

30 DAYS TO **Boost Your Energy**

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Women's health & energy levels

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Hormonal shifts can cause natural fluctuations in your energy levels, but you'll be better prepared to manage this if you're properly clued up

Women's hormones can have a big impact on energy levels. From periods to menopause, the hormonal ups and downs, shifts and fluctuations have both direct and indirect effects on how women feel. Thankfully, being aware of these and making simple lifestyle changes can help to smooth out the roller coaster a little.

The effect on energy of the menstrual cycle

The two main players in the female menstrual cycle are the hormones oestrogen and progesterone. Oestrogen is generally known as an energy giving hormone, and progesterone a relaxing and calming one. Levels of oestrogen and progesterone vary throughout the menstrual cycle.

In the first half of the menstrual cycle, oestrogen is the predominant hormone. This is often a time when women feel they have more energy. Ovulation, when an egg is released from an ovary, happens around halfway through the cycle and energy levels are usually still pretty good at

this time, which is handy if you want to have sex to get pregnant!

In the second half of the cycle, progesterone becomes the predominant hormone. This can often be associated with fatigue and lower energy levels, which are common in pre-menstrual syndrome (PMS). Other PMS symptoms, such as headaches, bloating or moodiness, can be hard to cope with and drain your energy, too.

Some women are more sensitive to hormonal fluctuations than others and find that their energy levels vary greatly according to where they are in their cycle. Many women don't notice much difference, or it's so small they haven't thought to link it to their hormones. It's important to remember that every woman is different and how you feel at any one time in the cycle is a very personal thing.

If you think your energy is significantly affected, track your cycle over three months and see if there are any patterns. If there are times in the cycle when you're regularly tired, it may be a direct effect of your hormones, but there may be specific triggers, such as food cravings or

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Smoothing out your energy levels

Here are some of the ways that you can maintain smoother energy levels through the menstrual cycle and in perimenopause:



EAT REGULARLY AND WELL

Hormonal fluctuations can lead to sugary food cravings, resulting in sugar highs and lows, which can leave you feeling exhausted. Maintain your blood sugar with regular meals and snacks and choose foods that release their energy more slowly, such as whole grain foods, fruit and vegetables.



WATCH YOUR DRINKS

Caffeine can boost your energy in the short term, but it's easy to become dependent on it. A switch to non-caffeinated drinks may improve things. Alcohol has a similar effect, especially in perimenopausal women who often become more sensitive to alcohol and find that it really affects their sleep quality.



KEEP ACTIVE

It might feel harder to exercise when you're tired and you might skip your HIIT workout, but a brisk walk outside will benefit your energy levels by relieving stress, improving sleep and making you feel more awake. It might seem counter-intuitive, but it works – try it!



MAKE LIFE EASIER

If you know you always struggle with your energy just before your period, or perimenopause has hit hard, do what you can to reorganise your life, delegate to others and be kind to yourself. Rather than beating yourself up, accept that this is a tricky time and plan for it accordingly.

stress, so do read on for ways to smooth out your energy.

Energy and periods

It's normal to feel a bit lacking in energy when your period starts, especially if you have pain or mood changes associated with it. If you have heavy bleeding or your cycle is short and you bleed frequently, you're at risk of anaemia, which can make you feel exhausted. Anaemia is a medical condition where the numbers of red blood cells are low. Red cells carry oxygen around the body to muscles and organs and they use it to produce energy. With low levels of red cells, you can be left feeling tired, out of breath and dizzy. If you think you may be anaemic due to your periods, it's important to see your doctor.

Energy and the menopause

Feeling tired is a really common symptom of perimenopause. Some women find they're dragging themselves around in a haze of brain fog with no energy to do anything. In perimenopause, the ovaries begin producing less oestrogen and progesterone and hormonal fluctuations can be extreme. As we have learnt, oestrogen is mostly an energy giver and progesterone is mostly a calming hormone. With lower levels of each, it's easy to see why tiredness is common.

Oestrogen has important roles in regulating energy levels. There are oestrogen receptors throughout the body, including in the brain where

they're involved in metabolism, sleep and appetite, all of which can affect energy levels.

Tiredness in menopause may be a direct effect of changing hormone levels, but there are many other factors that come into play. Sleep disturbance is a major one, with night sweats, trips to the toilet and itching being common things that wake women at night. With less circulating progesterone, anxiety levels can be higher and sleep harder to come by.

Mood changes, stress and mental health conditions, such as depression, are more common in perimenopause and low energy levels can be a consequence of these.

Some physical health conditions also become more likely around mid-life and menopause, including thyroid disorders. The thyroid is a gland in the neck that is crucial for regulating metabolism and therefore energy levels. Both under-active (hypo) and over-active (hyper) thyroidism can cause extreme fatigue.

If you're perimenopausal and struggling with fatigue, see your doctor. Hormone Replacement Therapy (HRT) can be very helpful for some women, but you may need tests to rule out other causes.

Thankfully, when you're beyond the menopause (haven't had a period for 12 consecutive months) and are in postmenopause, the hormonal fluctuations begin to reduce, and your body finds a new normal. At this stage, any energy-related changes are simply due to ageing. ■

