



MANAGING WEIGHT

Your guide to managing weight during the menopause transition with practical, proven tools for you to try out, shared by our team of specialists



WEIGHT GAIN AND MENOPAUSE

It's estimated that on average those transitioning through the menopause will put on 1–2 kg (2–5 lbs) during perimenopause but for some, weight gain can be more than this.

A shift in the type of oestrogen we produce occurs during perimenopause. Our body moves from producing oestradiol to oestrone – a less effective type of oestrogen – which is stored in adipose tissue. It holds on to fat to store the oestrogen there next to our adrenal glands.

This means the way we store fat starts to change, moving away from the hips towards the belly. This can have an impact on how women feel about their bodies, especially if they've had a lifetime of feeling unhappy about their shape.

This workbook gives you some evidence-based tools to try out to help you manage weight in a positive rather than restrictive way.

WEIGHT MYTHS

There are various myths around weight, so it's worth taking note of these to avoid making matters worse ...

High impact exercise will make me lose weight faster

When a person is stressed, intense exercise keeps cortisol elevated which in turn can release ghrelin, our hunger hormone, fuelling food cravings and contributing to weight gain.

Reducing carbs will make me lose weight

We need carbohydrates in our diet (45–65% of our daily food intake) as they provide us with energy and fuel the brain, kidneys, heart muscles and central nervous system – later in this workbook we'll look at what types of carbs are best for us.

Skipping meals will make me lose weight

When we skip meals or go on fad diets, our metabolism slows down to conserve the limited supply of fuel it has, so when we do eat, the body stores this as fat and holds on to it in reserve to help it function.



NON-HORMONAL TRIGGERS

There are various other triggers to weight gain. The next part of the workbook will help you identify and eliminate these!

Mental stress

Anxiety, poor sleep, emotional eating, trauma.

Read our *Managing Stress, Anxiety and Low Mood* and *How to Sleep Better* workbooks for more information and advice.

Body stress

Overeating or undereating, processed food, sugar, simple carbs, smoking, alcohol, over-exercising.

Medical

Weight gain may be a side effect of medication or a sign of an underactive thyroid, insulin resistance or fluid retention (if concerned, see your clinician).





**YOUR POWER
TOOLS**



EAT AND DRINK WELL

Nutrition is a menopause power tool, giving our hormones a helping hand to restore balance.

Our body absorbs nutrients best through food rather than supplements. Making considered choices around what we eat will

help our metabolism stay balanced and our body fuelled for longer.

Try to focus first on adding in healthier options to your diet before you start cutting out, as this helps new habits stick quicker.

EAT THE RAINBOW

Studies of people with the greatest longevity show they have a diet that consists of varied, plant-based food. This is because vegetables and fruit contain important nutrients, vitamins and fibre to fuel our body and metabolism.

🌟 Challenge

Aim to eat eight portions of vegetables and two of fruit a day. So what is a portion?

One portion = 80 g

- ✦ Green vegetables = four heaped tablespoons
- ✦ Cooked, tinned or frozen vegetables = three heaped tablespoons
- ✦ Fruit = one whole fruit



PROTEIN POWER

Protein fills us up and helps maintain muscle mass. Did you know the more muscle mass we have, the faster our resting metabolic rate is? That means we burn calories faster.

Serotonin, dopamine and norepinephrine – hormones responsible for making us happy are made from protein – and the better our mood, the less likely we are to use food as a crutch.

Sources include eggs, Greek yoghurt, salmon, tuna, white fish, chicken, turkey, lean meat, tofu, tempeh, quinoa, beans and pulses.



Tip

Make sure you have 20 g of protein in every meal.



FIBRE IS YOUR FRIEND

Fibre is a form of carbohydrate that fills us up for longer and keeps our blood sugar levels steady, reducing snack cravings.

Fibre also ensures excess oestrogen isn't reabsorbed into the body which can cause anxiety, cellulite, bloating, sleep disruption and low mood – all of which contribute to weight gain.

We should be aiming for 25 g of fibre a day.

Top Fibre Foods for Menopause

- ◆ Baked beans in tomato sauce (low sugar and salt version)
- ◆ Kidney beans
- ◆ Broccoli
- ◆ Chia seeds
- ◆ Chickpeas
- ◆ Oats
- ◆ Cannellini and soya beans
- ◆ Banana



COMPLEX CARBS

Complex carbs found in wholegrains, quinoa, barley, brown rice, buckwheat and oats are essential to maintain energy levels and hormone balance as well as boosting our metabolism. Swap simple carbs (refined grains, processed foods, added sugar) with complex ones.

Challenge

Make your plate one quarter wholegrain carbs, one quarter protein and one half vegetables for lunch and dinner.



YOUR CARB SHOPPING LIST

Fruit: apples, strawberries, apricots, peaches, plums, pear, kiwi

Vegetables: carrots, broccoli, brussels sprouts, courgette, celery

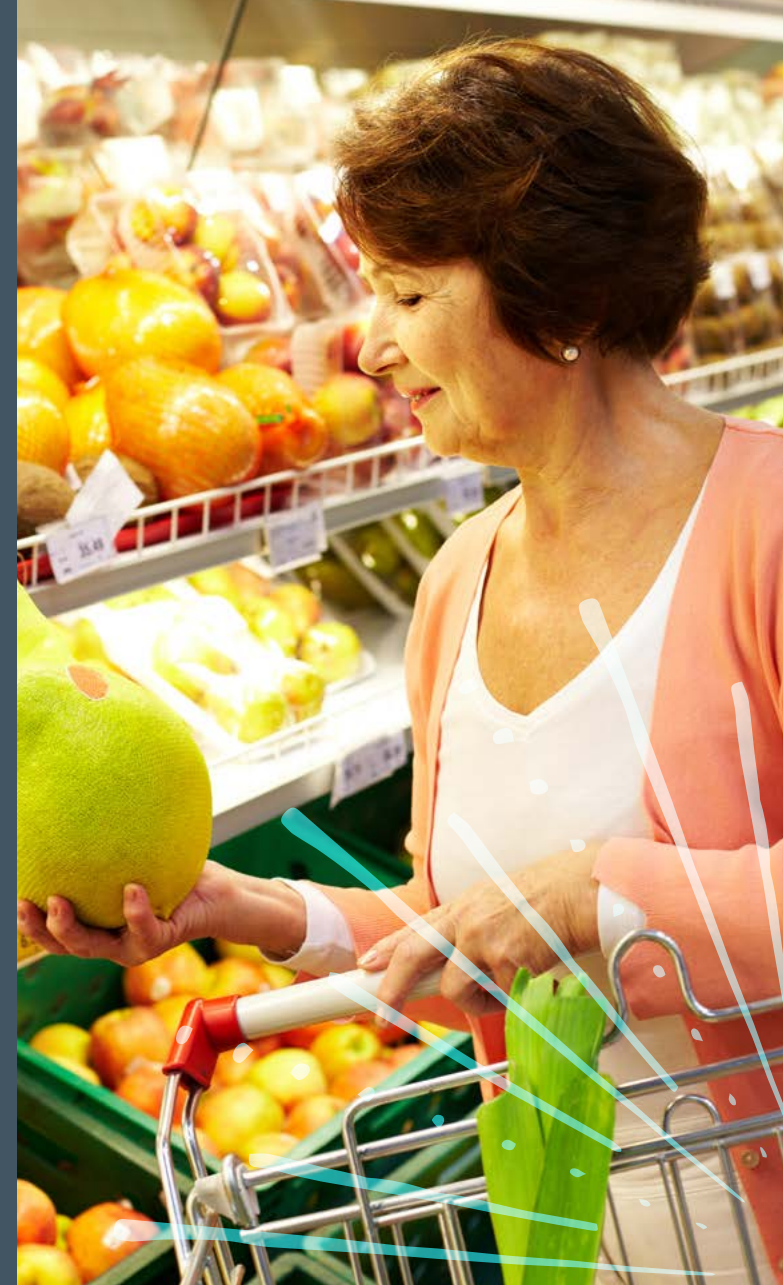
Pasta: brown pasta or soba noodles

Rice: wild rice, brown rice

Grains: quinoa, barley, pearl couscous, buckwheat

Dairy: almond, soya, coconut, low fat milk and cheese

Legumes: chickpeas, black beans, kidney beans



OMEGA GOODNESS

Various studies show that omega 3s help increase the body's metabolism which can be helpful for weight loss. These fatty acids have a role to play in hormone transport and communication, helping hormone receptors work more effectively.

As well as avocado, walnuts, chia and flaxseeds, oily fish is a key source and should be eaten 2–3 times a week.

Challenge

Make a meal from our SMASH list:

- ✦ Salmon
- ✦ Mackerel
- ✦ Anchovies
- ✦ Sardines
- ✦ Herring



GET GUTSY

There is increasing evidence to show that our gut health plays a vital role in regulating our weight and minimising our risk of obesity. Our gut health affects the amount of energy we burn from food and the amount of energy we store. As we get older, our gut health can become compromised and impact our weight and mood.



Tip

Probiotics contain good bacteria, so try a kefir drink or kombucha, or fermented food such as kimchi, sauerkraut, probiotic yoghurt or tempeh.



EAT HAPPY

Foods that contain the amino acid tryptophan – eggs, salmon, cheese, whole milk, bananas – convert into serotonin, our happy hormone.

When combined with complex carbs – wholegrains, quinoa, legumes – this can help reduce stress that contributes to food cravings and weight gain.

Challenge

Kick off your day with a sunshine omelette using two eggs, a sprinkle of grated Cheddar cheese and one chopped tomato. Once cooked, sprinkle with pumpkin seeds to serve.



EAT MINDFULLY

Eating with awareness and slowly savouring each mouthful helps us appreciate what we are eating. Taking time over mealtimes also fills us up for longer.

Challenge

First make a conscious choice about what to eat:

- ✦ What do you want to eat right now?
- ✦ How hungry are you on a scale of 1 to 10?
- ✦ Which food choices will nourish you?
- ✦ How will you feel after you eat it?

Next, take 15 minutes to eat your meal slowly with awareness:

- ✦ What do you notice about the aroma?
- ✦ What do you notice about the appearance?
- ✦ How does the mouthful feel?
- ✦ What tastes can you pick out?
- ✦ If each mouthful was a piece of music, how would it be composed?



DOWNSIZING

We should be eating 200 fewer calories in our forties unless we are exercising like an athlete.

Behavioural scientists have shown that we tend to feel most satiated when we finish all the food on our plate. Doing this stops us snacking after dinner.



Tip

Change your plate to a side dish. You can actually trick your brain – it really does work!



PLAN AHEAD

Eating healthily is not necessarily more time-consuming if you get planning – studies have shown it reduces the shopping bill and leads to less food wastage.

All you need is half an hour at the beginning of the week to work out your meals for the next seven days.



REMOVE TEMPTATIONS

Out of sight, out of mind!

If it's not on the shopping list, or it's hidden away, you are more likely to stick to the healthier substitutes you have at home.

Challenge

Donate your treat food to someone who will appreciate it – maybe an elderly neighbour, a homeless shelter or the school fair!



INTERMITTENT FASTING

Whilst dieting can trigger weight gain when we return to eating at our usual level, there's increasing evidence to suggest intermittent fasting is an effective way of managing weight in the long term.

This means restricting your eating to within a set number of hours. The pattern in a 24-hour period could be – 14 fasting hours and 10 eating hours, or 16 fasting hours and 8 eating hours. This is helpful because it stops us from wanting to snack and speeds up the metabolism.

★ Challenge

This week set yourself a regular time to eat. Start eating later in the day around 10 a.m. or 11 a.m. and finish eating by 7 p.m. or 8 p.m.



HYDR8

As we age, we need more water to help support our bodily functions and maintain the condition of our skin and hair. When it comes to weight, keeping hydrated can be a useful way to curb food cravings. To combat these cravings, drink eight glasses of water every day.

🌟 Challenge

- ✦ Start the day with a warm glass of water and a slice of lemon to invigorate you and kick start your metabolism
- ✦ Drink little and often (water is absorbed better when it's drunk slowly rather than in big, quick gulps)
- ✦ Create a new drink as soon as your glass is empty – use it as a micro-break
- ✦ Drink another seven glasses of water or water-based drinks through the day and early evening
- ✦ You can Infuse your water with mint, ginger, citrus, turmeric, cinnamon, honey in warm water and then drink warm or chilled, for added goodness and flavour
- ✦ Stop drinking an hour before bedtime to avoid needing the bathroom in the night



BE SOBER CURIOUS

Alcohol is extremely calorific. Because it's in liquid form, it can be easy to consume high calories without realising it. A large glass of wine (250 ml) with 13% ABV is the equivalent of 228 calories. Alcohol can make us more carefree and trigger an unhelpful habit of pairing alcohol with unhealthy food, e.g. red wine with chocolate.



Tip

Seek out low-calorie drinks, and avoid high sugar cocktails, dessert wines or liqueurs.



GOODBYE SWEETIE

As we transition through menopause, we can become 'insulin-resistant.' This means we have excess insulin in our body and cells can no longer react properly to their instructions, leading to hormone imbalance and weight gain.

It's unrealistic to cut out sugar completely but start taking a note of foods with high sugar to cut back on such as biscuits and cake, as well as foods with hidden sugar such as yoghurt, bread, and granola.



Tip

Rhodiola, an adaptogenic herb, may help reduce stress-related weight gain or cravings. Take it along with regular exercise as this may accelerate weight loss. It can be taken in as a liquid or capsule.





MOVE DAILY

When it comes to weight loss, there is a simple equation to follow:

Energy Out > Energy In

Changing our diet will get us towards achieving our weight goal but we also need to burn off calories with daily exercise.

Studies show that those who 150 minutes of moderate exercise a week have a better menopause experience and live longer.

However, choosing the right kind of exercise becomes more important as we age.

Here are a few tips to take note of:

- ✦ Avoid high-impact movement if you have a weak pelvic floor and see a pelvic health physiotherapist to strengthen these muscles
- ✦ Do continue to exercise if you have joint or muscle pain but get advice from a physiotherapist about what is safe to do
- ✦ Avoid high-impact exercise like spinning or HIIT if you are stressed, as this elevates cortisol, our stress hormone and can make us put on more weight

STRENGTH TRAINING

During perimenopause we lose around 10% of our muscle mass. Post menopause, our muscle and bone density continue to lower.

The less muscle mass we have, the slower our metabolism becomes and the harder it becomes to shift excess weight. Strength training uses weights or resistance to build muscle mass and bone density.

Ideas for you to try:

- ✦ Book a reformer pilates class
- ✦ Hold a plank for one minute
- ✦ Invest in some dumb-bells or kettlebells
- ✦ Do 10 push-ups, 20 squats and 10 lunges
- ✦ With a skipping rope, do 20 jumps a day



BALANCE

Focusing on exercises that strengthen our core muscles is important as this helps us develop balance which reduces the risk of injury and increases performance during movement.

Core muscles are more than the ones in your belly. They are also made up of the:

- ✦ Traverse abdominis: located on each side of the naval
- ✦ Internal and external obliques: extending diagonally from ribs to pelvis
- ✦ Rectus abdominis: known as the six-pack
- ✦ Multifidus and erector spinae: located along the spine from head to pelvis



Challenge

Try out a yoga or pilates workout this week.



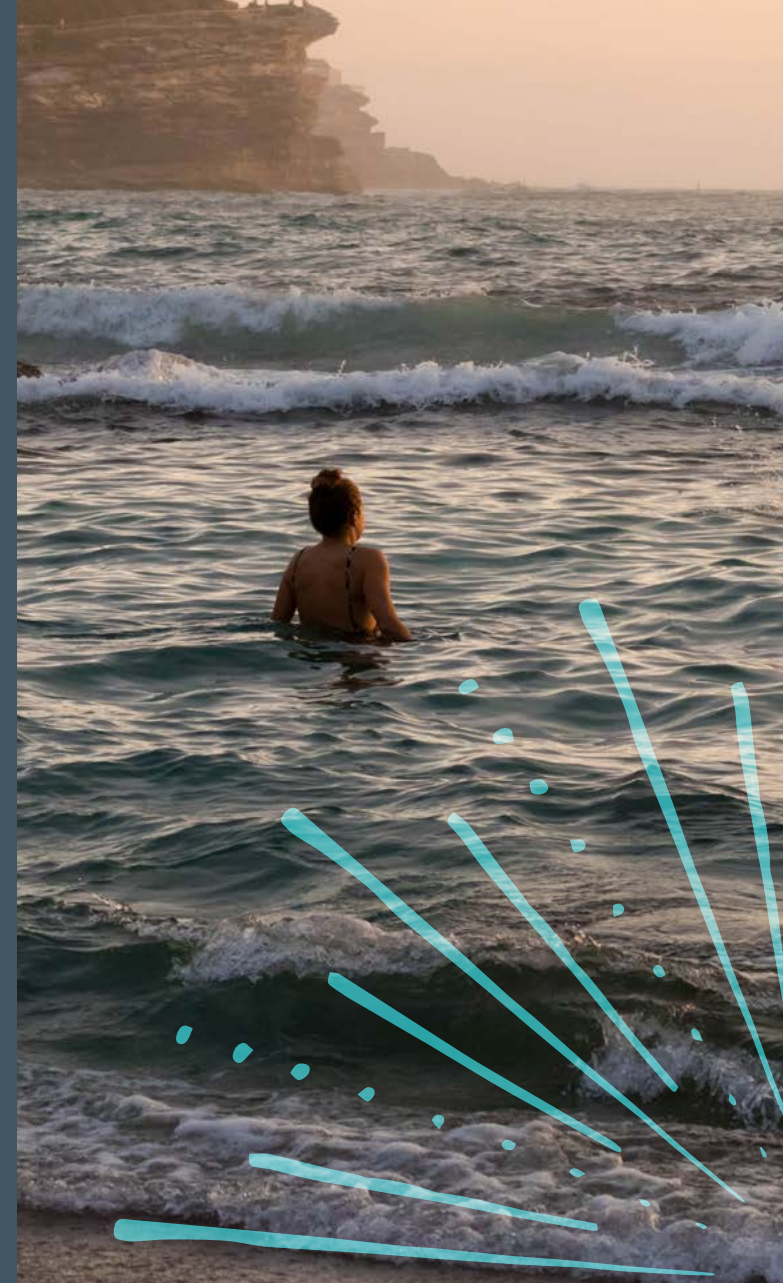
CARDIO

Cardio exercise gets the heart rate up and blood pumping, so as well as being an efficient tool for weight loss, it helps with brain fog, low mood and daytime fatigue.

However, as we go through menopause, shorter workouts (around 30 minutes) with resting intervals, such as HIIT are more effective and continue to burn calories for up to 48 hours afterwards.

Here are a few other ideas that may work for you:

- ✦ Go outdoor swimming
- ✦ Take a brisk walk with a friend
- ✦ Go for a bike ride in nature
- ✦ Enrol in a dance class



LEAK AND 3-PEAT

Urine leakage can restrict the type of exercise we can do and this has an impact on how well we can manage our weight. To make sure you can take part in moderate- to high-impact movement, schedule in time each day to do your pelvic-floor exercises. These are as important as working out other muscles in your body.

Challenge

Practice the KNACK exercise three times a day:

- ✦ Sit away from the back of the chair or stand tall with your chest lifted with a neutral spine
- ✦ Lift and squeeze the muscles in and around all three pelvic openings – urethra, vagina and anus
- ✦ Contract around all three pelvic openings at once, with a strong inward lift and squeeze of your pelvic floor muscles
- ✦ Maintain this pelvic-floor muscle contraction as you do a small cough
- ✦ After you cough, relax your pelvic-floor muscles back to normal resting level
- ✦ Repeat three times in a row



CREATE A CUE

Habits are a sequence made up of three parts:

The cue – a visual object or transition in the day that triggers you into an activity.

The activity – the habit or routine you often do on autopilot.

The reward – how you feel afterwards.

It can be helpful to create cues to encourage you to get moving.

Tips

- ✦ Put workout gear next to your bed
- ✦ Set yourself notifications on your phone with a scheduled time to exercise
- ✦ Put a movement plan on the fridge door
- ✦ Put a pair of trainers (or other movement prop) by the front door



MIX IT UP

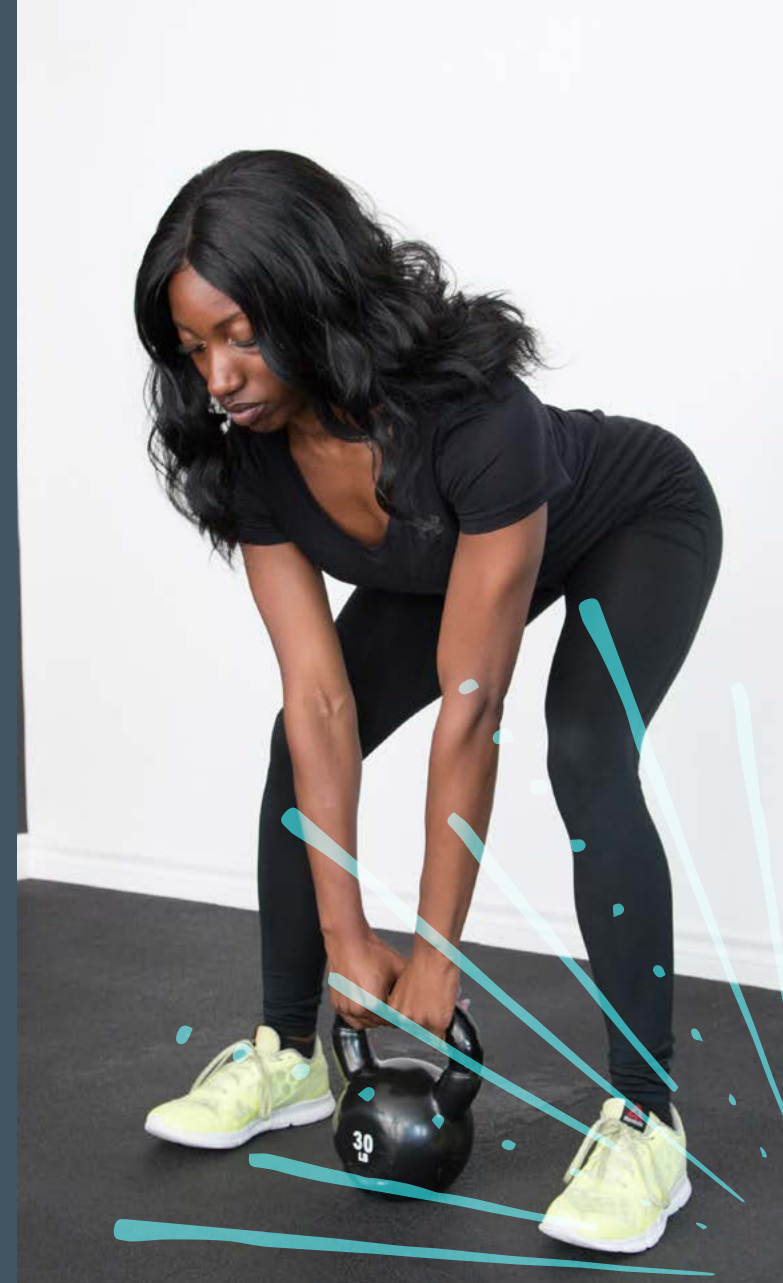
We should be doing 30 minutes of moderate exercise at least five times a week, so to keep things interesting, mix it up. Strength, cardio and balance should all feature.

☆ Challenge

Create a movement plan for the next seven days and schedule this into your phone/diary, so you are more likely to do this.

Each week you're aiming for:

- ✦ 2x strength training sessions
- ✦ 1x balance session
- ✦ 2x cardio sessions
- ✦ 7x pelvic-floor exercises



SUMMARY

- ✦ Make considered choices over your nutrition and movement
- ✦ Make positive additions before introducing deprivations
- ✦ Set yourself up for success
- ✦ Celebrate your wins



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