

Module 8, Lesson 5 Handout:

Managing Symptoms of Menopause

While it sounds nice to not have to carry around tampons and pads and deal with the monthly drawbacks of womanhood, menopause is a marker of maturity and the physical drawbacks probably outweigh the benefits of not dealing with your monthly flow. The symptoms of menopause can be difficult to deal with. Here are recommendations for helping your clients manage.

Dietary Recommendations

- Emphasize fruits and vegetables. This one probably goes without saying. Cruciferous vegetables and leafy greens may be especially beneficial in this population. In one study, eating more of these types of vegetables was linked with a significant reduction in overall menopausal symptoms. These vegetables contain a compound called glucobrassicin, which is broken down to indole-3-carbinol during metabolism and indole-3-carbinol is a known regulator of estrogen. As for fruits, berries and citrus fruits have been shown to help reduce menopause symptoms likely due to their phytochemical content and eating more fruit overall is linked to better mood.
- Choose whole grains. Go for ancient and sprouted grains when available. These foods pack in B vitamins and minerals and research also has shown eating more whole grains is linked to better overall health in postmenopausal women.
- Get plenty of fiber. Eat plenty of fruits and vegetables and other fiber packed foods like whole grains, beans, legumes and nuts. Fiber helps with digestion, which matters because bloating can be worse during menopause, so you'll want to keep things moving.
- Go for lean protein. Include a mix of plant based sources like legumes and beans and animal sources like fish and grass fed meats (depending on the client). Protein can help maintain muscle and bone mass during menopause.
- Consider phytoestrogens. The two major classes of phytoestrogens are isoflavones and lignans. Soybeans are rich in isoflavones and lignans are found in flaxseed as well as other plant foods. These compounds have similar chemical structures to that of estradiol and this becomes complicated because depending on the amount of estrogen circulating in the body, eating foods with these compounds can have either an estrogenic or antiestrogenic effect. One study found that among perimenopausal women, eating soy was associated with a decrease in the perceived severity of vasomotor symptoms (hot flashes and night sweats) and cardiovascular disease risk factors like high blood pressure. That's important because your

risk of heart disease increases during menopause. Other research has found soy may help with vaginal dryness in menopause. Yes, some research has linked soy consumption with increased risk of breast cancer, but most of this research was done in rats and scientists now understand that rodents metabolize soy differently than humans. This is a complex and debated topic, but the net of it is most experts agree the benefits seem to outweigh the risks. Always choose organic soy products such as tofu and tempeh, keep it to just a few servings a week and avoid all forms of processed soy such as soy protein isolate.

- Include omega-3 rich foods. Include fatty fish like salmon and plant sources like chia seeds and walnuts. These fats support heart health, brain health and a positive mood.
- Cook with coconut oil. A study in perimenopausal women found coconut oil to have a beneficial effect on lipid profiles, which becomes especially important during menopause blood lipids tend to increase as a result of drops in estrogen and this may help counteract that effect.
- Try adding in herbal remedies such as maca powder or black cohosh. Research has shown maca can help alleviate menopausal symptoms including hot flashes and interrupted sleep, studies find black cohosh may help reduce symptoms like hot flashes, night sweats and sleep disturbances, vaginal dryness and irritability.
- Limit dairy to one serving of full fat per day. Dairy can promote deeper sleep in menopausal women, but too much dairy may have negative effects. Dairy is also known to promote better bone density, a concern among menopausal women.
- Avoid processed foods, caffeine and alcohol as much as possible.
- Stay hydrated. This can help with hot flashes. Up the water and herbal tea.

Lifestyle Recommendations

- Exercise regularly. This can help with weight management, and women who are overweight and obese often experience worse symptoms, like more frequent hot flashes. Insomnia is another major symptom of menopause, and exercise is associated with better sleep. Exercise can also help ward off mood swings, and it helps maintain bone density. Include variety in exercise and get a mix of cardio and strength training.
- Work on sleep hygiene, such as finding soothing rituals to set the tone for bedtime. Sleep is essential to mental clarity and weight management.
- Try yoga and meditation. Many women experience mood swings and up to 80 percent of women going through menopause experience hot flashes. A yoga and/or meditation practice may help with both issues. Research suggests meditation programs and yoga classes can

improve anxiety and depression, especially when deep breathing is involved. In terms of hot flashes, studies show a technique called “paced respiration” can “cut in half the frequency of hot flashes.” It’s a breathing technique you’ll be able to pick up quickly if you already know all of your yogic breathing techniques.

- Do kegels. Just like pregnancy, menopause can increase the risk of urinary incontinence. Do your kegels regularly, or engage in Pilates and yoga, which also often include pelvic floor strengthening exercises.

Menopause can be a challenging time for women, so while you’re helping this client make improvements to their diets and lifestyle habits, be empathetic. Acknowledge their struggles managing symptoms and adjusting to changes their bodies are making.