make your choices and take control of your self care.

We are going to explore some ideas;

HERBAL/PLANT MEDICINE

It is worth exploring if you have moderate symptoms and if you prefer to avoid any synthetic hormones. In many places in the world herbal medicines have been used for ever! If you decide to use herbal or plant remedies do check with your health provider that it is safe to take your chosen herb or plant supplements if you are on other medication.

PLANT FOODS AND HERBS

Many contain phytoestrogens (the good guys!) These help to balance oestrogen levels and are found in foods such as

- Apples
- Potatoes
- Nuts
- Seeds
- Carrots
- Oats

Plant foods eaten straight from source are great sources of fibre and anti-oxidants. **Broccoli is King of the Vegetables!!**

Herbs and plants play a big part in menopausal and ongoing health. As you can see from the section on herbs and plants there are many helpful properties to be found in them. Here is a reminder of the benefits and ***how they can help YOU:***

- Vasomotor symptoms (hot flushes and night sweats)
- Irritability / anxiousness
- Sleep problems
- Cardiovascular health
- Gut health
- Sexual health
- Brain health and function
- Bone health
- Aches and pains
- Inflammation
- Normalising blood sugars
- Increasing fibre in your diet
- Managing your weight
- Bloating / digestive issues
- Stress management

So many positives!

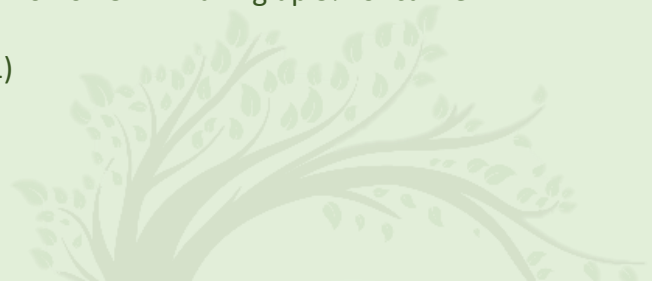
SPECIAL NOTE – if you are undergoing any treatment for cancer ALWAYS refer to your specialist or health care provider before using supplements, herbs and oils. Some essential oils and herbs can have adverse effects.

ALSO check which oils can be used directly on your skin as some are not suitable.

OILS

Here are a couple of very lovely mixes to use on your skin, for massage (even if you DIY!)

1. Lavender; Marjoram; Ylang Ylang; Neroli (ratio of 20:10:15:2 - making up 3% of carrier oil)
2. In a carrier oil of Almond and jojoba oil (ratio 9:1)



3. Neroli; rosemary; fennel; geranium; rose make up a wonderful concoction shown to be beneficial for sexual function.

ACUPUNCTURE AND ACCUPRESSURE

Chinese medicine is something worth exploring as there is evidence that it can help with menopausal symptoms. I would recommend seeking out a practitioner who can treat you. The principle of acupressure treatment is that the practitioner inputs positive energy into the negative energy within the acupressure points.

MEDITATION

Meditation has so many benefits;

Increases Grey Matter in the brain so may help with age related memory loss

Calms the mind, allows you to refocus.

Reduces stress and anxiety.

Improves sleep

Helps control pain

RELAXATION

Beneficial for calming the parasympathetic nervous system; Lowering the heart rate; lowering blood pressure; reducing vasomotor symptoms and releasing tension in muscles.

YOGA/PILATES/TAI CHI

All of these exercise techniques are fabulous for calming the mind and body and connecting with the breath.

BREATHING TECHNIQUES

There are many different breathing techniques and exercises and I will introduce some in this program

MINDFULNESS

Mindfulness is all about being 'in the moment'.

Stopping those voices in your head "I haven't sorted dinner" "I must phone my friend" "I didn't make that appointment" etc etc etc...

This is hard! As we know, there can be so many pressures at this stage of life and so much to think of – but you must try and **STOP** if you can!

APPS AND PODCASTS

There are so many helpful apps and podcasts you can use to help release tension and learn ways to help you relax such as the calm app or insight timer. Have fun exploring the ones that you think are suitable for you as we all connect with different things.





HERBS AND PLANTS

To help with Menopausal Symptoms and Health

There are many herbs and plants that can be used to alleviate menopausal symptoms, however, if you are on any other medications always check with your health provider before taking any of these as they can be an unsuitable mix with some medications.

NAME OF HERB / PLANT	WHAT IT MAY HELP WITH	HOW TO USE IT
Sage/ vinegars/ lavender	Hot flushes / night sweats	Teas / cooking oil / dried or Fresh in cooking / vinegars/ Tincture Cooling spritz with
Black Cohosh	Hot flushes / vaginal dryness / Aches & pains	Short term use 8-12 weeks Supplements / tincture
Evening primrose oil	Vasomotor symptoms	Supplements
Nettles, Tincture	Low iron from heavy periods / bleeding	Tea / soup/
Red Clover	Hot flushes / night sweats	Supplements / tincture (do use in the case of cancer)
Oatstraw	Irritability / anxiousness / sleep	Tea / tincture
Lavender	Relaxing / sleep Brain function / mood	Fresh / dried for fragrance Oils / Tea
Valarian	Sleep	Tincture / supplements

NAME OF HERB / PLANT	WHAT IT MAY HELP WITH	HOW TO USE IT
Rosemary /Lemon/ Peppermint	Constipation	In oil for abdominal massage
Fennel	Hot flushes & night sweats Vaginal itching, drying, discomfort Sleep disruption Upset tummy (chew seeds)	In cooking / seeds / oil Tea
Rosemary	Brain function/alertness	In cooking / oils / Tea / tincture
Garlic	Cardiovascular health/cancers	In cooking (chop & leave 15 mins before using for best results) / capsules
Turmeric (curcumin)	Inflammation cardiovascular health Brain function/Alzheimer's cancers	In cooking / supplements
Ginger	Circulation nausea & inflammation	In cooking / capsules
Rhodiola	Stress, depression, Fatigue, brain performance	Supplements/Tea Function exercise





A QUICK REFERENCE GUIDE TO YOUR MENOPAUSE SYMPTOMS SECTION

1. WE MAY BEGIN TO EXPERIENCE SYMPTOMS AS WE GO INTO OUR PERIMENOPAUSE, THESE ARE THE FIRST SIGNS THAT WE ARE ENTERING “THE YEARS OF CHANGE”.
2. WE MAY EXPERIENCE SYMPTOMS FROM A FEW MONTHS TO OVER 10 YEARS!
3. CONTINUING TO HAVE TYPICAL MENOPAUSAL SYMPTOMS WHEN WE ARE POST MENOPAUSE USUALLY INDICATES THAT WE HAVE CONTINUED IMBALANCES IN HORMONES OR NEED TO ADDRESS EXERCISE, NUTRITION, STRESS AND OTHER LIFESTYLE FACTORS
4. THE MOST COMMON SYMPTOMS INCLUDE HOT FLUSHES & NIGHT SWEATS, SLEEP DISTURBANCES, WEIGHT GAIN, BRAIN FOG, LOW MOOD, VAGINAL DRYNESS, LOWER LIBIDO
5. WE ARE LED TO BELIEVE THAT WE WILL HAVE A TERRIBLE TIME & SUFFER FROM EVERY SYMPTOM GOING.... IGNORE THE SCAREMONGERS!!
6. APPARENTLY, THERE ARE 34 MENOPAUSAL SYMPTOMS (IF YOU LOOK IT UP!) BUT SOME WOMEN ARE LUCKY ENOUGH TO EXPERIENCE VERY FEW OF THEM. APPROXIMATELY 85% OF WOMEN DO HAVE SYMPTOMS OF VARYING SEVERITY.
7. (WE CAN TAKE CONTROL AND LESSEN ANY SYMPTOMS THAT DO COME OUR WAY!)
8. EXPLORING ALTERNATIVE MEDICINES, HERBS, RESTORATIVE ACTIVITIES & MAKING LIFESTYLE CHANGES CAN ALL HELP REDUCE SYMPTOMS
9. EVEN IF YOU TAKE HRT IT IS REALLY IMPORTANT TO SUPPORT IT BY LIVING THE HEALTHIEST LIFE POSSIBLE AND IMPLEMENTING THE PLANS IN THIS PROGRAM
10. YOU ARE NEVER ALONE...DON'T SUFFER IN SILENCE. SEEK HELP IF YOU NEED IT
11. ALWAYS SEEK HELP AND ADVICE IF YOUR SYMPTOMS ARE AFFECTING YOUR EVERYDAY LIFE AND YOU ARE UNABLE TO COPE



Section 3

Stress



THE STRESS RESPONSE AND MANAGING STRESS IN MENOPAUSE

We are all familiar with the term “adrenaline rush”. The feeling that you would get if you were being chased by a tiger in the jungle or by a grizzly bear in a wood; if you leapt out of an aeroplane; skied a black run really fast; that feeling as you drop down the rollercoaster!

Any of these activities will trigger the hormone adrenaline to be released from the adrenal glands. You may know this as the ‘fight or flight’ response. Our heart rate rises, pupils dilate, more blood and oxygen is pumped around the body (along with glucose) and is sent to our muscles to allow them to spring into action! We can suddenly find we have “superhuman powers”, we can run faster and feel like if we really needed to we could lift the weight of a car! The body’s ability to feel pain decreases so even if the bear bit your bottom you’d still be able to run away!

But we also produce adrenaline when we are under stress and not in any real danger. The adrenal glands produce several stress hormones including adrenaline and cortisol.

Cortisol

This is the main stress hormone that is produced alongside adrenaline. Cortisol’s role is also to help regulate blood sugar, metabolism and blood pressure. It also raises sodium levels to keep our blood pressure up. We have many cortisol receptors in our body.

Our cortisol levels fluctuate, rising in the morning to help wake us up and get going and then levels vary during the day. We do need stress hormones to drive us on and to make sure we are reactive to situations, however, if the stress response doesn’t calm down because we are forever in a state of stress (and we may not even realise this!) the hormones are chugging out constantly and this can lead to;

- Weight gain (especially around the middle)
- Poor eating patterns and food choices
- irritability
- lack of concentration or memory
- high blood pressure
- Extreme fatigue
- Depression

- Headaches
- Sleep problems
- Anxiety
- Decreased libido
- Lower immunity
- Cold sores

.....and eventually exhaustion as the cycle continues to spiral out of control.

The constant revving of the engine means we have nothing left in the tank and this can also affect thyroid function.

To continue providing this fast energy is likely to result in cravings and increased appetite leading to the risk of weight gain. Insulin and blood sugar levels go on a roller coaster and unless our body is making use of it, extra energy will be stored as fat, PARTICULARLY around the middle of our body and deposited close to our liver for quick conversion to energy.

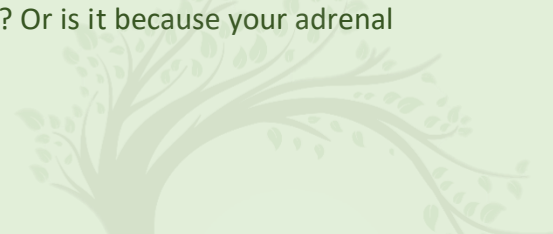
CAUSES OF ONGOING STRESS AT MIDLIFE

- Work stresses
- Commuting
- Challenging children
- Challenging relationships
- Care of elderly relatives
- Financial worries

Signs of cortisol imbalance

- Tendency to store fat around middle
- Increased appetite
- Increased cravings for combination of carbs and fats
- Mid-afternoon slump – need coffee / snack to get going
- Low immune system
- Headaches
- Blood Sugar swings
- Problematic digestive system
- Muscle aches and pains / neck & shoulders
- Hair loss
- Difficulty in concentrating
- Depression/feeling blugghhh
- Irregular/absent periods
- Increased PMT
- Slower metabolism
- Tiredness but can't sleep well
- 2nd wind in the evening; wakeful at night;tired in morning

As we can see, the symptoms we may have can be influenced by different hormones. It can be difficult to determine what is out of kilter! For example, are you suffering with low libido because of a drop in oestrogen? Or is it a drop in testosterone? Or is it because your adrenal



glands are fatigued? But it could also be due to Stress? Lack of sleep? Less confidence in your body?

This is another reminder that we need to look at the whole big picture!

The only way to truly know what your hormones are doing is by having a complete hormonal profile test.

Hormones do fluctuate and alter according to external factors so our best starting point is to check out the big picture first and determine if there are any changes that need to be made.

One thing will affect another - everything is linked in some way and once we restore some balance in our life through optimising our nutrition; managing our stress; having a balanced approach to exercise and addressing our sleep patterns, can we then begin to gain some hormonal balance.





WARNING SIGNS OF STRESS

Whilst you may be aware of your stress levels there are lots of signs and symptoms that can indicate that you are under stress.

This checklist will help you identify the signs and signals. If you find you are ticking a lot on the list then it may be time to think about what changes you can make to help you manage your stress.

SPIRITUAL SIGNS

- Feelings of isolation
- Lack of forgiveness
- Loss of meaning in life
- Loss of direction
- Persistent guilt feelings
- Self abuse
- Hostility in any form

SOCIAL SIGNS

- Isolation
- Bitterness or resentment
- Self-centredness
- Loneliness
- Withdrawal
- Intolerance
- Lack of communication
- Irritability

EMOTIONAL SIGNS

- Rapid mood swings
- Anxiety attacks
- Anger
- Depressions
- Worry
- Frequent nightmares
- Restlessness
- Feelings of despair
- Nervous laughter
- Bursts of tears
- Emotional numbness

MENTAL SIGNS

- Frequent lapses of memory
- Racing thoughts
- Poor concentration
- Difficulty in making decisions
- Boredom
- Constant negative self talk
- Poor judgment
- Confusion
- Pessimism
- Suicidal thoughts

PHYSICAL SYMPTOMS

- High blood pressure
- Constipation / diarrhoea
- Frequent infections
- Muscle spasms
- Muscular tension
- Excessively cold hands and feet
- Skin disorders
- Headaches
- Nail biting
- Insomnia
- Indigestion
- Ulcers
- Excessive sweating
- Eating disorders
- Dizziness or fainting
- Exhaustion





STRESS MANAGEMENT

At a stage of life when women have the menopause to cope with there can be so many other potential stresses! Work, family, money, relationships, children, and elderly relatives are just some of the things we may be dealing with. It really doesn't seem fair that this is all piled up on top of us in one go does it?

HOWEVER the fact is that **STRESS** is one of the biggest drivers of the symptoms and emotions we often experience in the Years of Change.

Stress affects gut health, our overall mental state, our ability to cope, our relationships, work and so much more. It can drive us to the biscuit tin or the drinks cupboard, make us snappy and irritable, tired and fed up. Unfortunately, when there is a menopause to deal with as well it can be very difficult to know where to start in dealing with being overloaded with a stressful situation. You may feel as though there is a huge pile of stuff sitting on top of you that you can't shake off or that you feel like you are "wading through treacle".

It can sometimes feel easier to do nothing than to have to make decisions about how to address the issue.

If you know that this is **YOU** then it is worth taking a step back and looking at what you can change to make things better. One step at a time. Taking control and making changes can be the hardest thing to do but can make such a huge difference!

It may sound silly but how do you know if you are stressed? We don't always recognise it in ourselves although we can usually recognise it in others. Take a look at **** WARNING SIGNS OF STRESS**** which may help you to determine if your stress levels are taking their toll on your health and well being.

HOW DO YOU COPE WITH STRESS?

Often, we choose ineffective ways to cope with stress levels such as;

- Overeating especially carbs / sweet foods / chocolate / bread / biscuits
- Undereating
- Drinking too much alcohol
- Using caffeine to get through the day
- Over exercising
- Overspending / retail therapy / too much TV (stops you thinking /good distraction)
- Smoking
- Aggressive behaviour
- Overworking

Even though we are aware that these coping mechanisms are unhealthy it can feel like climbing a mountain to change these habits. Finding alternative ways to cope will help you to discard unhealthy habits and slowly replacing them with better alternatives.

Try to remind yourself that choosing unhealthy coping mechanisms will add to menopausal symptoms, the very thing we are trying to avoid!

DO YOU CHOOSE STRESS?

This is a thought I believe we should consider. Is it possible that you overload yourself, try to do too much and take on more than you can cope with?

Depending on what kind of person you are it is so easy to try to do too much! Are you the one person everyone relies on, who does everything for their family whilst holding down a demanding job?

Is this because you find it hard to delegate or find it hard to let others take on things you feel are “your job”? Or maybe you schedule too much in your diary? Over the years I have been aware of many women who become stressed because they are flying from one thing to another; a nail appointment that has been scheduled in and over runs then means you are restricted in meeting a friend for a pre arranged lunch. It may seem ridiculous but this can create stress!

We cannot be everything to everyone and when we realise that, and we change our way of thinking, it can be a revelation!! I think I am speaking from experience here! As you may have already guessed! I know that I am also guilty of choosing stress sometimes; but I am working on it – HONEST!!

HEALTHIER WAYS TO MANAGE STRESS AND CREATE BALANCE

- **VIGOROUS EXERCISE/ ACTIVITIES**

Physical activities are a great outlet! Whether you go for a run, chop wood, stomp round the countryside, vigorously mop the floor or do a strength session the release of those feel-good hormones, ENDORPHINS, will give you a stress-reducing high!

- **RESTORATIVE EXERCISE / ACTIVITIES**

Relaxation, Pilates, Yoga, meditation, nature walking, breathing techniques and mindfulness all have a calming effect and allow you to refocus. See ****Restorative activities and breathing techniques**** for help, consider using one of the mindfulness apps such as CALM, find a class to attend or learn new ways of relaxing. And of course, massage therapies, reflexology and similar are amazing for creating calm and reducing stress

- **HOBBIES FOR CREATING CALM**

Reading, listening to music, painting, drawing, crafts or any hobby that creates calm will be helpful in reducing stress

- **ANIMALS**

Stroking a pet has wonderful benefits! If you have pets, take time to sit and stroke them and talk to them.



- **LAUGHTER THERAPY**

There is nothing like laughter to lift your mood! Find ways of increasing laughter in your life!

- **OPTIMAL SLEEP AND REST**

When you sleep better, everything seems better. Poor sleep is one of the major symptoms in menopause and there are many ways to work on improving your poor sleep patterns

- **RADICAL SELF CARE**

Are you making time for YOU? Stopping when you feel unwell? Eating well? Resting enough?

Are you over-consuming alcohol, sugar and carbs? Are you using nicotine or other medication to deal with stress? Are you addicted to screens and social media? Do you delegate or are you being a martyr? Perhaps it is time to change unhealthy habits and practice some self-care!

- **POSITIVE SELF TALK**

IT'S OK TO NOT BE OK. IT'S OK TO CRY. NOBODY IS PERFECT!

Try saying positive things to yourself such as...

"I can deal with it" .

"I will use my relaxation /other techniques and I will feel better".

"I've got this"!

Face a mirror and say these things to yourself, talk to yourself when you're out walking - the power of positivity is immense!

- **TALK TO SOMEONE**

Confiding in a friend or family member and talking out your problems, even if there is no immediate solution, can make you feel so much better.

- **ACCEPT WHAT YOU CANNOT CHANGE**

Sometimes problems cannot be avoided or solved immediately. Situations may be unavoidable.

This time of change is going to happen, you are going to be different, become older, look different, feel different.

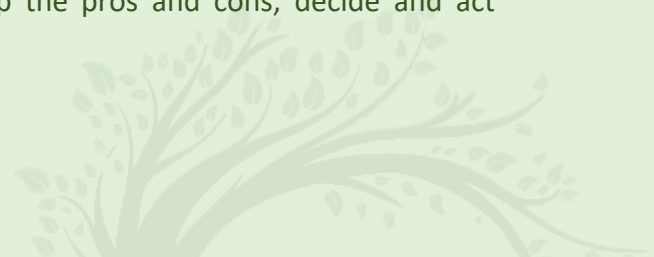
Accepting the changes is such a positive way to reduce the stress they may be loading on you.

- **UNDERSTAND YOUR STRENGTHS AND WEAKNESSES**

Make a list of both your strengths and your weaknesses. Focus on your strengths and accept that we all have weaknesses. See the positives in yourself. Allow yourself to make mistakes.

- **KEEP THINGS IN PERSPECTIVE**

Write things down, list the options, weigh up the pros and cons, decide and act accordingly.



Use humour, laugh it off.

Look at the good side.

Change your focus; turn to something else for a while; think ahead - will it still matter as much then?

Think of the worst; think of the best- is it unlikely to resolve itself?

What could you do to make things better?

Shrug it off, move on.

Do something to help someone else in need; this will help to put your own life in to perspective

- **AVOID THE BATTLEGROUND!**

When you feel like you are getting into a disagreement with someone; try and step back and allow yourself to agree with them. Allow them to have their way, even if you don't necessarily agree! This may then lead to them agreeing with you on something else. This brings a sense of cooperation, can change the emotional environment and therefore helps to take the stress out of the conversation

- **SAY NO!**

It is the hardest thing to do when you are people pleaser (this is me again!) but so much better when you learn the art of saying that simple word!

Think about how you say no, "I would love to but unfortunately I just can't commit to it at this time" "I am sorry but my diary is full!" You don't need to offend or feel that you are offending. It's easy when you give it some thought!

- **MANAGE YOUR TIME BETTER, PLAN AHEAD AND TRY NOT TO TAKE ON TOO MUCH**

Again, I am so guilty of not doing this! Work in progress but hey, we can't be perfect at everything and shouldn't feel bad if we aren't. It will only serve to create more STRESS!!!

- **CHANGE WHAT YOU CAN AND SET YOURSELF GOALS**

Believe that the answer lies within you! You can take advice and listen to others but ultimately it is only YOU who can make the changes.

Change is CHALLENGING,

Relapses HAPPEN

and maintaining better habits is TOUGH!

You need to congratulate yourself on every positive change you make! But make sure you find the support to enable you to do this as its so much harder to do this on your own.





A QUICK GUIDE TO YOUR STRESS IN MIDLIFE SECTION

We need stress to drive us and to kick us into action, however;

- Being constantly stressed is one of the major influences on menopausal symptoms including weight gain, vasomotor symptoms, brain fog and poor sleep
- Cortisol, one of the main stress hormones, can be out of balance and produce symptoms are much like many listed 'menopausal' symptoms
- Midlife can present us with many challenges that increase our stress levels
- Stress manifests itself in many different ways and long term stress can be detrimental to our health
- Recognising the signs of stress is a vital step in beginning to manage it
- Choosing the strategies that work for you, finding support and talking to someone can help reduce stress levels
- As always, seek help from your health provider if you feel you are unable to cope



Section 4

Nutrition, Gut Health & Weight Management



Nutrition & Gut Health

INTRODUCTION

When we are born one of the first things we do is feed. Food helps us to grow into a healthy human being, keeps us alive and is a major influence on our wellbeing.

You probably have memories of what you ate as a child, your likes and dislikes, what and how much your parents gave you to eat, whether you were told to finish what was on your plate or told to eat slowly, when you were allowed 'treats' or whether you were taught to cook. All of this would have influenced some of your thinking around food and eating.

My early journey

I have so many wonderful memories myself of baking with my Grandma at the family farm in Wales, where I spent a lot of my youth. Also of eating the typical 1970s diet, then later a more diverse range of foods from different countries as my parents explored the making of Spaghetti Bolognese and curries! A memory of steak being a birthday treat at the steak house, a fizzy drink and a packet of quavers at my Dad's rugby club after swimming on a Sunday morning.

I had never really thought about food and its impact on my health or physicality until I attended my school in London, aged 13. As a professional Dance School the idea of being offered a 'diet' lunch (if that was your preference over a cooked lunch) was something completely new to me! For the first time in my life I became aware of others around me worrying about their size and shape. (By the way, the diet lunch was Ryvita, cheese, coleslaw and an apple - hardly enough to feed a growing dancer!!).

I came across other girls with eating disorders which disturbed me. At 5 foot tall and just over 7 stone I was one of the larger students and still considered too 'chunky' to be a professional dancer. I was there to be a dance teacher anyway, not a performer so a little different to many of the students.

These days the issues are exacerbated by the continual presence of social media. Women feel the need to 'strive for perfection' to an even larger degree. It was just as well for me that the stage wasn't beckoning as I wonder what unhealthy habits would have been developed to keep my weight down.

So, did my eating history have an impact on how I eat and choose to feed others now?

Definitely; in some ways. However I found my way through the years as I took a keen interest in nutrition and healthy eating. I am not even mildly obsessive about food or exercise now, I believe in the 80/20 approach. It works perfectly for me and it also works for my clients when they work with me and adopt this strategy.

Incidentally, I don't like fizzy drinks or quavers these days but I still bake cakes with my Grandma's utensils and make a mean omelette which my Dad taught me to do! And the word DIET never enters my life as I don't believe in them.

NAVIGATING YOUR WAY

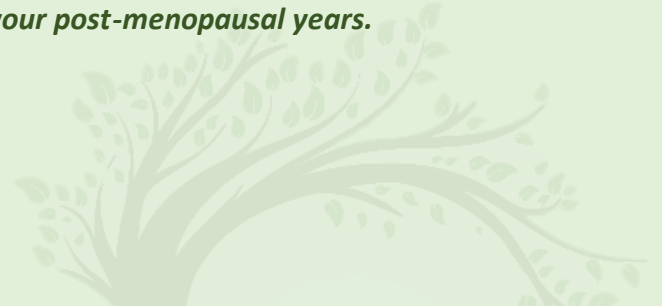
You must find your way of eating to enable you to enjoy the food you eat. At midlife we will most likely need to be prepared to make some changes as perhaps the way you have eaten in the past doesn't seem to be serving your body well now. Whatever has influenced you in the past must be held onto as they are precious memories but explore what works for you now. Which foods make you feel good and give you energy and will help you to stay healthy for the rest of your life.

We know that without food and water we cannot live. We also know that what we choose to feed ourselves has a huge influence on our health and wellbeing. Many midlife women may have battled with weight gain through their entire life. Going on diets and various "eating plans" which may have dominated their lives. Acceptance of our body shape can sometimes be hard if we feel that we aren't so keen on what we see in the mirror but not all of us are programmed to be slim, tall and willowy –this body type has been perceived by many women as the ideal. We can be heavily influenced by what we see on Instagram, Facebook, in magazines and on TV and what is promoted to be 'the look we are all striving for'.

You may have been slimmer in your youth and a different shape, or if you have retained a slim build you now notice skin changes that change the way you look – perhaps softness where nothing used to move - but at midlife it is most certainly a time to accept that your body is likely to have changed. Battles are not worth getting into and I have worked with many women who have constantly done just that – and it just makes them miserable!

Of course, it isn't all about how you look, though that often dominates our thoughts as ageing women. What is going on inside your body is of far more importance and staying healthy should be now be a priority. As we enter our post-menopausal years the risks of health issues increase. Heart disease, high blood pressure, diabetes, joint issues, osteoporosis, inflammation, certain cancers, liver disease and dementia are all more prevalent in later life and we should be doing everything we can to avoid any battles with these.

This is not the time for diets or restrictions, this is the time to let good nutrition help you to achieve optimal health so that you can live well in your post-menopausal years.



WHAT WE ARE GOING TO LOOK AT IN THIS SECTION

- *Weight management*
- *Midlife middle management*
- *Gut health*
- *Eating well in midlife and beyond*
- *Midlife nutrition tool box*

I look forward to sharing lots of information with you in this program. Information that will help you to find the way to manage your nutrition so that you are happy with it and more importantly, so that you are happy with yourself.





MIDLIFE MIDDLE MANAGEMENT

Many women going through midlife begin to notice the middle of their body is changing. You may feel thicker around the centre of your body; your jeans may feel like they have 'shrunk in the wash'; there seems to be an extra layer of something overhanging your jeans and your bikinis are making their way to the bin!

The washboard stomach you may have once had seems to have the feel of a marshmallow and it feels much less appealing to strip off at the beach. Towelling robes at the spa day feel like a Godsend and luckily it's pretty cool to wear 'loungewear'!

The way you have always eaten doesn't seem to be a perfect fit for you anymore, you may suffer with bloating after eating certain foods and feel you are gaining weight even though you are eating the same as you always have done! and the exercise plan that has always done the job is no longer working either!

So what can we do about this unwelcome change? If you have gone in search of "how to get a flat tummy" you probably found advice to do hundreds of sit ups, lots of planks and take up high intensity training. Oh, and eat better. Sadly, you may not have come across anything that will actually help you. Until now; I am here to put you on the right track.

It's yet another unwelcome sign of menopause. Of course like everything else I have written about it's not a given and will affect some women more than others.

To be fair, we have become a little obsessed with flat bellies. But look at how attractive belly dancers are and how beautiful all those women in those fabulous Renaissance paintings as they lounged across the chaise long with pieces of fabric draped over them, not a six pack in sight!

In reality, our bodies are not going to stay the same as we age. We need to accept that we will change and instead of putting another tick in the resentment box - we put a tick in the acceptance box.

If women never aged after their 30's we would have a whole lot of 30 year old looking females on the planet and with all due respect to 30 year olds (as we were all one once) would anyone look at them and think 'I'll ask her, she has wisdom and experience'? No - but they would you! In addition to that you would never get the chance to enjoy the admiring looks like the 40 something Anne Bancroft did from a 21 year old Dustin Hoffman in The Graduate!

In our youth we spent much longer getting ready to go out, choosing clothes and makeup, doing our hair. It was of utmost importance because we didn't have all the stuff we have to think about now! Even then, find me a young woman who totally loved the way she looked!

So let's cut out being cruel to ourselves. You are beautiful in your maturity, perhaps even more beautiful than you were in your youth.

We can always find things we don't like about ourselves. In midlife the changes that are maybe more obvious to us. Grey hairs, looser skin, having to give in to reading glasses, wrinkles, looking older; these are all signs that we have moved further through our life. But ask yourself, what have you achieved in that time? There is often so much we can look back on and feel proud of!

In my case, I was born in 1964; given birth to 2 children; trained in dance and taught dance and exercise for almost 40 years. Therefore giving my body quite a hammering! So how is my body going to be the same as it was 25 years ago?!

See how easy it is to look at the negatives!

Ok, back to the muffin top.

It's not a healthy thing to have an increasingly growing middle but there is a healthy balance to be had. Accept there may be a change but manage it so that it doesn't get out of hand and have implications on your health.

WHY DOES IT MATTER?

Having an ever-expanding middle and becoming Apple shaped can contribute to health issues and the potential to develop METABOLIC SYNDROME. This is not a good way forward.

WHAT IS METABOLIC SYNDROME?

Metabolic syndrome affects 1 in 4 adults in the UK

This is defined as a collection of conditions that together can increase the risk of;

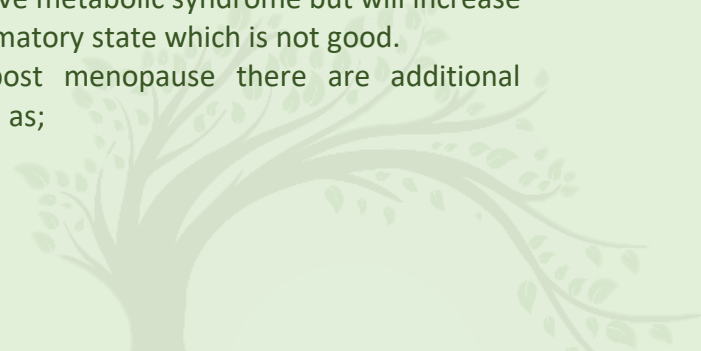
- Heart disease
- Stroke
- Type 2 diabetes

These are conditions such as....

- High blood pressure
- High blood sugar
- Central obesity
- Abnormal levels of cholesterol

Having one of these conditions doesn't mean you have metabolic syndrome but will increase your risk of disease. You are likely to be in an inflammatory state which is not good.

For women going through perimenopause to post menopause there are additional implications of developing Metabolic syndrome such as;



- Increased bone density issues
- Loss of muscle mass
- Pelvic dysfunction
- Insomnia
- Cognitive impairment
- Cortisol deregulation
- Cancer
- PCOS
- Non alcoholic fatty liver disease

MEASURING METHODS FOR CHECKING YOUR MIDDLE

For females increased risk over 32 inches. Serious health risk over 35 inches

WAIST TO HIPS RATIO is also a good indicator

Should be 0.8 or below

How to measure – divide your waist measurement by your hips measurement

WHAT HAS CHANGED DURING PERIMENOPAUSE TO POSTMENOPAUSE?

Central body fat can increase which may be due to;

- *Lower Oestrogen and Enzyme changes (can promote central fat storage)*
- *Androgen dominance (increased testosterone)*
- *Oestrogen dominance / Progesterone deficiency*
- *Less movement and exercise*
- *More socialising / alcohol*

So women face increased risks as they go through midlife.

Cardiovascular disease is the primary cause of death in women from midlife and beyond.

28,000 women in the UK die from cardio vascular disease per year - **77 EVERY day.**

Where we store fat is important. Are you an apple or a pear? It is healthier to be a pear, even if you don't like having a big behind!

WHAT CAN WE DO ABOUT IT?

We are not all the same! We need to assess what changes we may need to make and take action!

Everything we cover in this program will contribute to you maintaining good metabolic health but key factors are:

- Weight management / eating well
- Balancing your hormones



- Managing stress
- Taking regular exercise
- Managing your sleep

It seems that the answers to many of the questions you may have lead you to all the same places in the YEARS OF CHANGE program!!! Everything affects everything else which is why there is never just one easy answer!

Middle management is no exception. Addressing stress, exercise, nutrition, sleep, hormonal balance and lifestyle will usually provide some great help and improvements throughout this program.





WEIGHT MANAGEMENT IN MIDLIFE

As women go through life there are times when managing their weight can be a challenge. There are many different reasons for this, I believe stages of life are a major influence. Midlife and menopause is most certainly one of those stages.

If you 'look up' weight gain at menopause you may read that average weight gain is 10-15lb – more proof that menopause gets “bad press”. But this weight gain does not HAVE to happen!

True, many women do report weight gain at this stage of life but the important thing is to keep some control on the amount of extra body fat we carry and not to let it get out of hand. Carrying a lot of extra weight isn't something that will benefit us as we go through later life as it is associated with increased health risks, joint pain, pelvic floor issues and several other issues. Increased fat stored around the middle is particularly unhelpful but due to hormones changing this is often where it decides to land! However we should try to minimise this as much as we can.

It isn't simply about “Calories In versus Calories Out”, there are other factors that contribute to weight gain in menopause. I will help you to understand why you may gain more weight at menopause and suggest different ways of taking control.

I have taught 1000s of women over the past 30 plus years – and have known so many women who have struggled with their weight, even before menopause. I have seen faddy diets come and go and have seen many women follow them. Of course, any restrictive eating plan is likely to result in weight loss but most dieters will regain the weight they lose. As well as losing body fat there is often a loss in active muscle tissue. Muscle tissue burns more calories - so in dieting, you are probably fighting a losing battle!

I am not a fan of 'diets' but very much a fan of making the right choices in terms of nutrition and lifestyle. I totally understand and respect anybody's personal choices and can see how easily they are persuaded to try the latest fat-busting plan! Clever marketing wins many women over every time “sign up here madam, you'll lose weight so quickly!!” “pay here” many women will pay if they think there is guaranteed success! Let's take a look at WHY we may gain weight, the added associated risks and what we can sensibly do to take control!

HORMONES

Nothing in menopause is just about hormones, but they do have a part to play in contributing to weight gain

- We know that men tend to store fat around their middle and as a woman's hormones change and less female hormones are produced we can mirror how men gain weight. The hormones that regulate our appetite, Leptin and Ghrelin, can also be disrupted.
- As we discovered in the hormones section, belly fat is hormonally active and has the potential to produce the more toxic form of oestrogen that women produce at menopause so managing the storage of belly fat is important.
- Visceral fat stored around the middle also contributes to increased risk of cardiovascular disease, inflammation, diabetes and some cancers.

STRESS AND THE EFFECTS OF CORTISOL ON WEIGHT GAIN

- High cortisol levels can interfere with the function of the thyroid and this can contribute to slowing our metabolism leading to weight gain
- Cortisol can drive us to crave sugary & fatty foods.
- Over production of Cortisol encourages storage of fat around the middle, it increases appetite and so "locks" the fat in.
- Abdominal fat cells have 4 times the cortisol receptors than anywhere else in the body. This means that cortisol contributes to a gain in abdominal fat, which then leads to excess cortisol – a vicious circle!
- High cortisol levels can lead to muscle breakdown - loss of muscle gain can contribute to weight gain. So **STRENGTH WORK IS ESSENTIAL!**
- Adrenaline and cortisol, our stress hormones, have an effect on weight gain. The ongoing chug, chug, chug of stress has the biggest effect on these hormones. Women with a higher waist to hips ratio also tend to produce more cortisol
- If you are on a restrictive diet this can lead to your body thinking you are in 'famine mode'. This is a stressor that then makes you release more cortisol leading to more cravings **which equals more weight gain!**

THE EFFECTS OF INSULIN ON WEIGHT GAIN

Eating sugar = increased INSULIN = roller coaster of blood sugars = more stress = increased risk of insulin resistance = increased inflammation = increased belly fat



NUTRITION

This seems to be the number one thought when thinking about managing our weight. You may feel that this is the hardest job in terms of YOU taking control. Of course, what we put in our mouth is going to have a big influence on our weight but it is never the whole story.

You may notice that you cannot eat ~~now~~ what you used to eat without putting weight on. That you may now simply walk past a bakery and gain weight! True, the way you used to eat may not be working for you now but that is down to many things, not just hormonal changes.

- You may be more sedentary than you used to be;
- Your eating patterns may have changed;
- You may have higher stress levels;
- You may sleep poorly;
- You may have increased your alcohol intake; Socialise more and eat out
- Your attitude to eating may have altered;
- Your gut health may need some consideration.

Many things to consider! Within this program you will get a clear picture of the influence of other factors on your weight.

It just takes some careful consideration as to what changes you may need to make to influence your body composition. Making these changes is always the difficult part.

We cannot expect to follow a 'diet plan' and have long term results if we revert to old habits – but you know that! Many women I have worked with have said to me time after time "I know what to do, it's doing it that's the hard part!"

So how do you do what you need to do?

You have to WANT to make changes, there is only one person who can make those changes and it is YOU – but you knew that too!

I think support is key, this is why for many years women find 'diet clubs' so good. They have that support, encouragement and someone who can give them the guidance to lose weight. Unfortunately, dieting is unsuccessful in the long term as boredom sets in, results slow or plateau and momentum is lost. This usually leads to the weight that has been lost being regained, often adding more - how soul destroying!

Yet many women live on this rollercoaster without exploring other reasons for their lack of control over their weight.

Then menopause arrives and gives women the very excuse they need. Because "don't we all get fatter when our hormones change?"



You will have your best chance to achieve a happy balance if you have an understanding of how to eat well at this stage of life (and the associated support required), the encouragement to try other avenues and to make the necessary changes required.

EXERCISE

Without regularly doing the right type of exercise it is much harder to control weight gain. Once again, what you did before may not be what works for you now. It's definitely time to change it up in midlife!

Once you find what works for you and find a sensible and regular exercise plan it's easier for you to influence your weight, your emotions and your wellbeing. As always, **nothing works in isolation, it's just another part of the jigsaw.**

I will be able to motivate you and guide you in the exercise section of this program. As a fitness and exercise teacher with many years of experience I have all the tools needed to enable you to find your way.

Whatever restrictions you feel you may have can be overcome, I have literally motivated the most reluctant of exercisers to get moving and they have been forever thankful! Nike may say 'just do it' but without the help, guidance and motivation it's actually not as easy as that!!

SLEEP

Sleep patterns and sleep disruption affect weight gain. Sleep in menopause can be a challenge. But sleep is affected by stress, vasomotor symptoms, worries and many other things that can be worked on.

Let's do this one together too! You will see a jigsaw building here. Every part of this program relates to every other part – the same as our bodies. As we build the jigsaw together it is hopefully beginning to get easier for you to see how everything relates to everything else and how we can put everything back in a way that suits your NEW SELF.

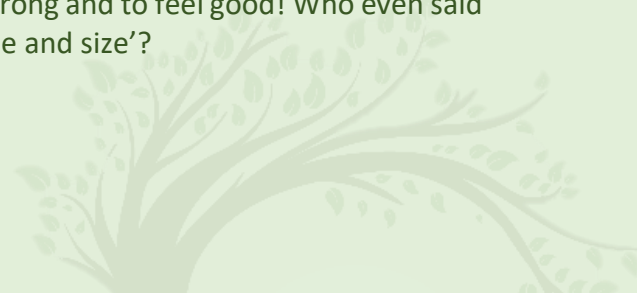
MINDSET

I know that this is the toughest challenge of all. You may have battled all your life with weight, you may have always been slim but now you find some weight creeping on. None of us like the feeling of our clothes becoming tight and it can make us miserable, irritable and can result in a loss of self-confidence.

I have found over the years I have been teaching that many women have come to me for help to lose weight. However, there is not one easy answer to how we can achieve weight loss, there are many things combined that contribute to weight gain as I have mentioned.

As women we have been lead to believe that slim is beautiful, we often pursue the 'ideal' even if we know we cannot achieve it.

For those who know me, it would be the most ludicrous idea that I should believe I can have long slim legs and be tall and willowy! I have accepted that I am small and short limbed and have worked to make my small and short limbed body strong and to feel good! Who even said that we should only be credited if we are the 'ideal shape and size'?



We owe it to ourselves to appreciate the body we have, to work to make the best of what we were given but more importantly at midlife remind ourselves that if we measure our worth on our LOOKS we must still have a 20 year old's brain! Why waste your time chasing the impossible? - **Acceptance is so important**

Mindset is so hard to change. I urge you to focus on the positives, to note what you like about yourself not dislike, I know it is a tough call. To accept that you are not the woman you were earlier in your life, to embrace your wisdom and experience and to know that the new woman you are is every bit as good if not better than your 20 year old self.

Taking control is powerful Beating yourself up is not. You can do anything you want if you want it enough, having some encouragement and support makes it that much easier!





GUT HEALTH

GUT HEALTH is a term we have heard so much more about over the past few years but there is still so much more to be learnt about the importance of it. Like many aspects of nutrition there are many differing opinions on the best way to support our gut health. New research is constantly coming out and influences the advice that is being given.

However, there is clear evidence that improving the health of your gut is really important at menopause because maintaining healthy gut bacteria also aids hormonal balance.

The gut also has strong links with the immune system, the brain and nervous system. Ensuring good gut health should be one of our priorities in midlife.

It's easy to spend ages obsessing about diet and making things unnecessarily complicated but when it comes down to it we just need to stick to the basics of eating real food. We need to have plenty of variety in our vegetables & fruits, drink plenty of water and if we follow some simple rules we can help to support our gut health too.

Let's look at what can go wrong with our gut, why it can happen and what we can do about it!

WHAT CAN GO WRONG WITH OUR GUT?

The surface area of our intestines is enormous, around the size of a tennis court, so it's a huge area to keep healthy!

A healthy gut lining ensures that digested food particles, bacteria and other toxins do not make their way into the blood stream which can contribute to inflammation.

Leaky gut syndrome is when the gut lining leaks. This can be caused by stress, some medications (such as antibiotics), excessive use of over-the-counter anti-inflammatory drugs, poor nutritional choices and certain vitamin deficiencies.

Associated symptoms of Leaky Gut Syndrome

- Inflammation
- Food intolerances
- Irritable bowel syndrome
- Poor immunity
- Joint pain
- Weight gain
- Skin problems

- Thyroid dysfunction
- Liver disease
- Brain fog
- Auto immune diseases
- Bloating/ diarrhoea / nausea
- Headaches
- Type 2 diabetes

THE ESTROBOLOME

The Estrobolome is a term used to describe a collection of bacteria in our gut responsible for metabolising oestrogens that circulate our body, having an affect on oestrogen levels. The body needs to excrete excess oestrogens that may become harmful but if the bacteria is disrupted (dysbiosis) this may not happen.

We also need our Liver to be healthy. We should have healthy bowel movements and avoid inflammation within the body.

WHAT CAN AFFECT THE ESTROBOLOME?

- Age & ethnicity
- Lifetime environmental influences
- The way you were delivered (at birth)
- Diet
- Alcohol
- Antibiotic use
- Exercise
- Sleep

WHAT CAN YOU DO TO HELP YOUR GUT STAY HEALTHY?

As always, there is so much advice available and if you feel you need specialist help do seek the advice of your health provider or explore the possibility of seeing a nutritionist who specialises in gut health.

You may identify with something in the following that may be relevant to you. However it's best to try out one individual area at a time so that you can identify what may be relevant to you;

- *Identify food intolerances - gluten & dairy primarily. Try eliminating for a few weeks then add back in for a few days*
- *Take a look at your diet and consider whether there are improvements you could begin to make*
- *Manage your stress levels. The impact on digestive health is huge. This includes stressing about food!*
- *Consider whether the eating of meat may be having an impact on you. Meat can contain antibiotics which will be making their way into our own system*

- *Consider medications. Anti-inflammatory medication / Antibiotics/ Proton Pump Inhibitors prescribed for acid reflux and other medications may impact your gut health.*
- *Ensure you are taking regular exercise*
- *Address your sleep if you know you need to*
- *Cut down on alcohol if you know you need to*

MORE IDEAS TO SUPPORT GOOD GUT HEALTH

Increase your intake of Pre and probiotics. Probiotics are the good bacteria while Prebiotics are the good bacteria promoters. They work in synergy with each other, so your gut needs both of them to keep your gastrointestinal tract healthy.

Sources of Pre biotics

Onions, garlic, leeks, oats, dark green leafy veg, cooked Seeds and nuts
Fermented foods
Turmeric & ginger

Sources of Pro biotics

Yoghurt (unsweetened live), Kefir, Sauerkraut, Tempeh,
Kimchi, Miso, Kombucha

Consider practicing Yoga for digestive health

Twists for constipation
Restorative poses for sleep

Use food as Menopausal medicine

Consider what to eat what to avoid, for example alcohol stresses the liver, contains empty calories, disrupts sleep, promotes weight gain and can trigger vasomotor symptoms. Try to notice food and drink triggers that are personal to you.

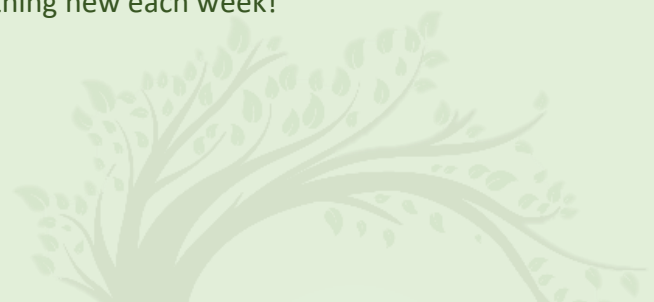
Add in medicinal foods

You can affect your health through practicing good nutrition!

Find some great recipe ideas, share them with friends and family, work out what you enjoy eating and what you can replace poor choices with.

Explore the Mediterranean way of eating which is proven to be one of the healthiest diets! (see more detail in this section)

Eat more and as many different types of plants as you can - 'Eat the Rainbow' ie have as many different coloured vegetables as you can and try something new each week!



Consider TRF (time restricted feeding) Eating within a 10 hour window has proven to help control weight. Also avoid snacking as this all helps to give the gut a rest

Eat fibre to aid good bowel movements! This will aid excess oestrogen excretion and help to keep your blood sugar steady. Most of the population in the UK only eat around half of the recommended amount of fibre!

Make soups with whole vegetables to add plenty of extra fibre to your diet. Juicing is great but consider that much of the fibre will be wasted so juice wisely! Note – bran can interfere with calcium absorption so don't make this a major source of fibre in your diet

Make sure your diet is rich in polyphenols which contain antioxidants

Some good sources of Polyphenols

- Berries
- Cocoa powder and dark chocolate
- Plums, sweet cherries & apples
- Nuts such as hazelnuts, walnuts, pecans and almonds
- Vegetables such as artichokes, red onions, chicory and spinach
- Coffee and black or green tea
- Red wine
- Olives

If you know you need to, increase your fluid intake with plenty of water. This will aid bowel movements which is also essential for good gut health. Supporting your gut health can certainly go a long way to improving many aspects of your health and well-being!





EATING WELL IN MIDLIFE & BEYOND

As you are probably seeing in this program, we cannot just blame our hormones for all that is going on. Optimal nutrition and gut health are a huge contributory factor in managing weight but also in ensuring we live a healthy life during menopause and into our later years. We truly ARE what we eat!

Let's explore some thoughts and ideas that can make an enormous difference to your health and help you to manage your weight!

AVOID SUGARS

For all the reasons mentioned in this program! Weight gain, erratic blood sugar, risk of later life diseases are just a few of the potential risks associated with an excess of sugar in your diet.

EAT MINDFULLY

Pay attention to what you eat, why you eat and how you eat. Listen to your body

EAT WHOLEGRAINS

This will assist Bowel Health, Heart Health and your general wellbeing
Wholegrains can challenge your gut so if you find they are affecting you perhaps avoid for a while and reintroduce slowly

CARBOHYDRATES

These are essential to our diet but make good choices and avoid refined and processed carbohydrates

EAT LEAN PROTEIN

Avoid fatty meats which are high in saturated fats

INCLUDE PLENTY OF ESSENTIAL FATTY ACIDS

These are good for skin and hair health, heart health, mental health, hormonal balance, the nervous system and they help to support the immune system.

INCREASE YOUR FIBRE INTAKE

Most of us don't eat enough! This is a great support for gut health. Make sure you also drink plenty of fluids.

INCLUDE PRO & PRE BIOTICS

For gut support

AVOID things that you know trigger your menopausal symptoms or disrupt your sleep such as alcohol, caffeine, sugar

EXPLORE DIFFERENT DIETS

The Mediterranean or Japanese diets are proven to have so many health benefits. There is much evidence that Japanese women eating the traditional Japanese diet have less vasomotor symptoms and less breast cancer cases.

EXPLORE MEDICINAL PLANTS AND HERBS

There is some evidence that if you aren't looking after yourself very well, herbs are less effective.

EAT THE RIGHT TYPES OF FOOD

This helps maintain healthy blood sugar levels which helps with weight management

GET YOUR VITAMINS

A diverse range of foods should ensure you are achieving this.

CHECK FOOD LABELS

Look for hidden additives and sugars and remember that many products advertised as low fat are high in sugar!

COOK MORE AND EXPLORE NUTRIENT RICH FOOD

EAT A DIVERSE DIET – this is key to good health

EXPLORE “TIME RESTRICTED FEEDING” which can help manage your weight

ENJOY YOUR FOOD!

DITCH THE DIETS! TRY LIVING BY THE 80/20 RULE

WORK ON YOUR SLEEP

INCREASE YOUR STRENGTH TRAINING AND MOVE MORE – try short and sweet HIIT sessions too

BALANCE YOUR HORMONES

MANAGE YOUR STRESS





THE NUTRITION TOOLBOX FOR MENOPAUSE

Good nutrition is about what you add rather than what you take away! I have listed what I feel are the essential additions to help you to achieve great health at midlife and hormonal balance...the lists are exhaustive in terms of good nutrition, but this guide will point you in the direction of much of the best to support midlife health.

PHYTOESTROGENS – plant-based foods

BENEFITS - May reduce vasomotor symptoms, balance oestrogen therefore potentially reduce oestrogen driven cancers

GREAT SOURCES

- Legumes - lentils / chickpeas / kidney beans / peas
- Alliums – onions / garlic / leeks
- Fruits – apples / plums / cherries
- Vegetables – broccoli / carrots / potatoes / celery
- Flax seeds

HEALTHY FATS

BENEFITS – as the building blocks of sex hormones they are essential in menopause. Low fat diet can lead to dry skin (including vaginal dryness), lifeless hair, fatigue, depression, joint pain, difficulty losing weight.

GREAT SOURCES

- Eggs
- cheese
- avacados
- dark chocolate

ESSENTIAL FATTY ACIDS

(The only source is food)

BENEFITS – They “oil the joints”, can help balance mood, can help reduce vasomotor symptoms

GREAT SOURCES

- Nuts - Brazil, almonds, walnuts
- extra virgin olive oil
- seeds /
- seed and nut spreads /
- oily fish eg salmon, mackerel, sardines. You can use tinned fish!

TOP SEED TIP!

Flax seeds seem to be Queen of the seeds! They have shown to be beneficial for hypertension/ diabetes/fecal flora/ breast health/ mild source of oestrogen /help block toxic oestrogen.

You can eat them as they are and grind your own (don't buy ground as they go rancid quickly) Have been shown to mimic tomosofen. Experiments have been done and 3.5 tsps per day seems to be magic number.

Flax seeds are also shown to be beneficial for Cardio Vascular Health.

VEGETABLES

BENEFITS – rich in fibre so help to keep bowels healthy, blood sugar steady and hormones balanced

GREAT SOURCES

- Broccoli
- cauliflower
- Brussel sprouts
- kale
- dark green leafy vegetables
- beetroot (also good for heart health)
- carrots

FRUITS

BENEFITS – packed with vitamins, minerals, fibre and antioxidants. (Remember that some fruits are high in fruit sugar)

GREAT SOURCES

- Citrus fruits
- berries
- cherries



- grapes

COMPLEX CARBOHYDRATES

BENEFITS – help control blood sugar therefore weight, rich in nutrients, higher in fibre than simple carbohydrates, filling

GREAT SOURCES

- Wholewheat breads
- pasta and flour
- brown and wild rice
- quinoa
- legumes

FIBRE

We need to eat both Soluble and Insoluble fibre.

BENEFITS - Fibre is like a good cleanser for your colon! Aids good bowel movements which can help with hormonal balance and balance gut bacteria.

GREAT SOURCES – Insoluble Fibre

- barley
- couscous
- brown rice
- courgettes
- broccoli
- cabbage
- green beans
- dark leafy vegetables
- root vegetables

GREAT SOURCES - Soluble fibre

- oatmeal
- lentils
- apples
- oranges
- nuts
- flax seeds
- celery
- carrots
- dried peas
- beans
- cucumbers



PROTEIN

BENEFITS – protein provides the building blocks of cells in our body and of course builds muscle which is in decline as we age. Protein isn't just derived from animal products and plant-based proteins. We need to ensure we are getting enough protein in our diet as we go through hormonal changes

GREAT SOURCES

Plant based proteins

- pea protein
- lentils
- beans
- tofu
- edamame
- nuts
- seeds
- quinoa

Dairy sources of protein –

- eggs
- fish
- lean meat





A QUICK REFERENCE GUIDE TO YOUR NUTRITION, WEIGHT MANAGEMENT & GUT HEALTH SECTION

1. Food is essential to life and the choices we make influence our health & wellbeing strongly in midlife
2. Our nutritional status contributes to hormonal balance, sleep quality, mood, weight management, gut health, balanced blood sugar, hormonal balance, managing menopausal symptoms, energy to exercise, muscular strength, bone health, brain health, managing later life disease - it's a huge health factor!!!
3. Good gut health and healthy bowel movements are essential at midlife and will contribute to maintaining hormonal balance
4. Diets and restricting food fail us in the long run!
5. It is normal to change shape & to gain weight in midlife (especially around our middle) however we can do much to keep this to a healthy minimum
6. Finding the right exercise plan will support weight management – we all need to add strength/resistance sessions, some exercise with intensity and also with some restorative practices
7. The Japanese diet is linked with less menopausal symptoms
8. The Mediterranean way of eating seems to tick the box in terms of menopausal eating!

9. Explore a plant-based diet – phytoestrogens can be your best friends!
10. However, remember, one size does not fit all! YOU have to find what works best for YOU.





Section 5

Exercise



EXERCISE – TIME TO CHANGE IT UP?

I remember as a younger fitness and Pilates teacher being very conscious of some of the ladies in my classes who were obviously 'menopausal'. I noticed that they looked hot and bothered easily, started to lack concentration, often losing the choreography I was teaching and sometimes appeared flustered and irritable. My own Mother was a similar age at this time so I had a sense of what changes were going on in this age group. But being in my 20s or 30s I could never have known exactly how they were feeling and certainly had no in-depth knowledge on the subject of menopause! However, I was fascinated and vowed to do something about it so that I could understand and help women going through their 'Years of Change'.

Whilst I read up and learned what I could, it wasn't until I had been through the Menopause myself that I decided to delve in deep and really find out what was going on. **Plus** I felt that I could empathise much more being on the 'other side' myself! Finally, I knew what these women had been feeling when they attended their classes and retrospectively commended them for being there at all and keeping up their regular exercise!

Depending on what your experience of menopause is, it would not be unusual to notice a drop in energy, tiredness from disrupted sleep and regular 'heat waves'. You may notice more aches and pains, general stiffness and that your body just doesn't seem as responsive to the exercise it has previously found doable. It would be easy to understand that this could put you off continuing with the exercise you have loved taking part in.

Whilst you may genuinely feel this way and you may need to take that into account in planning your exercise regime, I certainly don't believe that you are ever 'too old' to be doing anything you wish to do! Let your body be your guide, it will be the best indicator of what it is happy to do!

Unless there is a physical or medical reason that prevents you doing so, you should be able to continue doing the things you have always enjoyed doing and to stay mobile, fit and strong through your later years.

The trouble is, if you shy away from exercising, before you know it, you feel even worse. The pounds start to creep on (especially round the middle) possibly because instead of exercising you are playing the "oh blow it, you only live once" game and snacking and drinking wine instead! (I love a G&T and a snack to go with it now and again but we need to ensure that this is offset by exercise and a good diet – as I always say, it's all about balance). So instead, perhaps it's time to take a different approach. Consider what your body is happy to do and

not what it isn't happy to do. It's time to consider whether you are giving your body the gift of the right types of exercise to help it stay strong, mobile and fit through your later life. You may genuinely feel that right now some things don't feel right for you and that now could be time to change it up and let your body reap the benefits!

Let's look at some of the reasons we may be put off exercising, what we can do to help ourselves and find a way forward to preserve our functionality!

SO WHY DOES IT FEEL SO HARD TO DO WHAT YOU USED TO?

If everything still feels exactly the same for you then you are very lucky but for many women going through the menopause they can feel that everything is against them

- **WEIGHT GAIN** can make moving feel harder work. Carrying extra weight, especially if it's landed somewhere you are not used to carrying it, means that there is more to move around! Bending and stretching can feel more awkward if you have gained weight around the middle and even tying your shoelaces can feel more of a challenge. There will be more stress on your joints, potentially making them ache, and they may already feel more uncomfortable as it is due to your changing hormones. Jumping up and down is bound to feel harder work as there is more weight to lift off the floor!
- **MANAGING YOUR WEIGHT** can be challenging though it can be at this stage of life, is something that we look at in this program and is achievable if you put the work in!
- **LOWER ENERGY** is something that we often experience in our Years of Change and this means that we can often be put off exercising. Especially if we already find it less comfortable doing the type of exercise we have always been used to doing. The sofa and a good film seems to have more appeal than exercising and whilst I am a believer in taking time to relax and put your feet up this can lead us down a slippery slope. The film feels better with popcorn, munchies and maybe a glass of wine. And the less you do - the less you want to do. Then the feelings of guilt and laziness set in and we feel even worse!
Remember that exercising the right way actually induces energy!
- **LOSS OF INTEREST / MOJO** - something many women experience, not just in exercise but all sorts of things!
- **LOW MOOD** can mean that we just can't be bothered!
- **POOR SLEEP** – sleep disruption is so common to midlife women and is, without a doubt, one of the most frustrating things we face. It leaves us feeling extremely fatigued, more stressed, anxious, irritable and can lead to increased menopausal symptoms and cravings for sugary foods.
We look at sleep closely later on in the program. How to improve sleep and sleep quality.



- **TOO STRETCHED & BUSY** - sometimes life does get in the way and we genuinely lack time to ourselves. This is classic for midlife women who are often trying to “keep all the plates spinning”. We can feel that we don’t know who to look after first and we give our attention to everyone and everything - except ourselves! But aren’t you the one who, at this time, needs time to yourself? Do you not deserve to take time to exercise?
- **LOSS OF CONFIDENCE** – when you feel less happy with yourself and the way you look, the last thing you want to do is put on lycra or a swimsuit. Or maybe you just feel that you aren’t as able to keep up now?

I know from teaching 1000s of women over the years and from personal experience and from being a woman myself that it doesn’t take much for to feel your self-confidence to take a dive.

Many women managed to increase their exercise during the pandemic of 2020/ 2021 and “virtually” did classes and exercises that they wouldn’t normally attempt because of the possible lack of self-confidence. They could wear what they wanted (I had “Pyjama Participants” in many of my Facebook Lives) and could totally go for it because no one was looking!

- **I ACHE!** It can be very off-putting when you already ache before you even do that exercise session! However, you are likely to ache more if you don’t keep your body moving!
- **I CAN’T DO WHAT I WANT TO DO ANYMORE** – sometimes this is true. Wear and tear and other medical or physical issues can prevent us from doing certain things. Acceptance can be difficult, as I well know, but there is always a way forward and discovering different ways to exercise may be key here.
- **I’M MENOPAUSAL!!!** – who wants to risk more sweats and flushes than they are already getting?! Getting hot and sweaty takes on a whole new meaning in menopause! Who has got the energy when they can’t sleep? Who can even be bothered when there’s no way we can have that bikini body anymore? Shouldn’t we be slowing down anyway?

Menopause doesn’t mean the end of doing things you enjoy!

YOU ARE STILL STRONG; YOU ARE SEXY, VIBRANT AND GORGEOUS EVEN IN MIDLIFE! YOU CAN STILL HAVE ENERGY - YOU ARE STILL AMAZING!!!

SO WHAT IS THE ANSWER?

As well as the obvious such as controlling your weight, addressing your sleep, balancing your hormones, improving nutrition and making lifestyle changes
It could be time to **CHANGE IT UP!**



In changing your mindset and exercise plan it is possible to open up a whole new world if you want it enough.

In all honesty, it is a great time for making changes anyway. Even if you still enjoy the exercise you've always done, you actually may get more pleasure out of doing the type of activities that particularly suit midlife. And there may be things that you should be adding to your exercise regime that you haven't yet discovered – EMBRACE THIS!

DON'T BE PUT OFF IF YOU HAVEN'T BEEN A REGULAR EXERCISER START FROM WHERE YOU ARE NOW.

Build up slowly and acknowledge your progress. Noticing improvements in your abilities is so powerful and achieving things you haven't done before feels great!

In some ways, it's harder if you have always exercised and you feel your body is beginning to let you down. We are all different, try to concentrate on what feels right for you rather than comparing yourself with others.

Everything I listed above can be resolved using the many tools provided in this program. Whilst we can't revert back to being our 20 year old self, we can work to be our best both physically and mentally so that we can enjoy being the woman we are NOW, not the one we once were.

We can still do so much. We can work around any physical changes we may have. What is important is to focus on what your body CAN do, not what it CAN'T do.

Learning new skills at this stage of life is invaluable, promotes confidence and makes you feel that you have achieved something.

HOW DOES REGULAR EXERCISE HELP US IN MIDLIFE?

Choosing what type of exercise suits you is important but if you can embrace a variety of disciplines then there are so many benefits! I would find it hard to believe that looking at the list below would not motivate you to maintain regular exercise;



EXERCISE WILL

- *Lift our mood*
- *Help build our confidence*
- *Help us manage our weight*
- *Help stabilise blood sugar levels*
- *Promote energy*
- *Help to keep our digestive system healthy*
- *Help us to sleep better*
- *Help with aches and pains if appropriate exercise is chosen*
- *Help maintain muscle tissue*
- *Help keep our pelvic floor healthy*
- *Help with bone health*
- *Allow you to have much needed time to yourself*
- *Keep your heart and lungs healthy*
- *Help reduce stress*
- *keep you flexible*
- *Keep your brain active*
- *Help with sexual health*
- *Help reduce many menopausal symptoms*
- *Help ward off later life diseases*
- *Help reduce risk of falls as we age*
- *Promote longevity*

So, stay with me as we explore exercise, it's many benefits to longevity and to find you a way forward that works for you!





PHYSICAL LIMITATIONS TO EXERCISE IN MIDLIFE

In the previous sections I have highlighted the possibility that with the changes we experience as a woman going through our menopausal years we may feel less able to physically do what we did before.

It may be that you are ready to explore new challenges either instead, or as well as, what you did previously. Or that you wish to make a start on a new exercise plan. At this stage of our life, if we listen to them, our bodies will guide us.

Creating a balanced approach to exercise is, I believe, crucial to maintaining physical fitness whatever age we are but it is particularly important for women in midlife.

Unfortunately, we can be faced with some barriers as to what our body is happy to do, especially during our perimenopause when we tend to be noticing the effects of hormonal changes. We may not be able to be that leaping, energetic woman we were in our youth but with a bit of exploring we are able to be much more than that!!

WHAT LIMITATIONS COULD WE BE FACING?

- **CHANGES IN MENSTRUAL CYCLE**

As oestrogen declines our periods and menstrual cycle are likely to change. We may experience heavier loss, more regular periods, months without one then two close together or lighter periods.

Let's face it, they can be a nuisance at any time, we often feel lethargic, tired, experience aches and pains and generally feel rubbish. This will definitely **not** inspire us to jump about as we may normally do!

You may experience less control over your bladder which is certainly a turn off to exercise!

Whatever goes on with your cycle as you go through the perimenopause, if it affects the way you feel it is better to change things up. Some lighter exercise or making time for some mindful disciplines and relaxation could make you feel better. It can also help if you know you suffer with a change of mood at the time of your period.

So give yourself permission to change things up and choose things that will make you feel better rather than battle on and end up exhausted!

- **CHANGES TO YOUR MUSCULOSKELETAL HEALTH**

As we age our joints, our bones, muscles, tendons and soft tissue tend to change. This is partly hormone driven and is also part of the ageing process.

Increased inflammation, less hydration and lack of movement are contributory factors to pain and discomfort that may prevent “the want” to exercise. We can be put off by feeling discomfort when we move. However we then enter a cycle of reduced movement which unfortunately equals more discomfort and pain!

We need to work with the changes and take action to ensure we maintain muscle tissue, good bone health, well- hydrated connective tissue and our mobility.

Here is a short guide to the changes that happen in menopause and beyond and how we can work with these changes to ensure good musculoskeletal health.

- **STIFFENING JOINTS**

Our joints may stiffen due to less lubrication from synovial fluid and we may experience wear and tear that gives us pain. Cartilage may wear and spinal discs become less plump therefore provide less cushioning. We may develop some osteoarthritis (wear and tear) and experience pain as a result.

In midlife there seems to be an increase of back pain, knee pain and neck pain. There are many contributory factors including wear and tear.

How can we help ourselves?

- Maintain regular movement and exercise within a comfortable range at a comfortable level
- Include strengthening exercises so that your muscles correctly support your joints
- Ensure you stay hydrated
- If need be, change your activities to reduce wear & tear and increased pain
- Maintain a healthy weight to reduce further or increased stress on your joints
- Seek help and advice from a specialist, **DO NOT LIVE WITH PAIN!**

BONES

As we have discussed in the bone health section, our bone health can deteriorate as we age and as oestrogen declines. For more information refer to the **BONE HEALTH SECTION** which will give you a comprehensive guide to maintaining good bone health.

MUSCLES

Our muscles may shorten and tighten (and therefore often weaken) through repetitive lifestyle patterns and over time this creates muscle imbalance, possibly leading to pain and discomfort. We can lose the ability to perform simple everyday tasks because we naturally lose muscle density. However we will lose even more strength if we are not working to maintain it. Muscles may feel much stiffer and have restrictive movement if they are not well hydrated.

How can we help ourselves?

- Strength training will help to maintain muscle tissue and function



- Practice mindful activities such as Pilates or Yoga
- Ensure you stay well hydrated
- Move more and in as many directions and ways as possible
- Try not to stay in one position too long. If you have to, get up and move at regular intervals.
- Improve your posture
- Practice stretching and releasing regularly
- Also practice relaxing your muscles, this is as important as working them!
- Have a regular massage if you can!

TENDONS AND LIGAMENTS

Tendons and ligaments are the structures that attach muscles to our skeleton. The decline of oestrogen has an affect on the production of collagen fibres which make up a large part of these structures.

Our tendons and ligaments become more vulnerable as we age. They become stiffer and less mobile, therefore more prone to injury. Tendonitis becomes more common which causes pain and can prevent participation in activities.

There seems to be more occurrence of tennis elbow, shoulder tendon issues, Achilles tendon issues and wrist tendon issues, all which can be debilitating and annoying!

How can we help ourselves?

- Ensuring you stay well hydrated
- Keeping tendons active through appropriate activities
- Eating adequate protein which helps build collagen fibres

FASCIAL TISSUE

Fascia is the connective tissue that encases just about everything in our body! It surrounds our organs, blood vessels, muscles, bones and provides a kind of framework for our body. It is present all the way from your big toe to the top of your head!

The health of our fascial tissue can affect your movement. If it is tight and “stuck” you cannot move as well and may experience pain. Made mostly of water (70%), collagen and elastin fibres it is important to keep the tissue hydrated.

In recent years fascia has become a very talked about subject and much research has been carried out. In a nutshell and without delving in too deep (and believe me this one can go very deep but I am not a fascia expert!) our fascial tissue benefits from movement, manual therapy and water.

There are many techniques and ideas for releasing stuck fascial tissue, using spiky balls, rollers and other massage tools which are all worth exploring but I believe that if you follow the rules of moving, stretching, hydrating and eating good “fascial healthy” foods you are a long way in to maintaining healthy fascia!



Let's recap the best ways to help maintain good Musculoskeletal Health in menopause and beyond

- Avoid inflammation (remember this can be driven by excess sugar in the diet)
- Move more regularly
- Have a regular and appropriate exercise (this should include restorative activities)
- Stay hydrated
- Follow a well balanced diet (see my Nutrition section and Bone Health section)
- Avoid excess alcohol
- Reduce stress levels
- Improve sleep

IN A NUTSHELL - EVERYTHING WE DISCUSS IN THIS PROGRAM WILL BENEFIT YOUR MUSCULOSKELETAL SYSTEM!

PELVIC FLOOR ISSUES

Having continence issues because you are having problems with your pelvic floor muscles is a real turn off for exercising.

We know that many women who experience this embarrassing problem avoid activities for fear of leaking or having uncontrollable wind incidents.

Another issue may be that you have a prolapse (most likely due to a weak pelvic floor) which may make exercising uncomfortable or a worry.

If this is you then most of these issues can be resolved with the right help and guidance.

DON'T FEEL YOU HAVE TO PUT UP WITH IT - We have a whole section dedicated to this so use the information and guidance available. I know it can be an embarrassing subject but there is help available.

DIGESTIVE ISSUES

Bloating, excess gas and an uncomfortable abdominal region can also be a turn off to exercising. Again, we do tend to suffer with more of this in our menopausal years. It doesn't feel good to pull on a pair of lycra tights when you feel like this.



Digestive problems are linked to hormonal changes, a diet that isn't suiting you, poor gut health, stress and many other reasons that you CAN control.

WEIGHT GAIN

Many women find that they gain some weight in their menopausal years. Weight influences us both physically and mentally and is always a hot topic for women.

Gaining weight can lead to a lack of confidence; feeling less comfortable while exercising; not knowing what to wear (that won't show the extra pounds). A downward spiral of less exercise which then equals more weight gain.

A tough one to control but we can!

I don't believe that women are destined to pile on the pounds in menopause, yes maybe gain a little extra weight quite possibly but unless there is a medical reason we should be able to maintain a healthy weight.

It can be hard work because we will, most likely, have to make some changes. However, as with so many other factors during menopause, we have to aim to take control.

INJURIES

Injuries are often unavoidable and will usually cause some disruption to your regular exercise plan. However, injuries can also occur due to incorrect technique while exercising or over training.

If you sustain an injury in midlife it often seems to take longer to heal, this is often due to the changes in our soft tissue as described in the section about musculoskeletal health. This is a time I would definitely suggest acting quickly as receiving treatment sooner rather than later will mean you will heal quicker. This will allow you to rebuild your exercise routine again. Always do this progressively so that you don't end up back at square one.

Nutrition plays a large part in healing as does hydration, rest and rehabilitation.

FATIGUE

As we know, sleep disruption is high on the list of menopausal symptoms, often driven by vasomotor issues such as night sweats. If you are exhausted you are unlikely to feel inclined to exercise.

This is when relaxation and mindful disciplines show their value. Instead of being hard on yourself and thinking you are failing, take time out to do something less strenuous that will aid sleep. This is a time you need to remember to be kind to yourself.

Of course, working on your sleep goes without saying but from personal experience I know how hard that can be!



HEADACHES

Hormonal imbalances along with increased stress and contributory lifestyle factors can result in more regular and sometimes more migraine-like headaches.

No one feels much like exercising when they have a pounding headache! If you are getting regular headaches it's always best to get checked out by your GP.

If you know your headaches are driven by stress and tension it's a great time to explore some relaxation techniques. Tension in the muscles around the head, neck, shoulders and jaw can contribute to headaches so it's especially important to learn to relax these. Take a moment now, check in with your jaw, is it relaxed? How is your posture? Is your chin poking? Are you frowning or screwing up your eyes? Are your shoulders tense? Check in regularly and I bet you will catch some of that happening!!

Whatever physical barriers you may feel you have to exercising, remember that so many are controllable and that this is a great stage of life to explore new options.

Let new challenges and activities light your fire and try not to see it as a failure that you have had to cease some activities.





THE EXERCISE TOOLBOX IN THE YEARS OF CHANGE

STRENGTH & RESISTANCE TRAINING

Training with weights, resistance bands or your own body weight will help to maintain bone and muscle density. This type of training can have cardiovascular benefits too.

However, it is important to consider the appropriateness of the exercises before practicing them.

- If you know you have a weak pelvic floor, lifting weights may not be suitable. Learning correct core and pelvic floor engagement and breathing patterns is vital anyway but especially when we know the pelvic floor muscles can be potentially weaker during our menopausal years. It may be better to use resistance bands but having expert guidance and building up slowly will help you to know what you can safely achieve
- If you have any injuries, especially if they are back or neck injuries, you will need to consider the appropriateness of weighted work
- Your trainer should ALWAYS check your health status and allow you to build up slowly when working with strength based exercises
- Be careful not to copy exercises you may see on social media or in magazines. I don't feel full guidance is given and you can risk injuring yourself.

MINDFUL MOVEMENT SUCH AS PILATES OR YOGA

We need to slow things down too! Practicing mindful movement provides so many benefits. There are other methods of movement of course but as I teach Pilates and have enjoyed the benefits of a little yoga here and there, I am using them as great examples.

- You have time to connect your mind and body and really feel what your body is doing, what feels ok (and doesn't!) and it will help to promote relaxation. Moving slowly is quite often more challenging than moving quickly! It takes strength to control your body in slow movements. Many Pilates and Yoga exercises can be incredibly strengthening.
- Practicing these types of disciplines feels so wonderful and rewarding as they both allow you to work from the basic level. It feels so great when you can achieve something that you couldn't before!
- You can enjoy that 'me time' so much. I always say, "shut the door and close the world off and allow yourself to totally absorb yourself in what you are practicing".

- Breathing techniques are used in these methods of exercise, promoting relaxation to calm the nervous system. This helps to reduce stress.

STRETCHING, RELEASING & MOBILITY

We often ache as we go through the perimenopause and beyond. It would be so easy to think that exercise will make us ache more but it is more likely that it will help alleviate aches and pains. Stretching often goes to the bottom of the pile and we discard it in favour of 'working out' which we feel is of more benefit. However, this type of exercise is as just as important as any other discipline.

- Keeping your joints mobile and your muscle tissue and fascia (connective tissue) moving will allow more freedom of movement in your body
- Stretching and releasing muscles will help to maintain muscle fibre length, aid recovery post-exercise and allow you to work your muscles in their full range.
- Releasing muscles is as important as strengthening them. Muscles that do not release may become tight and may not function as well. This includes the pelvic floor muscles which function optimally when they are contracted and released in equal measures. Therefore this type of training has many benefits.
- It feels amazing to stretch. Many of my participants say they feel like they have had a massage!

SOMETHING TO CHALLENGE YOUR BRAIN

Many types of exercise challenge your brain. Different movement patterns or sporting techniques all contribute to maintaining cognitive health.

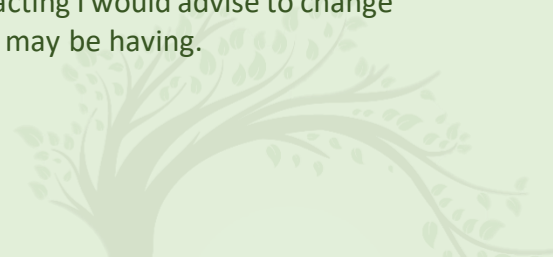
- Try a choreographed exercise class such as a step class, dance fitness, old school aerobics or anything that requires you to put steps together!
- Learning a new technique or sport will get the brain cells working as well as the body!

SOMETHING TO GET YOUR HEART RATE UP (NO IMPACT NEEDED!)

We tend to focus on this type of activity so much when we are younger. Possibly because we see it as the best way to manage our weight and because it feels so good to leap about! Whilst it is still important to get some training in for our heart and lungs we may feel it's time to change the way we do this.

You may be happy running miles or participating in the types of exercise you have always enjoyed and that is perfectly fine as long as it isn't placing undue stress on your body. It is also worth noting that whilst activities such as long runs can be a great stress reliever, they can also cause you to release more stress hormones as there is a lot of stress on the body. This won't work in your favour in the long run (pardon the pun!)

Consideration needs to be given to your pelvic floor muscle health if you are doing high impact activities. If you notice you have stress incontinence when impacting I would advise to change to low impact and address the issues your pelvic floor muscles may be having.



It really doesn't matter what you choose to get your heart rate up. As long as it is appropriate to you.

SOMETHING TO HELP MAINTAIN BALANCE

Have you noticed that you don't feel as balanced? That you feel less confident about doing certain things like walking in slippery mud or ice and snow? We lose our ability to balance as we age and, as with all types of exercise and movement, I believe in a preventative approach. For years I have recommended standing on one leg whilst you brush your teeth or waiting for the kettle to boil!

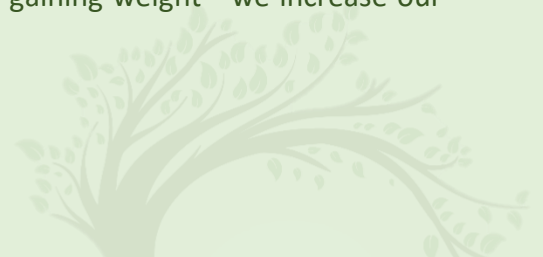
It is so easy to lose our confidence in what our body is able to do as we age and this is particularly true of balance. So practicing activities that challenge balance, stability and change of direction are something we should aim to be practicing.

- Coming back to Pilates and Yoga – these are great disciplines for encouraging balance and stability. The strengthening effects of this type of exercise help us to build confidence when we need balance. You will find that the positive effects on your core strength will help immeasurably.
- Any one leg standing exercises are fantastic, not only for balance practice but also for loading your bones and building bone density. A Barre workout is great for this and has many other benefits such as strengthening the whole body and improving posture. In addition the rotational movement of the hips can contribute to pelvic floor muscle strengthening.
- Try a bit of 'beam walking' or walking along a narrow path or wall (stay safe of course!) This is great for practicing balance
- Practice activities and exercises that demand quick changes in direction and make sure that your body moves in all planes of movement, not just forward and back or side to side
- Exercises where you either close your eyes or stand on one leg whilst following a moving object (even if its your hand) are great
- Walk on gradients and different surfaces
- If appropriate add some spinning movements in some of the classes!
- There are so many other things you can do to improve balance and your confidence in balancing so have a play and find out what works best for you!

FUNCTIONALITY

You will have heard the term 'functional movement' and 'functional exercise'. Quite rightly we want to move and exercise in a way that is going to help us in our everyday life.

We take for granted what our body is able to do and often it's not until something comes along to challenge this that we take action. We get a back problem - we take up Pilates. We injure ourselves - we rehabilitate and seek treatment. We suffer with stress - we take up mindfulness, relaxation or breathing techniques. We start gaining weight - we increase our



exercise sessions. We notice our muscle tone isn't as good - we take up weight workouts. We feel stiffer - we take up stretching.

These are all the things I believe we should be doing regardless of whether our body is asking for them. Exercise should always have balance. Doing only one type of activity is more likely to cause issues and muscle imbalances. Prevention is always better than cure.

However, we have to start at the point we are at and move forward so if your exercise and movement regime has lacked one facet it's not too late to start! A balanced exercise program is what will help to maintain functionality. It doesn't have to be labelled as a 'functional movement / exercise session', all good exercise programs should contain movements and work that add to your functionality. At this stage of our life as a woman, we should be particularly aware of learning good technique and appropriate activities to help us to stay strong, mobile, cardiovascularly fit, maintain good bone and muscle density, create a healthy pelvic floor, maintain a healthy weight, reduce stress, aid sleep and avoid age related diseases.

WHAT IF YOU DON'T LIKE EXERCISE?

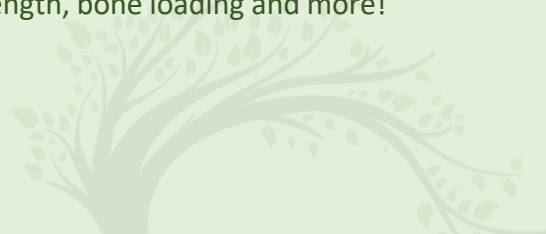
Exercise doesn't have to be in the shape of classes, a sport or the gym!

We don't have to be a slave to something we don't enjoy! Though I do believe that with a little searching, most of us do find something we enjoy.

ACTIVITIES THAT AREN'T 'FORMAL EXERCISE'

There are so many activities that will give you the benefits without attending the gym!

- Walking – speed it up, use hills! Walking is a great activity for getting your heart rate up, enjoying nature and fresh air, strengthening the muscles in your lower body and has such a feel good factor so great for our mental health too. Nordic walking with poles will increase intensity and help use muscles in your upper body too.
- Housework / shopping / gardening – you can really make use of your body doing everyday chores! Mopping floors, hoovering, sweeping, bending and stretching to reach places, going on all fours to wash the floor, moving heavy objects around (as long as it's safe), carrying shopping bags and lifting them in and out of the car, raking leaves, mowing the lawn, weeding, clipping....the list is endless! Consider how mobile that keeps you, how you are loading your bones and using your muscles and if done with vigor (put some great music on while cleaning to get you going and perhaps even have the odd boogie in between dusting!!) and you may even get a sweat up too!
- Biking – you may just like to use a bike to get somewhere, it doesn't have to be you going out cycling for sport. Using a bike instead of the car has great benefits! You can increase your heart rate, use the muscles in your bottom, legs and core
- Playing outdoor games – perhaps you have younger family members or Grandchildren you can run about with playing games? Great for cardiovascular health, balance, speed, mobility, sharpness, core strength, muscular strength, bone loading and more!



- For restorative activities – you don't need to do yoga or meditation to practice breathing deeply and relaxing. You can put on some beautiful music, sit quietly and do these things without the “formality” of a class!
- Releasing tight muscles / connective tissue - you don't have to invest in flashy equipment, you can use tennis balls, squash balls and some imagination. And you just need to move!

Whatever you choose to do at this stage of life to keep you fit and active, try to consider incorporating a diverse range of activities and ensure you are doing as much as you can to maintain good physical fitness.

It can feel like an effort and your motivation can be lacking. We can find ourselves making excuses not to exercise but always find the time to go on social media! Most of the time we can find at least 20 minutes to do something. You will never regret forming an exercise habit and your body and mind will thank you for it!





A QUICK REFERENCE GUIDE TO YOUR EXERCISE SECTION

- HOW WE EXERCISE IN MIDLIFE WILL AFFECT OUR MUSCLE MASS, BONE DENSITY, HOW WE SLEEP, OUR STRESS LEVELS, MOOD AND ENERGY – GET IT RIGHT AND YOU ARE ON TO A WINNER!
- EXERCISE ISN'T ALL ABOUT INTENSITY – THIS IS A TIME FOR ADDING RESTORATIVE EXERCISE IF YOU HAVEN'T YET DONE SO.
- INTENSE EXERCISE IS A STRESS ON OUR BODY WHICH ADDS TO THE RISK OF CORTISOL IMBALANCE
- STRENGTH TRAINING, (NOT NECESSARILY WITH HEAVY WEIGHTS) IS TOP OF THE LIST IN MIDLIFE – IT HELPS US MAINTAIN MUSCLE AND BONE DENSITY
- IT MAY BE TIME TO CHANGE YOUR EXERCISE REGIME – WHAT YOU USED TO DO MAY NOT SUIT YOUR NEEDS NOW AND YOU MAY NEED TO MIX IT UP MORE
- WORKING ROUND INJURIES AND WEAR AND TEAR CAN BE FRUSTRATING BUT THERE IS ALWAYS A WAY!
- EXERCISE CAN HELP US REDUCE MENOPAUSAL SYMPTOMS
- EXERCISE SHOULD NEVER BE A CHORE – FIND WAYS TO KEEP MOVING THAT YOU REALLY ENJOY OR YOU WILL NEVER KEEP IT UP
- HERE'S WHAT WE SHOULD BE INCLUDING – STRENGTH TRAINING, SOMETHING TO GET YOUR HEART RATE UP, FLEXIBILITY TRAINING, A RESTORATIVE AND RELAXING FORM OF EXERCISE, SOMETHING TO CHALLENGE YOUR BRAIN AND EXERCISES THAT HELP YOU FUNCTION IN YOUR EVERYDAY LIFE
- “MOVEMENT IS IMPROVEMENT” AND “MOTION IS LOTION” ARE MY TWO FAVOURITE PIECES OF ADVICE!



Section 6

Bone Health



BONE HEALTH

ARE YOU LOOKING AFTER YOUR BONES?

As we age it becomes really important to look after our bones. We reach peak bone mass way before menopause but the decline of oestrogen can begin to have an effect on our bone density as oestrogen helps to maintain our bone health. Oestrogen can also decline for other reasons, such as:

- *Early hysterectomy*
- *Progesterone only contraceptive pill*
- *Being a competitive athlete*
- *Eating disorders*

However, there are other factors that influence what happens to our bones which are important to be aware of, some we can control, some we cannot.

MODIFIABLE FACTORS (controllable)

- Diet
- Alcohol consumption
- Smoking
- Inactivity
- Low body weight
- Over and under exercising

NON-MODIFIABLE FACTORS (not controllable)

- Age
- Genetics
- Gender
- Hormones
- Early menopause / hysterectomy
- Long term use of steroids
- Eating / digestive disorders
- Chemotherapy treatment

MEDICATIONS THAT MAY AFFECT BONE HEALTH

- Steroids
- Some medications for epilepsy
- Anti-oestrogen treatment for breast cancer (Aromatase Inhibitors)

THE GOOD NEWS is that healthy women are not at great risk. However, it is important for us to know the best way to look after ourselves on every level and to make improvements if we need to! Self-care in our Years of Change is a priority.

We have already hit peak bone mass in our late 20s so working towards maintaining bone mass is important even before menopause. It is good to consider how well you are looking after those precious bones!

IN THIS PART OF THE PROGRAM, WE ARE GOING TO TAKE A LOOK AT:

1. Bones and what happens to them as we age
2. Risk factors for Osteoporosis
3. Exercise for bone health
4. Nutrition for bone health

WHAT HAPPENS TO OUR BONES?

When we think of osteoporosis, we tend to relate it to little old ladies, hunched over, probably in their 80s. What we need to be aware of is that bone health isn't just about little old ladies!

Peak bone mass or bone health is around **age 20** for women – our bones are at their best at this point.

It's a balancing act! - We have bone building cells (osteoblasts) and cells called osteoclasts which break down bone tissue and it's the balancing act between these cells that affect bone mass. We need both types of cells but the balance changes once we have reached peak bone mass and as we age further.

Osteoporosis or osteopenia – what is it?

Osteoporosis or osteopenia is a loss of bone density or bone mass leading to potential fractures. The main problem areas are the wrist, head of the femur, neck of the femur and the thoracic spine.

Unfortunately, women are more prone to osteoporosis than men

THE WARNING SIGNS:

- Loss in height
- Postural changes to upper spine
- Sudden back pain over 45 with no obvious cause
- Bone fractures from a minor incident



The statistics

- Osteoporosis affects 200 million women worldwide
- 70% of women over 75 will have osteoporosis
- 1 in 3 women will suffer osteopenic fractures in their life and a fracture may be the first sign of osteoporosis
- 75% of hip fractures are in women
- Risk increases with age
- In women over 45, osteoporosis accounts for more days spent in hospital than many other diseases including diabetes, heart attacks and breast cancer
- In older women risks associated with mortality due to falls, breathing difficulties due to increased kyphosis and social isolation due to their increasing disability or difficulties with walking etc.
- 1 in 3 women won't be diagnosed until after 3 or more bones have been broken

Considering that there is clear need to address bone health we don't hear enough about it!

Like many other things that are vital to women's wellness we are given limited information. And similar to many other things, a preventative approach is better than a reactive approach.

FACTORS AFFECTING BONE MASS

A variety of genetic and environmental factors influence peak bone mass;

- **Genetics** are understood to be a big factor. Take a look at your Mum and your Grandma and how they aged.
- **Gender** – Peak bone mass tends to be higher in men than in women. Before puberty, boys and girls acquire bone mass at similar rates. After puberty, however, men tend to acquire greater bone mass than women.
- **Age** – not something we can change!
- **Race** – Caucasian and Asian women are more at risk of bone health decline
- **Menopause / Hormonal factors.** The hormone oestrogen has an effect on peak bone mass.
- **Bone health** is affected when oestrogen has dropped in post menopause.
- **Women** who had their first menstrual cycle at an early age and those who use oral contraceptives, which contain oestrogen, often have high bone mineral density. In contrast, young women whose menstrual periods stop because of extremely low body weight or excessive exercise for example, may lose significant amounts of bone density. This may not be recovered even after their periods return.

Other factors – Low body weight / over exercising / inactivity / eating disorders / lack of periods / chemotherapy & other medications / smoking / alcohol

Nutrition & lifestyle behaviours

We will be looking specifically at exercise and diet this program

DIET



In some parts of the world it has been shown that statistics of bone issues are lower. For example women who embrace a traditional Japanese lifestyle have a lower incidence of menopausal symptoms, breast cancer and Osteoporosis. However, if they move to the UK or the US and adopt our typical diet their statistics level with ours.

Their diet contains less dairy, more fish, raw fish, sea vegetables, rice, spices that have anti-inflammatory properties such as Miso and Tamarind etc. Food for thought?

Dairy in the diet - although we always think of drinking milk to help bones because of the calcium in dairy. However – dairy is not necessarily essential for bone health!

SEE MORE IN FOLLOWING INFORMATION

EXERCISE FOR BONE HEALTH

Bones are a living tissue and are responsive to loading. Exercise and movement that pulls on the muscles and tendons and stress the bone will lead to bone building. Improvements in bone density may be seen when regularly practicing strength training.

SEE MORE IN FOLLOWING INFORMATION

PHYSICAL ACTIVITY IN OUR CHILDREN

Children and young adults who exercise regularly generally achieve greater peak bone mass than those who do not. Women and men age 30 and older can help prevent bone density loss with regular exercise.

IF YOU NEED TO SEEK MEDICAL OR SPECIALIST HELP

If you are concerned about your bone density, have a family history of osteoporosis or any other indicators it is always best to consult your health provider. A Dexter Scan will reveal your “T” score which reveals your level of bone density. Your health provider will guide you to what steps they consider will help.

EXERCISE PRESCRIPTION

If you do have any bone health issues, it is important that you are not only advised of the exercises that you should be avoiding (as fractures can occur when you least expect it!) but also the exercises you **should** be doing to help you build more bone density. Osteopenia can be reversed in some cases.

OUR DIET

It is important to look at our diet - a nutritionist can help you with this.

The FRAX (Fracture Risk Assessment Tool) on the WHO (World Health Organisation) website allows you to answer questions that can help determine your risk factors.

Your age, weight, height, gender, whether you smoke, your alcohol intake and any history of family hip fractures can be input and a result is then given.

OTHER CONSIDERATIONS

Gut health influences Bone Health

Sleep influences bone health – deprivation may influence bone mineral density

Soda and fizzy drink intake (particularly cola) may affect bone health



EXERCISE FOR BONE HEALTH

In order for us to maintain good bone health through exercise we need to put our bones under stress. Bone is a living tissue and responds to how we use it. As discussed, there are various influences on our bone health at midlife, therefore if you haven't already started the right types of exercise to help maintain good bone health now is definitely the time to start!

The exercise sessions available to you through this program will be of great benefit to building stronger bones. It is often a time for changing up your exercise habits and discovering what now works to help you to also maintain a healthy weight. We tend to think that running miles will keep our weight in check but remember that this can put our body under stress. Therefore producing more stress hormones and promoting the storage of midbody fat!

Resistance training builds muscle tissue which burns off more calories 24/7 as well as being perfect for healthy bones!

Please note that if you have been diagnosed with osteopenia or osteoporosis you **must** refer to your health provider for any advice and I can assist in providing modifications and advice to help further.

WHAT SHOULD YOUR EXERCISE REGIME BE FOR GOOD BONE HEALTH?

- Weight training and resistance training (including using resistance bands). Low load with high numbers of repetitions is often more appropriate; certainly if you are starting from scratch or if you have any physical issues including pelvic floor dysfunction.
- One leg standing work and balance activities (such as Barre based workouts). Single leg load bearing works the deep hip muscles and can strengthen the Pelvic floor muscles too!
- Weight bearing such as in Pilates or Yoga to strengthen the wrists, shoulders and arms. These activities are excellent for improving posture too.
- Certain high impact activities if suitable – even small jumps are good
- Certain low impact - so dancing, exercise classes to music, cycling (up on feet), hiking, sports such as racket sports

- And - ALWAYS INCLUDE SQUATS & LUNGES! As well as bone loading, Squats improve gluteal strength which is essential for good pelvic floor function!

HOW OFTEN SHOULD YOU EXERCISE?

Strength training 3 times per week would be the perfect recommendation. This could include a good weight-bearing Pilates, Yoga or Barre workout. This is very individual, and I am happy to advise if you have any questions.

OTHER CONSIDERATIONS

- *Always build up slowly and modify, progress to suit your capabilities.*
- *Any injuries or medical conditions need to be considered before commencing an exercise program. Please seek advice from your health provider if necessary.*
- *If you have any pelvic floor dysfunction this must be considered. Incorrect breathing patterns and technique create intra-abdominal pressure and can exacerbate weakness in the pelvic floor muscles.*
- *Remember that as well as strengthening bone tissue, all the types of exercise listed will be beneficial to muscle strengthening which in turn can help with everyday functioning. This will help with back pain, other dysfunctions and of course, mental wellbeing, aiding weight management, stress management, digestion and promoting better sleep!*
- *Never exercise if you are feeling unwell*





EATING FOR GOOD BONE HEALTH

What's the first thing you think of when considering nutrition for Bone Health?

Calcium is most people's first thought when we talk about bone health – calcium isn't just for strong bones - also used in the body for brain function / nervous system amongst other things and also works as a team with vitamin D, K and magnesium so these are required to effectively absorb calcium.

Most of us consider calcium to be the number one nutrient for bone health. However, this is not the case as we will discuss. Of course, calcium is a necessary nutrient to help us have good bones but has many other health benefits we may not have realised!

WHERE DO WE GET CALCIUM FROM?

We think firstly of dairy products which are of course a great source. However they are not the only source and if someone doesn't tolerate dairy, they are able to get calcium from other sources. ***As with everything a balance of all good nutrients is key.***

Some people who can't tolerate cows milk can tolerate cheese/yoghurt etc

SOURCES OF CALCIUM

- Milk, Cheese and other dairy foods
- Green leafy vegetables – such as Broccoli, Cabbage and Okra,
- Soya Beans
- Tofu
- Soya drinks with added calcium
- Nuts
- Bread and anything made with fortified flour
- Fish where you eat the bones – such as sardines and pilchards
- Fermented dairy – Kaffir, Yoghurt (with live cultures)

We need approximately;

1000mg calcium per day rising to 1200mg per day for women aged 50+

LEVELS OF CALCIUM IN EVERYDAY FOODS;

200ml milk = 200mg
125g pot plain yoghurt = 200mg
120g tofu = 200mg
50g tin sardines = 200mg
2 dried figs = 100mg
200g baked beans = 100mg
110g broccoli = 50mg
40g watercress = 50mg
Heaped tsp tahini = 100mg
10 whole almonds = 50mg
75g whole bread pitta = 100g

SOURCES OF VITAMIN D

Sunlight, Oily fish, Foods fortified with Vitamin D (cereals), Eggs (yolk), Cheese, Some meats

SOURCES OF VITAMIN K

Green leafy vegetables – Kale, Spinach, Sprouts, Broccoli, Cabbage
Fish, Liver, Meat, Eggs, Cereals (smaller amounts in these)

SOURCES OF MAGNESIUM

Dark chocolate (75% cacao and over), Avocados, Nuts, Legumes, Tofu, Seeds, Wholegrains, Bananas and some fatty fish

WHAT ELSE CAN WE EAT FOR GOOD BONE HEALTH?

- Oily fish (twice a week), Sushi
- Cooked greens – Broccoli, Cauliflower, Spinach, Sprouts, Seaweed
- Fermented soy
- Miso soup
- Tamari as a seasoning
- Yoghurt with live cultures
- Other fermented foods – Sauerkraut, Kimchi, Kaffir, Kimbucha (pro biotics)
- Prunes 2-3 per days (smoothie with berries, seeds etc)
- Adequate water
- Mushrooms (vitamin D)

Supporting your bone health through good nutrition along with the appropriate exercise is really important at this stage of life. Do explore the possibilities of improving your bone friendly food intake.





TIPS FOR GOOD BONE HEALTH

- **Have a well-balanced exercise programme including strength and resistance;** some impact training (whether high or low) for cardiovascular benefits, mobility and flexibility
- **Strengthen our bone tissue;** we need to create a stress on the bones by pulling on muscles and tendons with appropriate activities
- **Strength and resistance training;** this can be with weights, resistance bands and weight bearing activities
- **Activities** such as aerobic classes, step classes, dancing, hiking and skipping are beneficial
- **Higher impact activities** such as jogging, running and sports such as football, athletics etc are beneficial if appropriate
- **General housework, carrying shopping, DIY and gardening** can also be good!
- **Regular movement** is essential, not just formal exercise. So try and incorporate as much activity into your day as you can.
- **Get your Vitamin D!** Get outside!



A QUICK REFERENCE GUIDE TO YOUR BONE HEALTH SECTION

- LOOKING AFTER YOUR BONE HEALTH BECOMES EVEN MORE IMPORTANT ONCE YOU GO THROUGH MENOPAUSE AS BONE DENSITY CAN DECLINE DUE TO LOWER OESTROGEN LEVELS, REDUCED ACTIVITY, COMPROMISED GUT HEALTH AND EVEN SLEEP DISTURBANCE
- NUTRITION AND EXERCISE PLAY A BIG PART IN MANAGING BONE HEALTH
- 1 IN 3 WOMEN WILL SUFFER AN OSTEOPOROTIC BONE FRACTURE IN THEIR LIFETIME
- OSTEOPOROSIS AFFECTS 200 MILLION WOMEN WORLDWIDE - WE NEED TO CONSIDER OUR BONE HEALTH!
- RESISTANCE AND STRENGTH WORK ARE ESSENTIAL FOR MAINTAINING BONE DENSITY
- VITAMIN D, CALCIUM, VITAMIN K AND MAGNESIUM ALL SUPPORT BONE HEALTH
- KEEP A WATCH OUT FOR SIGNS OF BONE CHANGES SUCH AS BACK PAIN, SUDDEN LOSS IN HEIGHT
- GENETICS PLAY A LARGE PART IN TERMS OF RISK FACTORS
- OSTEOPENIA (PRE OSTEOPOROSIS) CAN BE REVERSED
- CONSIDERATION NEEDS TO BE GIVEN TO SUITABILITY OF EXERCISES IF YOU DO HAVE OSTEOPOROSIS THEREFORE GETTING THE CORRECT ADVICE IS ESSENTIAL
- HRT IS NOT THE ONLY SOLUTION TO MAINTAINING GOOD BONE HEALTH BUT IT DOES SUPPORT BONE HEALTH



Section 7

Pelvic Health



ALL ABOUT THE PELVIC FLOOR

The pelvic floor, hidden away as it is, can easily forgotten about and ignored. However, the function of these very important muscles need our attention and looking after because the different stages of life that a woman goes through can challenge it!

I am going to introduce you to this set of very important muscles and explain why, as women. we need to consider taking care of them!

We will look at the anatomy and function of the muscles; what can go wrong with them and what issues we may occur as a result.

Women will go through the different stages of their life and will notice that the function of the pelvic floor muscles may not be as good as they should be. Pregnancy, the subsequent Postnatal period along with the Menopause are often responsible for giving us a few challenges in this area. Sadly, we are lead to believe by companies wishing to sell their wares that having a few continence issues is normal! – but it is not normal to regularly leak! You will see adverts with young and older women claiming that it's ok because they have a 'magic weapon' in their pants.

If you have leakage issues they need addressing not catching with a pad or special pretty pants!

Just to note, some continence issues can be unavoidable due to illness or medical conditions and in these cases protection may be required. But it is possible to improve their function if the issue is a question of retraining weakened muscle.

Many women have not been taught the importance of keeping their pelvic floor muscles in good shape, so if this is all new to you, you won't be alone.

ANATOMY OF THE PELVIC FLOOR

The pelvic floor is made up of pairs of multi-directional muscles in layers that have their own individual functions, including controlling continence. The muscles make a bowl shape at the bottom of our pelvis. We need ALL these muscles to be strong enough in order that our pelvic floor can function properly and is able to support the weight of the organs and contents of our pelvis. We also need the muscles to be able to release well, just like all the other muscles in our body. Without this the muscles can become overtight leading to some of the same issues we see if the muscles are not strong enough.

EXERCISING THE PELVIC FLOOR MUSCLES

Understanding, and ongoing practice, of how to make the muscles work will help to improve and maintain a healthy pelvic floor. We are going to cover this in full in this program.

Improving function is not achieved through exercise alone. We have other factors to consider such as correct breathing, good posture and lifestyle other factors.

In this program I am going to bring you specific exercises to help you have a well-functioning pelvic floor. However, you may have certain considerations to take into account before practicing the exercises so please take the time to complete the checklist before starting them. If you have any concerns regarding the suitability of the pelvic floor exercises or of any of the other exercise sessions in the program please contact me to discuss.

WHAT ARE THE FUNCTIONS OF THE PELVIC FLOOR?

- Provides support / a floor for the contents of our abdomen – and the weight of a growing baby in pregnancy.
- Opens and closes our pelvic outlets / controls continence / gives tone to the female mid passage.
- Resist the increases in intra-pelvic/abdominal pressure during activities such as coughing or lifting heavy objects.
- Plays a part in sexual function and health and also influences sexual pleasure.
- Has an active role within childbirth to birth baby.
- Helps to stabilise our pelvis because it is part of the deep hip muscle structure.

CAUSES OF PELVIC FLOOR DYSFUNCTION

- Age
- Pregnancy & childbirth – particularly if you have had an assisted vaginal delivery, episiotomy, significant tear or very large baby. It is so important to strengthen the pelvic floor during pregnancy!
- Chronic constipation & conditions such as IBS
- Heavy or repeated lifting – as we lift there is an increase in intra-abdominal pressure which puts strain on the pelvic floor
- High impact exercise / trampolining / heavy weights – heavy weights based and very vigorous gym activities with jumping can put the pelvic floor under a lot of strain
- Being very overweight adds extra stress for the pelvic floor
- Excessive coughing
- Menopause – changes to soft tissue



- Certain neurological conditions
- Some medication
- Surgery (hip, hysterectomy, prostate)
- Postural imbalances & poor posture – seated occupation, weak gluts / poor alignment & breathing patterns
- Back issues / poor core connection & pelvic stability
- Inactivity – this can be addressed!
- Illness eg neurological illness
- Prolapse (bladder or bowel)
- Infection – Urinary Tract Infection / cystitis
- Piriformis syndrome
- Damaged coccyx
- Hypermobility
- 57% of women with stress incontinence have a diastasis (separation of the abdominals)

WHAT CAN HAPPEN IF OUR PELVIC FLOOR ISN'T FUNCTIONING WELL?

The Pelvic Floor muscles may not function well because they have weakened but also because they may be over tight (hypertonic). Both these scenarios can lead to similar symptoms, so it is important to know where you are in terms of what is happening with the muscles. Always consult your health practitioner or see a pelvic health specialist if you feel things are not functioning as they should.

Note: WE MUSTN'T ASSUME THE MUSCLES NEED TO BE STRENGTHENED AS THIS IS NOT ALWAYS THE CASE

IF THE PELVIC FLOOR HAS WEAKENED

- The pelvic floor cannot do its job of supporting the bladder, uterus and bowel well enough. This results in prolapse and possible bladder or bowel continence issues. Women are more vulnerable than men
- Pelvic floor dysfunction can lead to issues with letting us evacuate from the bladder or bowel
- It can interfere with sexual function and enjoyment

HIGH TONE /HYPERTONIC PELVIC FLOOR

The pelvic floor can become overactive. If we don't learn to relax it, it can lead to the muscles being too tight. This will therefore lead to the muscles being weak and will create issues with continence, sexual discomfort and pelvic pain. Working ANY muscles a lot – and not relaxing them – IS NOT GOOD!

SYMPTOMS OF HYPERTONIC PELVIC FLOOR MUSCLES

- urinary frequency, urgency, hesitancy, stopping & starting of flow, painful urination
- constipation, straining, pain during or after bowel movements
- interstitial cystitis : painful bladder syndrome
- unexplained pain in lower back, pelvic region, hips, genital area or rectum



- pain during or after intercourse, orgasm or sexual stimulation
- uncoordinated muscle contractions causing the pelvic floor muscles to spasm

THE IMPACT OF URINARY INCONTINENCE / STATISTICS

- It is estimated to affect up to 5 million people in the UK – though as it is much under reported and this figure could be much higher. It allegedly affects 1 in 3 women
- This costs to NHS £117 million per year
- It is the 2nd largest reason for admitting the elderly into residential care (1st is dementia related)
- It can lead to being unsure about going out if unsure of toilet facilities
- It can lead to dressing differently because of the problem
- It can affect our sex life – up to 50% avoid sexual activity
- Reports state that 1 in 3 women aged 45 – 75 avoid physical activity. The lack of activity increases the risk of obesity, diabetes, coronary heart disease, falls, osteoporosis and loss of mobility. This is yet another unnecessary strain on our NHS. Failure to address issues postnatally can lead to women avoiding exercise. This will shape the quality of their life in old age
- It can lead to social isolation
- Evidence suggests that urinary incontinence has a profound effect on quality of life – and something can be done to help with the issues people have – due to the ‘normalisation’ of incontinence by the media, family and friends, sufferers often see their symptoms as inevitable if they have had children or are getting older. fewer than 1 in 10 people who have these issues talk to a health professional either through embarrassment or because they don’t think there is an answer to the problem. it may take someone who has issues up to 10 years to seek help.
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TYPES OF URINARY INCONTINENCE

- stress incontinence – involuntary loss of urine on effort, exertion, when coughing or sneezing
- urge incontinence – ‘key in the door’ – sudden desire to pass urine which is difficult to ignore
- mixed incontinence – both of the above
- overflow incontinence – involuntary loss of urine associated with over distension of the bladder (inability to urinate even with urge) (prostate issues, other medical issues etc)

THERE ARE SO MANY WAYS TO DEAL WITH PELVIC FLOOR MUSCLE ISSUES

Seeking medical assessment and help

Appropriate exercise



Improving nutritional status including choice of drinks
Addressing daily toilet habits
Certain gadgets can help improve function

PLEASE SEEK HELP FROM A MEDICAL PROFESSIONAL IF YOU ARE AWARE OF ANY OF THE FOLLOWING

Continence issues that can't be resolved with other measures or if they are really affecting your daily life
Pelvic pain or painful sex
Heaviness or bulging feeling in your mid or back passage
Continuous urinary infections (Cystitis)

REMEMBER if you know that you have any pelvic floor muscle issues or concerns please consider that what is covered in this program should not be an alternative to medical help.





LOW TONE & HIGH TONE PELVIC FLOOR MUSCLES

Low tone refers to muscles that lack strength so may have poor function, high tone refers to muscles that are literally too tight and may have poor function as a result.

What may attribute to Low Tone Dysfunction

- Going through menopause as oestrogen declines
- Having had one, or more, babies
- Having had pelvic surgery, particularly with access through the perineum, which can damage the pelvic floor muscles
- Irregular orgasms – This is because orgasmic contractions help keep the pelvic floor strong
- Carrying a lot of body weight - This can stress the pelvic floor muscles
- Being an athlete who experiences injury to the perineum from water-skiing, bicycle racing, or equestrian sports
- A family history of pelvic organ prolapse
- Having had radiation treatment to the pelvic region

What are the symptoms of Low Tone Dysfunction?

- Weak or absent orgasms
- Stress incontinence (losing urine or stool when you sneeze, laugh, cough, lift, or exercise)
- Pelvic Organ prolapse (uterus, bladder, or rectum)
- Back ache

How can we treat or prevent Low Tone Dysfunction?

- Through practicing specific pelvic floor muscle exercises
- Learning to 'engage' the pelvic floor along with correct breath techniques when lifting
- Trying not to carry excess body weight
- Avoiding activities and exercise programs that may put unnecessary stress on the muscles
- Avoiding lifting anything too heavy
- Obviously having regular orgasms!

High Tone Pelvic Floor Dysfunction

High Tone Pelvic Floor Dysfunction occurs when the pelvic floor muscles are overly tense, inflexible, or in spasm. The muscles are unable to move and stretch with daily activities. This causes uneven stress on the bones where they are attached, as well as uncomfortable stretching of the muscles themselves. The term “high tone” refers to the presence of high tension in the muscles. This can occur with either strong or weak pelvic floor muscles and can cause a wide range of problems.

What may attribute to High Tone Dysfunction?

- Practicing lots of pelvic floor exercises without adequate relaxation both during and in between exercises.
- Being an athlete, gymnast, dancer, martial artist or Pilates enthusiast who work with a focus on core strength without adequate focus on core flexibility and relaxation.
- Menopause. Oestrogen supports muscle function, and oestrogen levels decrease during menopause, causing some menopausal women to gradually lose their pelvic floor flexibility.
- Infrequent vaginal penetration. Relaxing to allow penetration helps keep the pelvic floor muscles flexible.
- Having a high-stress lifestyle and/or difficulty coping with stress, because this increases the likelihood of carrying tension in the pelvic floor muscles.
- Trauma to their pelvic floor including surgery

What are the symptoms of High Tone Dysfunction?

- Pain as sexual arousal builds
- Pain with vaginal penetration
- Pain with orgasm
- Inability to tolerate wearing tampons or having a pelvic examination
- Constipation and/or pain with bowel movements
- Painful urination and/or increased frequency of urination
- Ache in the pelvis from constant muscle stress on the lower spine and tail bone

What should I do if I think I have High Tone Dysfunction?

There are many conditions that are easily confused with High Tone Dysfunction, so I always recommend you see your health care provider to obtain an accurate diagnosis.

A pelvic health specialist can perform treatment as well as teach you a series of individualized exercises that you can do at home, either alone or with the help of a partner, to facilitate normal coordination and flexibility of pelvic floor muscles. I recommend working with a therapist rather than attempting to treat this condition on your own.

AS ALWAYS CONTACT ME IF YOU WOULD LIKE ANY INDIVIDUAL ADVICE





PELVIC HEALTH – OTHER POTENTIAL ISSUES AT MIDLIFE

We have looked at the pelvic floor muscles in detail and what issues may arise as our hormonal status changes. I think it is also important to remember that whilst our hormones are responsible for altering things we have lived some years by the time we reach this stage and to be honest with what many women put their bodies through it is no wonder our bodies, including our pelvic region have some wear and tear!

We have looked at the pelvic floor muscles in detail and what issues may arise as our hormonal status changes. It is also important to remember that our hormones are responsible for altering certain aspects of our behaviour and also our physicality. We may have lived with some of these changes for some years and because of what many of us put our bodies through it is no wonder we suffer from some wear and tear including in our pelvic region!

Let's take a look at some basic information about other issues we may encounter at midlife. This, I hope will lead you to seeking the relevant help if you need it rather than to suffer in silence as many women do.

PELVIC FLOOR MUSCLE RELATED PROBLEMS

This is covered in full in this section so please refer to the information there.

PROLAPSE

What is a Prolapse?

A prolapse occurs when the ligaments that hold the pelvic organs in place, weaken. This means that they can drop from where they should be. It can also occur because the vaginal walls weaken and they invade the space within the vagina. Another contributory factor is the weakening of the pelvic floor muscles.

Some degree of prolapse is extremely common affecting around 50% of women. You may not ever know that you have one if it is mild.

A bladder prolapse is known as a CYSTOCELE. The bladder pushes onto the anterior (front) wall of the vaginal passage.

A rectal prolapse is known as a RECTOCELE. This is where the ligaments that hold the rectum in place lose their strength, causing the rectum to move down and outwards of the anus.

A uterine / womb prolapse happens when the support for the womb is lost and the uterus moves down into the vagina.

Post hysterectomy there is an increased risk of VAULT prolapse which is when the vaginal canal inverts and prolapses downwards.

Prolapses are graded 0-4 and are treated according to grade.

WHAT ARE THE SYMPTOMS?

Typically a feeling of heaviness or dragging in the lower abdomen, vagina or rectum. You may feel a protrusion like a bulge. Continence may be affected and it may be more difficult to fully empty your bladder or bowels. Obviously, you could feel pain and be uncomfortable. Always seek medical help if you think you may have a prolapse to prevent it worsening.

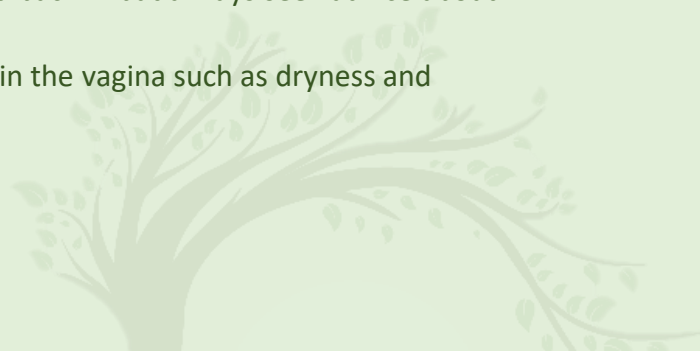
WHAT ARE THE RISK FACTORS FOR DEVELOPING A PROLAPSE?

- Childbirth, especially if large babies
- Increasing age
- Obesity
- Hysterectomy or previous pelvic surgery
- Weak pelvic floor muscles
- Lifting heavy objects
- Long term constipation
- Hormonal changes in the menopause
- Family history of poor connective tissue

CAN A PROLAPSE BE RECTIFIED?

Depending on the type and severity of the prolapse certain approaches may help to treat the prolapse. Some of the options are listed below;

- Strengthening of the Pelvic Floor
- Pessaries can sometimes be used to control the prolapse, depending on the grade of prolapse – these can be effective when prescribed properly and present a lower risk alternative to surgery.
- Sometimes a prolapse can be manually pushed back in but always seek advice about this.
- Hormone treatment to help with the changes in the vagina such as dryness and atrophy (thinning of the walls)



- Lifestyle changes such as avoiding lifting anything heavy, changing your diet if you are constipated or losing weight if needed
- Sometimes surgery is a suggested route. There has been a lot of negative publicity surrounding the use of mesh in repair surgery so I feel it is always essential to know what risks are present when undergoing any surgery. It is not my place to advise, just to bring you the statistics but sadly although this type of surgery can be very successful, there is evidence of mesh surgery having given many women some irreversible issues which has had a negative impact on their lives.

CONSTIPATION

Constipation may be more common during menopause. Let's take a look at why and what we can do to help if you are suffering with a sluggish digestive system or finding it difficult to empty your bowels.

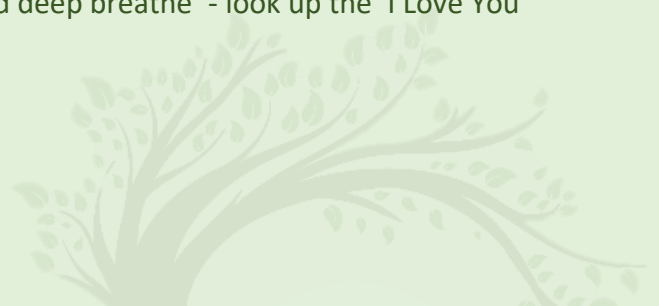
If you are suffering and you have any associated pain, bleeding or other worries always consult your health practitioner.

WHAT CAUSES CONSTIPATION IN MENOPAUSE?

- The reduction of oestrogen can be partly to blame as oestrogen helps to balance cortisol levels. As we have seen, stress produces the hormone cortisol and if levels of cortisol rise and we are stressing the body, our digestive system takes a back seat. This can lead to constipation and a sluggish digestive system.
- Low progesterone levels don't help either as this can slow colon activity, again leading to constipation and bloating. If food is not being processed as normal, and is sitting in the digestive system, it can become dryer which isn't helpful either.
- Some medications can cause constipation. Iron supplements, some blood pressure medication, some anti-depressants and some thyroid medication to name a few culprits.
- A diet lacking in fibre
- Poor hydration
- Lack of movement
- Stress

HOW CAN WE AVOID CONSTIPATION?

- Avoid stress
- Check your diet – increase fibre and hydration if necessary
- Move more often
- Massage your abdomen while you relax and deep breathe - look up the 'I Love You' method
- Consider taking a stool softener



- Toilet techniques – try to sit with your knees slightly higher than your hips (toddler stools are good – pardon the pun!) relax, take some deep breaths.

URINARY TRACT INFECTIONS

These are more common during menopause. Again, something you should seek medical help with.

WHY ARE THEY MORE COMMON AT THIS STAGE?

- The drop in oestrogen levels can affect the condition of the urethra (the tube that drains the bladder) leading to increased risk of infections.
- Incomplete emptying of the bladder can also lead to risks of infection.
- Changes to bacteria within the urethra add to risks of infection.
- Other medical conditions can also be a contributory factor

HOW CAN WE HELP TO MINIMILISE THE RISK?

- Ensure you are well hydrated
- Always empty your bladder fully? and do so before and after sexual intercourse
- A vaginally delivered oestrogen pessary can contribute to helping (prescribed by your health provider under consultation)

BACK AND PELVIC PAIN IN MIDLIFE

Is it connected to your pelvic floor?

Getting to the bottom of why you have back pain can be ongoing as you go through Perimenopause and menopause. Of course, it can be a mechanical issue or can be due to injury, but what if you've ruled that out and you still don't know why you have this nagging ache?

There can be many reasons including the natural changes that occur at this stage of life. However something you may not have considered is the connection to the health of your pelvic floor.

Around 90% of women with back pain have pelvic floor issues and not necessarily because the muscles aren't toned! Sometimes issues can be as a result of over activity in the pelvic floor muscles, learning to relax them, feel them lift and then shorten is really important.

As well as hormonal changes, stress; poor sleep; incorrect breathing patterns; poor bladder and bowel control can all affect the functioning of the pelvic floor. These areas of our health need to be addressed in order that we can start make improvements.

If you are concerned about the health of your pelvic floor you should always seek advice rather than just assume it's "part of midlife". I can answer your questions and guide you in the right direction if you need help from a health professional. **Remember – LEAKING IS NOT NORMAL - whatever you are lead to believe!!!**

LET'S TALK SEXUAL HEALTH! DRYNESS AND DISCOMFORT

Many women report vaginal dryness and painful intercourse once they become perimenopausal. Coupled with a lower libido it can make the whole thought of sex a complete turn off!

Many women struggle with body confidence which also contributes to difficulties in maintaining a healthy sex life. This can all make for a frustratingly awkward situation between you and your partner if you have been sexually active in the past.

This can be an embarrassing subject for women to discuss but there is lots that we can do to help the situation. It's definitely the one subject that I know women avoid talking about, even with other women, and it sits like an elephant in the room!

Firstly, we have a duty of care to ourselves to check that there aren't any reasons for pain and discomfort other than the drop in oestrogen causing dryness and some atrophy of the vaginal wall.

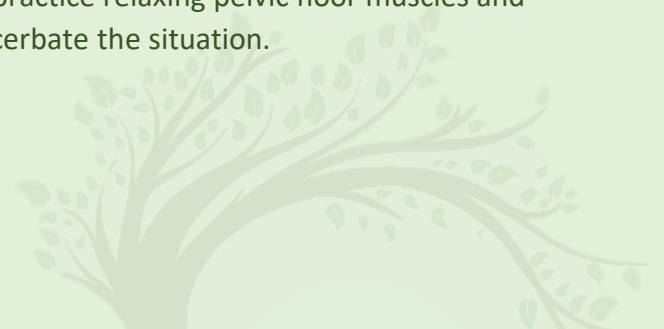
OTHER CONSIDERATIONS

There are other conditions that we should rule out. If you are suffering with burning, itching, painful sex, difficulty in having penetrative sex, soreness around the vulva, bleeding or anything that is unusual I urge you to get checked. I know we don't necessarily like the idea of checking ourselves but you should note that there are no changes to the delicate skin around the area. It is too easy to leave things in the hope that they will go away but please don't.

HOW CAN WE HELP OURSELVES?

The constant theme through this program is to take control where you can. This is no exception although as I said, it can be a bit of a taboo subject. We can do several things to help that are easy!

- Use lubricants – there are many on the market. 'YES' products get great press. Check that they are suitable if you are using condoms as some aren't compatible. USE PLENTY!
- Consider different positions that may be more comfortable for intercourse – take control!
- Relax and give yourself time to do so and practice relaxing pelvic floor muscles and the whole pelvic area. Tensing up will exacerbate the situation.



- I promote the use of scent free products, scented shower and bath gels etc can irritate the skin around the vulva. Best policy is to stay as natural as you can on this one!
- Consider your washing powder or liquid – again washing underwear in kinder products is preferable
- Give the area some breathing space! Wearing tights, tight trousers and certain fabrics all the time may promote irritation
- An oestrogen pessary delivered vaginally can help to ‘plump up’ the vaginal wall and make it more comfortable (chat to your health provider)
- Consider your loo roll – go natural and try bamboo loo roll, I recommend this as normal loo paper can contain chlorine based chemicals.
- Seek advice and help if need be – try to remember that your health provider or a specialist is used to dealing with these issues and to them it’s the same as a car mechanic checking out the parts of an engine!!

OTHER PELVIC HEALTH RELATED ISSUES

- Fibroids (non cancerous growths in or around the womb) – if you have suffered with fibroids before your menopause we would expect a reduction in their size as oestrogen and progesterone can increase the risk of having them. However, they can persist and cause issues.
- Symptoms from Endometriosis, similarly to fibroids, can lessen post menopause due to hormonal changes.
- Heavy bleeding / bleeding between periods
- The need for a hysterectomy - this is a big subject in itself. Evidence shows that there are incidences of surgery being done when an alternative option may be available. How we prepare and recover from a hysterectomy is really important. Please ask and if I can offer any advice on this I will.

Whatever issues you may face in your pelvic region, remember much can be done to help. Try to remember that a **women’s parts (should we not be using the correct term? Womens parts is a bit SHHHHHHH)** go through a lot in life and deserve the best attention!

Make sure you get the answers you want (as with everything you consult a health provider about) as I am aware of too many women who have not received satisfactory answers to their questions and can get fobbed off. You must be open and honest however. We can’t necessarily blame our health provider if we haven’t given them the whole picture! If you’re not happy, persevere until you are!





TIPS TO HELP IMPROVE PELVIC FLOOR MUSCLE FUNCTION

EXERCISING THE PELVIC FLOOR MUSCLES

VISUALISATIONS TO HELP ENGAGE THE PELVIC FLOOR MUSCLES

- Visualise the tail bone and pubic bone drawing closer together to help engage the muscles then when you can add visualising drawing the 2 sit bones underneath your pelvis together.
- Visualise a jelly fish – scooping up from underneath and drawing up as far as you can
- Imagine you are stopping the flow of urine / closing your back passage to stop wind escaping / lifting up in the mid passage **Note...**practicing stopping the flow of urine is not recommended but it's ok to practice once to get the feeling if you need to.

BREATHING TECHNIQUES

Although you should be able to activate the muscles however you are breathing, during specific training exercises when engaging the pelvic floor breathe out through your mouth through slightly pursed lips then breathe in to relax the muscles.

RELAXING THE PELVIC FLOOR

It is important to relax the muscles when you have been working them our strongest muscles are those that can fully relax too.

PELVIC FLOOR FUNCTION DURING MOVEMENT AND EXERCISE

As we function and move we want our pelvic floor to work so learning exercises that combine static isolated exercises and exercises with movement will be most beneficial. The exercises I teach in this program build slowly and allow us time to get to grips with working the pelvic floor correctly and building up to standing exercises.

POSTURE AND PELVIC FLOOR

The better our posture and sitting position the better chance of ensuring good pelvic floor function. So part of my teaching is in good postural habits. When sitting try not to adopt a slumped position and in standing keep the pelvis in good alignment -ie not tilted under (like slumped position in sitting).

MUSCLE BALANCE AND THE PELVIC FLOOR

It is vital that we have good strength in certain muscle groups to aid good pelvic floor function – the glutes (buttock muscles) and Lats (upper outer back muscles) are areas I particularly work on in my program.

WAYS OF DEALING WITH STRESS INCONTINENCE

(LEAKAGE ON EFFORT, EXERTION, SNEEZING, COUGHING)

- Firstly it is important to know if there are any issues that may need investigation by a pelvic health specialist so do get checked if you have any pain, feelings of pressure or other symptoms that are concerning you
- Hold on longer before going for a wee (bladder holds 400 - 500ml but we may get the first call to go for a wee at 125-150 ml)
- Empty bladder fully, rocking gently back and forth to help as you finish going for a wee
- Try not to do a just in case wee, this will help strengthen the muscles of the pelvic floor
- Pelvic floor muscle training (variety of isolated exercise along with functional and specific exercises)
- Learn 'The Knack' - this is when we activate the pelvic floor muscles before we are going to cough or sneeze to withstand pressure.
- Improve posture /breathing
- Strengthen glutes, lats & exercise more. Techniques such as Pilates can benefit the pelvic floor muscles greatly.
- Cut down caffeine / fizzy drinks
- Avoid high impact exercise and trampolining
- Avoid lifting heavy
- Drink plenty of fluids – concentrated urine can irritate the bladder

PRODUCTS ON THE MARKET THAT MAY HELP SUCH AS

- Weights inserted to train your Pelvic Floor
- ELVIE – connects to an app that gives feedback on your Pelvic Floor muscle function and helps you track your progress
- The Pelvic Educator
- SQUEEZY APP (NHS) helps you with timing Pelvic Floor exercises and supports your practice
- KEGAL8 – neuromuscular electrical stimulation

AS ALWAYS – seek medical help and/or advice where necessary.





Section 8

Heart Health



HEART HEALTH

Looking after our heart health becomes even more important as we go through our menopausal years and beyond. Cardiovascular disease is one of the leading causes of death in later life women.

Women are different to men in terms of our hearts. We have smaller hearts; narrower blood vessels and experience cholesterol build up in different ways. Symptoms of heart attack are different in women. However, until recently women and men seem to be treated in the same way as far as treating cardiovascular disease.

WHAT IS CARDIOVASCULAR DISEASE?

Cardiovascular disease is a general term to describe conditions that affect the heart or blood vessels. It is usually associated with an increase in fatty deposits in the blood vessels and an increased risk of blood clots. Conditions include coronary heart disease, strokes, angina, heart attack and vascular dementia.

WHAT ARE THE RISK FACTORS?

- Smoking
- High cholesterol
- High blood pressure
- Diabetes
- Inactivity
- Age
- Being overweight
- Family history
- Excess alcohol consumption
- Stress
- Gender depending on age (men are at risk earlier than women)
- Depression has links to risk of stroke
- Poor sleep

WHAT ARE THE SIGNS OF CARDIOVASCULAR DISEASE?

Women may not have signs of disease until they have a heart attack and the symptoms for women are different from men. It is important that women understand the symptoms of heart attack as they may not be as you would expect.

I have listed the classic symptoms;

- Chest pain, pain in the back between the shoulder blades (men experience this differently as a crushing chest pain)
- Pain in the jaw, neck or throat
- Nausea or vomiting
- Fatigue
- Shortness of breath
- Light headedness / fainting
- Sweating
- Change in pallor
- Feeling restless, sleepless, anxious

These symptoms are different from what men experience and can go undiagnosed, leading to serious consequences. Many women think they have had flu, acid reflux or are experiencing the signs of ageing.

Therefore, as with every other unusual symptom you may experience, never leave things unchecked.

It isn't as simple as exercising to keep your heart fit. Stress, poor nutrition, too much alcohol, smoking, poor sleep and weight gain, especially around the midsection all have negative effects on heart health so there is much we can do to contribute to having a healthy heart.

WHAT HAPPENS IN MENOPAUSE?

- Oestrogen has a cardio protective effect and maintains elasticity in our blood vessels therefore a decline in oestrogen increases the risk of cardiovascular disease
- Added stress at this stage of life can add to the risks of heart disease.
- Heart palpitations are more common during menopause due to hormonal changes
- There is an increased incidence of high blood pressure
- There is often an increase in LDL cholesterol,(the harmful kind)
- Insomnia and sleep problems have been linked to a higher risk of cardiovascular disease – we know poor sleep is common in menopause
- Women often gain weight around the middle of the body, this is more common to the male shape. Men have higher risks than women until women are postmenopausal.

WHAT CAN WE DO TO AVOID HEART DISEASE?

- Exercise regularly
- Have check ups and get screened for blood pressure and cholesterol
- Follow a healthy diet as discussed in this program and manage your weight
- Keep a check on your hips to waist ratio
- Drink water and stay hydrated – this allows the heart to pump blood more effectively and allows oxygen to reach your muscles more effectively. If you are dehydrated your blood is thicker and retains more sodium therefore its harder for the blood to be circulated around your body.
- Manage stress and recognise stressors
- Consider quitting smoking
- Keep a check on your alcohol consumption



Practicing good self-care is a priority to all aspects of our health and well-being. Your heart health is no exception. The heart is a symbol of LOVE so make sure you give it the love it deserves!





Section 9

Brain Health



BRAIN HEALTH IN MENOPAUSE AND BEYOND

From the time we are born, the female brain is different from the male brain. Obviously, we have different hormonal influences on the brain and, as our hormones change at menopause, this has a definite influence on the brain and its health.

Whilst there are many differences in terms of the male and female brain, for the purpose of this program we want to discover what influence menopause has on our brain health and what it means in terms of later life for a woman.

Women are more likely to develop and die from Alzheimer's disease and Dementia than men, and Alzheimer's disease is now the leading cause of death in the UK. We could look at the possibility that these figures reflect that women tend to live longer than men. However, what is also known is that the changes in the brain that lead to developing Alzheimer's disease begin years before it develops and the symptoms arise, but that post menopause it is more common. So does the change in our hormones spark something?

Women are more likely to be diagnosed with anxiety disorder or depression, to develop an autoimmune disease (including those that attack the brain such as multiple sclerosis) and four times more likely to get headaches.

Women are also more likely to develop meningeal brain tumours (the most common type) and to die of a stroke if they have one.

So, is this directly affected by the menopause and the change to our hormones?

Because Women now live in their post-menopausal years for so much longer than they used to, it may be more evident that we are more at risk of these illnesses and disorders. One thing we do know though is that we can have a profound effect on our brain health and cognitive decline. In this section we are going to look at what we can do to maintain our brain health.

MENOPAUSAL 'BRAIN RELATED' SYMPTOMS

Many women report experiencing 'brain fog', 'forgetfulness' and 'memory loss' as we go through our perimenopause and beyond. Have you ever seen someone whose name you know well and you just can't recall their name? Maybe you found your house keys in the fridge or you get to the top of the stairs and wonder why you walked up them? This is common at this stage of life but is it the hormones or is it that you are tired because you aren't sleeping well or stressed and distracted because you have too much on your plate?

HORMONES AND THE BRAIN

Absolutely, oestrogen does have a connection with the brain. It regulates the main fuel, glucose, to the brain so its decline can have an impact on our brain energy. Oestrogen has a protective effect on our brain by boosting the immune system and is considered to be “nature’s Prozac” too. A decline in oestrogen appears to have an impact on our memory and ability to concentrate. However, we also need to consider if there are other factors contributing to brain fog and poor memory.

The decrease in oestrogen also has an effect on the Hypothalamus, an area of the brain that maintains homeostasis of the body and regulates temperature. The result is that we store more fat around our middle and our temperature regulation becomes more sensitive and is disrupted.

So once our oestrogen levels decline it becomes even more important to ensure that we protect our brain and put the work in to maintain our brain health. There is much we can do but as with everything we explore in this program, it takes some work and thought.

Thyroxin imbalance can also have an effect on our concentration and memory. It’s worth noting this, especially if there are no signs of your sex hormones altering at this time.

Once again, taking a holistic approach to ensure our brain stays healthy is the best plan. Whilst many women report that HRT has cured their brain fog we must always consider that there are other ‘lifestyle choices’ that will impact our brain health.

DIET AND BRAIN HEALTH

As we have discussed many times in this program, we know that our choice of foods and drinks have a profound effect on every aspect of our health. You are what you eat is no exaggeration! The brain is affected by nutrition as much as any other part of our body. That includes hydration as 75% of the brain is water. Our brain is responsible for burning around 20% of our daily calories and relies on good nutrition as much as any other organ in the body.

A diet rich in antioxidants and omega 3 polyunsaturated fats along with a healthy, balanced diet will contribute to good brain health. The brain appears to love us ‘eating the rainbow’ and the Mediterranean diet scores highly in terms of brain health. Everything we have discussed in the nutrition section counts towards maintaining brain health as we age.

An inflammatory diet that is high in sugary foods and refined carbohydrates is not beneficial to brain health. Excess alcohol is also detrimental. Excess fish can also be an issue due to the excess mercury naturally found in fish.

EXERCISE AND BRAIN HEALTH

There is a positive connection between exercise and brain health. Amongst other benefits, exercise improves blood flow and memory, improves our mood, helps the brain develop pathways of learning and stimulates feel good hormones from the brain.

Aerobic exercise has a highly positive influence on brain health so should definitely feature in your exercise regime.



EXERCISING THE BRAIN

Stimulating the brain and treating it like a muscle has huge benefits to brain health. Cognitive decline can occur because we are not stimulating our brain cells sufficiently. It is important to vary the challenges we give our brain cells, therefore a variety of 'challenges' to the brain is most beneficial, we need the brain to have plenty of 'surprises' and new stimulants.

COGNITIVE CHALLENGES

Here are some ideas of how to challenge your cognition

- *Consider learning new activities and mentally challenging the brain to create new pathways*
- *Read aloud or be read to*
- *Consider remembering telephone numbers rather than letting your mobile phone do all the work!*
- *Learn a new language*
- *Do sums in your head rather than on a calculator*
- *Take up some learning or a course*

MOTOR CONTROL CHALLENGES

There are some simple ideas you can implement to challenge your motor system (signal system from the brain to the muscles in your body)

- *Using your less dominant hand to stir your cup of tea, or eat with*
- *Rake, sweep or mop on the other side of your body*
- *Stand on one leg with one eye closed and swap eyes*
- *Take your first step up the stairs with the foot you don't want to start with*
- *Learn a new skill using your hands*



OTHER WAYS TO CHALLENGE YOUR BRAIN

There are so many simple things you can do to stimulate your brain! Here are just a few but I will let you use your brain and think of your own challenges!

- *Learn to dance or move in a new way*
- *Stop using your satnav and plot your route*
- *Have conversations with people you don't know*
- *Start a new hobby*

STRESS AND BRAIN HEALTH

We have already established that stress is harmful if it is constant and long term. Living a highly stressed lifestyle can affect memory and brain shrinkage before the age of 50.

Studies have shown that the effect of constant stress are harsher on the female brain than the male brain. Our natural instincts to nurture and care for others mean that our emotional brain is turned on alongside our 'fight or flight' reaction.

With the heavy load many women have of juggling family and work, worrying about elderly parents as well as going through the menopause with all the emotional challenges that can bring, it is easy to see why women typically have more stress in their lives than men at this stage.

Stress has been shown to be a contributory factor to Alzheimer's disease as well as other life limiting diseases. Therefore, managing and reducing stress is of major importance.

SLEEP

Another big subject we discuss in this program and again seeing how all these major factors come together to affect our well-being and health.

This is another big subject we discuss in this program. We can see how all of these major factors come together to affect our well-being and health.

Our sleep has different stages. For brain health, deep sleep really matters. In this stage of sleep our brain is literally having a 'deep clean' and the harmful toxins including Alzheimers plaques are cleared out.

If you are not getting your sleep you are more likely to be suffering from lower concentration, 'brain fog' and mental fatigue.



SUMMARY OF WHAT WE CAN DO TO HELP MAINTAIN GOOD BRAIN HEALTH

- *MANAGE AND REDUCE STRESS*
- *EAT A HEALTHY DIET AND INCLUDE FOODS THAT BENEFIT THE BRAIN*
- *LOOK AFTER YOUR GUT HEALTH*
- *DRINK WATER*
- *MANAGE ALCOHOL CONSUMPTION*
- *TRY NOT TO SMOKE*
- *CHECK YOUR MEDICINES...SOME DRUGS CAN AFFECT COGNITIVE CHANGES*
- *LOOK AFTER YOUR DENTAL HYGEINE – THERE ARE LINKS BETWEEN GUM DISEASE AND COGNITIVE DECLINE*
- *IMPROVE SLEEP*
- *EXERCISE REGULARLY*
- *CHALLENGE YOUR BRAIN*
- *RELAX, TAKE TIME OUT, SWITCH OFF*
- *REDUCE ENVIRONMENTAL TOXINS*
- *FORM AND ENJOY LOVING, MEANINGFUL RELATIONSHIPS*
- *DO WHAT MAKES YOU HAPPY*

The Brain is such a complex organ, still so much about it is unknown.

What we do know though is that our brain health is of huge importance at this stage of a woman's life and beyond.

Many women are concerned about hereditary factors when it comes to Dementia and if you have any concerns whatsoever please ask the advice of a medical professional. Even if it just to put your mind at rest!

I can recommend an excellent book by Dr Lisa Mosconi 'the XX brain' if you would like some further in depth reading.





Section 10

Sleep



SLEEP

The power of sleep should not be underestimated. Sleep restores our mind and body and taken in the right doses it protects us from disease, aids immunity, helps us manage our weight, stay sharp and live longer.

In our modern world many of us do not get the recommended amount of sleep and our sleep often isn't of the best quality. As a population the amount of sleep we get has reduced. We could question whether there is a connection between this and the rise in obesity, stress levels and anxiety.

When perimenopause hits, one of the most common symptoms women experience is sleep disturbance. There are numerous reasons for this and we will explore them in this section and see what changes we could make to help us sleep better.

SLEEP DISTURBANCE

You may have experienced problems with your sleep even before entering the perimenopause as around 2 to 3 adults struggle to get adequate sleep. Of course, if you have had children you will have definitely experienced broken sleep before this! However, many women report that their sleep disturbances worsen when perimenopause arrives, almost like a light bulb going on, leading to around 40% of women reporting sleep issues in their 40s and 50s.

The change to our sleep pattern can be driven by hormonal changes but also by what is happening in our lives at this time and how we are choosing to live. Women who are suffering with night sweats, restless legs, skin irritation, anxiety or stress and other disturbing menopausal symptoms will be at more risk of experiencing poor sleep and periods of wakefulness. As will women with other midlife related worries such as concerns about older parents or children who have become more independent and are out partying while you have one ear listening for them to arrive home! Work stresses, financial worries, relationship issues, health concerns, working shifts, making poor nutritional choices all contribute to sleep disturbances so once again, we cannot just blame our changing hormones!

Sometimes we get off to sleep well only to be woken by a night sweat or by something else that disturbs us. Then.... we just can't get back to sleep. Our brain springs into action and about a thousand thoughts start going round like a roundabout!

There is nothing more frustrating than lying awake, tossing and turning or being wide awake when you slip into bed after dozing on the sofa 10 minutes before because you felt so tired! Lack of sleep can contribute to weight gain, reduced cognitive function, low mood, gut health problems, stress, brain fog, being less productive and of course fatigue.

HOW MUCH SLEEP SHOULD WE GET?

Sleep experts say that we should give ourselves an 8-hour window to sleep each night, knowing that we won't actually sleep that long and recommend at least 7 hours good quality sleep a night and that sleep is essential to our overall health and wellbeing. As with every other aspect of our lives we all differ and may think we can manage on less sleep but the reality is that in a stage such as midlife when life can be so busy and wearing, we really do need that sleep!

HOW DO YOU KNOW IF YOU ARE GETTING ENOUGH SLEEP?

The general rule is that if you set an alarm and you know you would sleep longer if it didn't wake you, you are not getting enough sleep.

WE CAN HELP OURSELVES!

Like all other very annoying and frustrating menopausal symptoms there are things we can do to improve our sleep quality. So before giving up and deciding your 'sleep life' is over consider whether there are things that you could try that could help. Some of us can tolerate things that others can't so of course, it's all about how you respond to things. As always, take one step at a time and see what works for you best but give yourself time to form new habits and routine and be patient. If you know you have habits that could be disrupting sleep try to change them, take control. If you still find that you are struggling badly or that you are lying awake for hours on end, do seek help.

HOW CAN WE HELP OURSELVES?

- **MENOPAUSAL SYMPTOMS**

We have looked at options for improving troublesome symptoms throughout this program. Many typical menopausal symptoms contribute to poor sleep. In helping to minimise these symptoms you can really help with sleep patterns and lessen the disturbances you may be experiencing.

- **STRESS AND ANXIETY**

If you are suffering with stress or feelings of anxiety there is every chance this will be disrupting your sleep. We have looked at stress hormones such as cortisol and how imbalances in cortisol production can interfere with the natural patterns of sleep.

We discussed cortisol earlier in the program and its affect on your sleep. With the potential challenges we face at our menopausal stage of life we may have higher levels of stress hormones. So managing stress and anxiety is a priority as it can heavily influence our ability to fall asleep and to sleep soundly.



- **ESTABLISHING A PATTERN**

Sleep experts believe that going to bed and waking at the same time each day is a good aid to improving sleep. If you need to make changes to your sleep schedule do it gradually until you achieve the desired timing. Shift the time a little at a time until you establish a satisfactory pattern.

It may be difficult for you to achieve this, especially if you work shifts or life just doesn't allow, however it's worth getting as close as you can to a regular pattern.

- **PREPARING FOR SLEEP**

If you wind down and ensure that you are 'sleep ready' you stand a better chance of sleeping well. Try getting ready for bed an hour before you intend to tuck up, clean your teeth, put your PJs on, take off your makeup and then enjoy the last hour of your day before sliding into bed. Children usually have a wind down routine so why not create one as an adult? Wind down with some gentle music, relaxation or a bath and deep breathing to focus your mind on sleep. Use an app such as the calm app or insight timer or similar where you can listen to meditations. Use visualisations to help you feel relaxed. Dimming the lights leading up to bedtime is also beneficial.

- **THE INFLUENCE OF TECHNOLOGY**

Avoid screens and blue light before bedtime for a couple of hours. Also avoid over stimulating yourself with television programs or reading material or conversations that are going to heighten your senses. Try to avoid having any tech in the bedroom. Blue light glasses can help if you really can't manage without looking at your ipad or phone in the hour before bed or you can use an app to change the light on your devices.

- **LIGHT AND DARK**

The hormone melatonin influences our circadian (sleep/awake). Nature's natural light patterns influence our melatonin levels. In a nut shell, daylight stimulates our 'awake' state and dim light our 'sleepiness', therefore dimming the lights leading up to bedtime is beneficial.

- **ALCOHOL**

Avoid alcohol in the afternoon and evening. Alcohol is often thought of as a great sleep aid but it has a negative on your sleep and fragments your sleep, often making you feel you haven't slept well when you wake in the morning. It also deprives you of your REM sleep which is a necessary stage of sleep.

- **CAFFEINE**

Avoid caffeine in the afternoon and evening if you know that you are not sleeping well. Caffeine stays in our system for many hours after we have had any so it is recommended that if you like a coffee or cups of tea that you have them in the morning only. Try replacing your afternoon coffee with something else you can enjoy, this is a great time for exploring all the wonderful caffeine free teas you can buy now. Even decaffeinated drinks can give you problems too so if you truly want to discover if you are better without either it is better to avoid both.



- **EATING PATTERNS**

Our body temperature needs to drop one degree ideally to help us to go to sleep – this would explain why the hot flushes we may experience are not conducive to sleep, along of course with the fact they can make us feel so unbearably uncomfortable!

When we eat a large amount of food, especially if it contains sugar it raises our body temperature so if you need to eat anything later in the evening, having had your dinner early it is best to choose something high protein with some fibre, for example Greek yoghurt with berries, oat cakes with sugar free peanut butter or almond butter with apple. We shouldn't go to sleep hungry but neither should we go to sleep full

Have a warm drink but not caffeine in the run up to bedtime such as a camomile tea or 'sleepy' tea or whatever works for you. As children do you remember the warm milk that soothed you to sleep? Caffeine affects people in different ways and working out whether drinking it affects your sleep. Caffeine has been shown to have some health benefits (the coffee bean contains antioxidants) so it's more about the timing of drinking it than cutting it out.

- **YOUR PLACE OF SLEEP**

Make sure your place of sleep is welcoming. Think about the temperature of the room, around 18 – 18.5 degrees Celsius is considered optimal – if you have night sweats you won't want unventilated room that is already too warm. Make sure your bedlinen, pillows, nightwear (if you wear any) and bed are all comfortable to sleep in. Consider scents that will help sleep – I have mentioned herbs such as lavender previously.

- **EXERCISE**

For most of us, exercising regularly and taking the right type of exercise at the right time can contribute to good sleep. Usually it would be wise to avoid highly stimulating exercise late in the evening and to do something that is calming. Taking plenty of fresh air can aid sleep too. If you are exercising regularly and at a suitable level, you are likely to reduce the risk of aches and pains that can keep you awake at night.

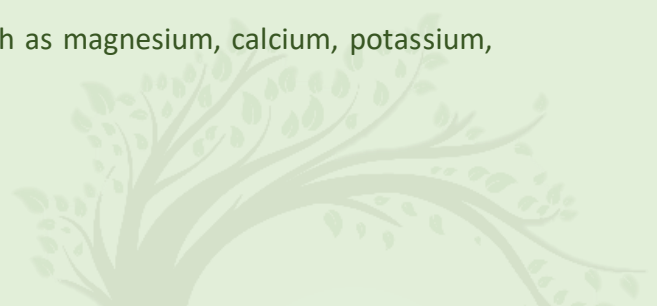
Exercise also helps us maintain a healthy weight. Apparently we are more prone to snoring and sleep apnea once we reach this stage of life and being overweight can promote snoring. None of us want to be accused of being a snoring old lady!!

Whilst exercise is important it is not recommended that you wake yourself early to fit in your exercise. If you naturally rise early and have had adequate sleep that's fine but the fact remains that sleep is even more important to our long term health well-being than exercising.

- **NUTRITION**

How and when we eat can have an effect on how we sleep. I have previously mentioned caffeine, sugary foods and alcohol being sleep disruptors and that if you need something in the evening it is best to stick with protein and fibre. Foods rich in carbohydrates can make you feel drowsy but evidence shows that they also affect sleep quality, giving us more awakenings in the night and less deep sleep.

Studies have shown that lacking certain nutrients such as magnesium, calcium, potassium, vitamins A, C D, E and K can affect sleep too.



The Mediterranean diet is beneficial to health but also to sleep. Following a well-balanced diet and taking notice of any food or drink that triggers poor sleep will be beneficial.

- **SLEEP REMEDIES**

There are many supplements, lotions and potions available that are all marketed for their beneficial properties for sleep. Herbal remedies can work well but I think it's a case of exploring what works for you. Always check before taking supplements if you are on any other medication that they are suitable.

As you have probably concluded by now, if you take a holistic approach to your health and well-being in menopause and try to create good habits across the board, one thing will help another. Sleep is no exception, if you live well, eat well, move enough and manage any stress your sleep should be better!

- **WAKING IN THE NIGHT**

It is normal to spend a small percentage of time awake in the night but when it starts stretching to longer stretches of time it isn't natural. Here are some tips that may help!

If you lie in bed trying to get back to sleep for over 25 minutes it has been shown that your brain starts to associate your bed and your bedroom with the place you are awake. This sets up a pattern which we want to avoid. To help your brain relearn that bed is the place for sleep it is better to get up, do something such as gentle stretching, relaxing, reading in a dim light or meditation until you feel sleepy again then return to bed. Don't check your phone or have anything to eat though!

Advice is not to count sheep but to do something such as 'take yourself on a walk'...envisage your walk, slowly ambling along and before you know it you may be hearing your alarm!

Count backwards... choose a number to count backwards from and visualise the number as you breathe out.. if your thoughts wander start again... this worked for me!

Remove all clock faces! Being aware of the time can be unhelpful.

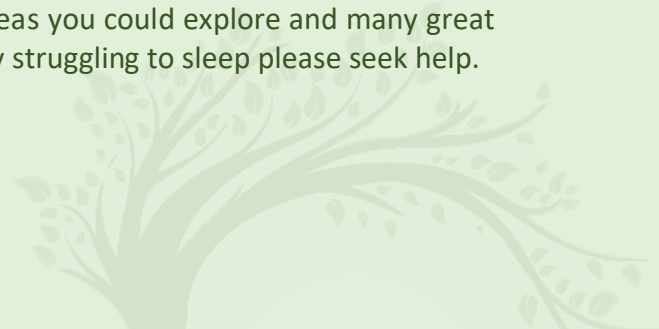
Try not to get stressed if you lie awake – use the tip of getting up. If this doesn't appeal try deep breathing, progressively relaxing your muscles or going on that walk or using visualisations that will promote sleepiness.

Take your mind off your mind – ruminating is not going to promote sleep – though we all know things seem 100 times worse at night. This is why addressing issues in your life is essential if you can so that you don't have to take them to bed with you.

Perhaps have a note book by the bed so that you can jot anything down and offload it from your mind.

If you are having night sweats you may feel better if you have a warm shower then go back to bed so that you feel comfortable & clean as you drift off... again worked for me!

I am sure that there are hundreds of other tips and ideas you could explore and many great reads and podcasts you could listen to. If you are really struggling to sleep please seek help.





Section 11

Life Beyond the Menopause



LIFE BEYOND MENOPAUSE

One day, if you haven't reached the point yet, you will be through it.

One of the positives of coming through menopause is that we often feel so much better, as if the clouds have cleared and we can see the view more clearly again. Everyone's 'view' will be different but will reflect the changes you have gone through and the choices you have made to take your life forward into your later years.

Menopause can be a time of many changes and these may include making major decisions that rock your world but they may also lead you to a more fulfilled life. Maybe you have thought about making those changes or maybe you have already implemented them.

Our new found freedom can be one of the most joyous and liberating times in our life, though as with everything we all go through as a woman we will all be different. You are a woman who has ridden the waves of time, gathered experience, weathered many storms and moved forward to a stage of your life that you can embrace and hopefully enjoy to the full.

Focussing on the positives of ageing, I believe is one of the most powerful things we can do as a woman. You can't be that 20 year old young woman with the flawless, wrinkle free skin. But the face of a young woman does not show years of wisdom and experience.

Your body may be softer, fuller and have lost the tautness of youth, but it is a body that has done a magnificent job. It has taken you to places and through experiences that a young woman hasn't yet been and I am sure you can thank your body for many amazing things it has done.

Your mind may not feel as sharp as your young brain and you may feel you can't learn and remember information as you used to. However it is full of so much information, so many memories and thoughts that perhaps it's a lot to expect to cram in even more!

You most likely will have have suffered loss, disappointments, hurt and heartbreak but I believe these things teach us so much about ourselves and make us stronger. Life with its ups and downs teaches us so much. Finding a positive can sometimes seem impossible but when we can it is so powerful.

One of my aims in this program is to instil positivity. I have generally always been a very positive person but like all of us have had times of negativity, self doubt, lack of confidence and uncertainty.

I know that my transition through the menopausal years presented me with physical challenges, sleep deprivation and several of the typical menopausal symptoms! But without truly realising it, the regular exercise I take, my love of nature and fresh air, my love of good food and my love of my work helped me get through it. Again it wasn't something I was deeply thinking about at the time but I know that my naturally positive attitude and my acceptance of the ageing process helped further. Without realising it, I was generally following the path that I would suggest to other women now!

However, it had its ups and downs and I know I could have done so much more to improve how I was feeling. The knowledge I have now would have been of great use to me and I wish I had already gained it before my **Years of Change**. But I have it now.

My mission is to pass on that knowledge, along with my help and support, so that other women have the power to manage and control their Years of Change and their ongoing life.





***Brought to you by Ceri Barnes,
Wife, Mum, Grandma, Business Owner,
Fitness Coach, Lifestyle Coach & WorkoutAngel!***

**If you have questions on the Years of Change
or would like further advice, please contact
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