

## Supercharge your diet after menopause

WHAT YOU EAT IN YOUR 50S AND BEYOND CAN HAVE A HUGE IMPACT ON YOUR WELLBEING, SAYS HEALTH COACH SUSAN SAUNDERS. HERE, SHE EXPLAINS SOME EASY WAYS TO POWER UP YOUR MIDLIFE DIET

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IN the years after menopause you need to make good nutrition a priority. Your body changes during this time. Lower oestrogen levels lead to loss of lean body mass and an increase in fat storage, so it's important to think about what you're eating in the context of these changes.



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**PUT VEGETABLES FIRST:** Serve fruit and veg with all meals and you'll soon see the benefits

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Even if you don't try fasting, it's a good idea to fully digest dinner before bed. Going to bed on a full stomach impacts sleep as the body pumps out insulin to manage glucose, rather than melatonin to aid sleep.  
Try to finish eating three hours before bed.

non-animal sources include beans, lentils and pulses, soya and tofu, nuts and seeds.  
Protein from animal sources means you're more likely to get a supply of good quality iron too.  
When we lose oestrogen, our iron absorption ability weakens, leaving us more vulnerable to anaemia.  
We need less iron post-menopause but low levels can cause fatigue and headaches. If you're concerned, ask your GP to

**FRIENDLY FAT:** The right sort of fat is vitally important as we age

**HEAD TO THE MED**

It's not about following a strict diet, but there are some guidelines – eating a plant-heavy fibre-packed diet with enough protein and enough healthy fats to keep you full and to lubricate the body and brain.

### PUT VEGETABLES FIRST

Fill your plate with brightly coloured fruit and vegetables at each meal. We tend to think about protein and carbohydrates first, with vegetables an afterthought. So when planning your meals start with veg instead, the more brightly coloured the better.

These colours come from antiinflammatory antioxidants and are associated with health and longevity. One easy way to boost your fruit and veg intake is to think berries and

greens – that's three meals a day with berries and/or greens.

### CARBS WITH BENEFITS

Carbohydrates have been demonised in recent years. But there's a huge distinction between highly refined sugar-laden carbs and nutrient-dense wholegrains, such as beans and fibrous vegetables, which come with a whole host of benefits.

We need a fist-sized portion of starchy foods with each meal. But ask yourself what added benefits your carb choice brings – ideally it comes with fibre plus something extra. For example, a sweet potato contains the antioxidant benefits of carotenoids for better eye and brain health, and brown rice has fibre and B vitamins.

### SUGAR IS NOT SO SWEET

Sugar and other refined carbs like white flour send us on a bloodsugar rollercoaster – just at the time when we've lost the oestrogen that helps keep blood sugar stable. Balance blood sugar by eating complex carbs and protein, and seek out naturally sweet fruits to deliver sweetness without the sugar hit

To reduce sugar cravings, make sure to eat nutritious meals that contain protein and fat so you feel properly satiated.

And find ways to nourish yourself that don't involve food. Prioritising time for yourself, be that reading, relaxing or walking, can help you step away from using sugar for comfort.

### BOOST YOUR MICROBIOME

Your microbiome – the healthy bacteria that live in your gut – plays a vital role in disease prevention, longevity and metabolic health. It also helps regulate weight gain and fat stores. A poorly functioning gut struggles to manage carbohydrate metabolism – another link in the chain that creates weight gain post-menopause. Oestrogen and the gut microbiome work together to maintain the integrity of the gut barrier – the lining which prevents food particles and bacteria entering the bloodstream and causing inflammation.

As oestrogen declines we need to look after our good gut bacteria by introducing healthy new bacteria in the form of probiotic-rich fermented foods like live natural yogurt, kefir and kombucha, and feeding our microbiome with prebiotics.

The healthy bacteria feed by fermenting fibrous vegetables and fruit, such as oats, Jerusalem artichokes, almonds, apples, chickpeas, chia seeds, bananas, onions, broccoli and kale.

### TRY TIME RESTRICTED EATING

Intermittent fasting is believed to increase longevity and reduce dementia risk. Research has also linked it to weight loss and better glucose management in diabetic patients.

Time-restricted eating involves an eating window and a fasting window across a 24-hour period – for example, a 10-hour eating window and a 14-hour fasting window..

So that can be a late breakfast, an early dinner or something in between.

However, it doesn't work if you have a history of disordered eating, or a low BMI.

Even if you don't try fasting, it's a good idea to fully digest dinner before bed. Going to bed on a full stomach impacts sleep as the body pumps out insulin to manage glucose, rather than melatonin to aid sleep.

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#### HEAD TO THE MED

The Mediterranean diet has antiinflammatory properties which can alleviate aching joints, preserve muscle and play a key role in heart health – our hearts being the most important muscle of all. It's heavy on vegetables, fruits, wholegrains, legumes (which includes pulses) and olive oil. It also includes some fish, eggs and meat.

The Mediterranean diet has also been linked to higher bone mass and muscle mass in postmenopausal women – two of the key health issues facing us during these years.

#### GET PROTEIN POWER

We need more, not less, protein as we age. This is because muscles are less able to make use of the protein we consume, and we tend to have less muscle to begin with as lean muscle mass declines after menopause.

This doesn't mean supplementing with protein powder – it means ensuring you get enough from your diet. Meat, fish, eggs and dairy all provide protein, while non-animal sources include beans, lentils and pulses, soya and tofu, nuts and seeds. Protein from animal sources means you're more likely to get a supply of good quality iron too. When we lose oestrogen, our iron absorption ability weakens, leaving us more vulnerable to anaemia. We need less iron postmenopause but low levels can cause fatigue and headaches. If you're concerned, ask your GP to check your levels.

#### FAT IS A FRIEND

We're a generation of women who were raised to believe that fat makes us fat, and we should shun it at every opportunity.

But fat is vitally important to health as we age. It supports the brain, lubricates joints and builds healthy cell walls, among many other roles.

Fatty fish, such as salmon, sardines and mackerel, provide the omega-3 fatty acids vital for brain health. But there are plenty of other sources of good fats, including olive oil, avocados, nuts and seeds. The fats to avoid are the ones that are highly processed, such as trans fats and vegetable oils. Saturated fats found in butter and cheese are fine in moderation, just ensure you eat the best quality.

Extracted from *The Power Decade: How to Thrive after Menopause* by Susan Saunders (£16.99, Headline)