

Heather Rose Health & Wellness

Our Bodies - Through Time - Written by Heather Rose Blakeman

Over the years, many hormonal topics/words such as menopause, breastfeeding, miscarriage, and even puberty in young girls have been words that are hush hush. They are not spoken of often, and even brushed to the side like a topic that should be forbidden to speak about, yet everyone (or almost everyone) experiences.

Just like pregnancy and breastfeeding being hormonal changes on the body that require change in caloric intake and change in nutrition, menopause and post-menopause is no different. During menopause, the body is transforming significantly from the inside out. It's not a change that should be feared or frowned upon. It is a change that one should welcome as if a new era, a new transformation. One should take the opportunity to rejuvenate and be reborn and come out a stronger, more empowered woman.

But first, addressing the needs of the body - physically, mentally, and emotionally - will be really important. The biggest factor to address is the fluctuations of hormones as the female body slows down the production of hormones, specifically estrogen. As the production of hormones slows down rapidly, one will experience a change in sleep, eating, energy and even muscle mass and bone density. The muscle mass and bone density do decrease over time, making exercise and nutrition a very important topic to address.

In order to support stronger bones and stronger muscles, consuming calories from five main food categories will be very important: quality proteins, very dark greens/vegetables, low glycemic fruits, whole grain carbohydrates, and lean fats. Getting the nutrition in line will mostly be about the body composition - maintaining the muscle mass and bone density - rather than weight loss. This is not a time to focus entirely on weight loss, but instead focusing on maintaining a healthy weight, keeping strong muscles and bones, and working on the function of the body in daily movements.

That being said, when I mention quality proteins, they are very important for maintaining muscle mass. Because the female body is decreasing the production of estrogen, phytoestrogen foods like tofu and tempeh are great sources of protein. Fish, such as salmon, are high in omega-3s and also excellent sources of lean protein. Other sources of protein that bring amino acids into the body for maintaining muscle mass and development are eggs, lean meats such as turkey, chicken, pork, and beef.

When it comes to choosing your veggies, the darker green the better. Dark leafy greens such as kale, spinach, broccoli, asparagus, and brussel sprouts bring calcium and iron to the body to also support muscles and bones. They are very nutrient dense and all mixed together with the proteins listed above can make a beautiful salad. You can consume any veggies you'd ever want, but trying to take in at least 1 cup a day of dark greens will help significantly.

Low glycemic fruits will be your friend for bringing natural sugars to your blood, keeping energy levels in check and helping solve the cravings for sweets. Berries and cherries will be your top choices with plums and watermelons up next on the list. While all fruits are okay to eat, keep the portions in check and monitor when/how much sugar from fruits you are taking in. The post-menopausal body is much more resistant to glucose and may take a long time to use, process, and store these sugars. Unused sugars may be stored as belly bloat.

When I say we should choose whole grains, I want to specifically mention which whole grains are best. Quinoa, rice, barely, millet, and oats are at top of the list. Beans, lentils, and chick peas are also excellent choices of carbohydrates. And, yes, the potato family of sweet potatoes and yams are top carbs for the pre, menopause, and post menopause stages. Sadly though, as the female body ages, it reacts poorly to the combination of glucose and grains - which are found in pasta, breads, and flours. Steering clear of flour based foods would be a benefit to your gut. You don't have to eliminate anything entirely, but by consuming significantly less flour, you will feel much leaner in the gut and midsection area. Like sugars, the body just is not processing and uses these flour-sourced carbs as easily. Instead of processing heavy carbs, these carbs become belly bloat and gut fat.

Lastly are fats. Remembering that eating fat doesn't make us fat, you are able and allowed to take in fats. But, you want to take in fats in small amounts. You also want to choose wisely. Top choices of fats will be almonds and walnuts because they are very healthy for the heart. They also aid in the release of serotonin in the body, helping one sleep better at night, which is a solid challenge during menopause. Furthermore, chia and flax are great sources of omegas, also aiding the body.

Need a recipe to bring all of these together, try this fancy salad!

- 1 Cup Dark Green Kale
- 1 Cup mixed greens - diced broccoli, asparagus, brussel sprouts
- 1 cup mixed raspberries and blue berries
- 1/2 cup chick peas
- 3/4 cup diced chicken
- 2tbsp slivered almonds
- Juice of 1 lemon

Lay your greens out beautifully on your plate. Top with your fruits, then your chick peas, followed by your chicken and almond. Squeeze the juice of one lime over the salad. Enjoy. And there you have your greens, your low glycemic fruits, healthy carbs, protein, and fats!

Changing your eating for this transformational phase of life doesn't have to be boring or bland. It also doesn't have to be an elimination diet. Recipes such as the one above is just one example of how you can consume all five types of foods described in the article. Changing ingredients here and there will absolutely help. However they won't be the entire solution. Pairing these into a solid nutrition plan paired with exercise will be a more solidified solution.