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Sexual Health

Menopause and Your Diet

Source: Dr Wee Horng Yen, Consultant and Director, Women's Wellness Centre, *KK Women's and Children's Hospital*
Ms Suzanne Khor, Senior Dietitian, Department of Nutrition and Dietetics, *KK Women's and Children's Hospital*

How does diet affect menopause? What is the recommended diet for menopausal women?

Dietary interventions can help manage hot flashes as well as other symptoms of menopause. Eating foods rich in carbohydrates can help to raise the levels of serotonin, thereby alleviating depression. Try eating bagels, sandwiches, and whole-grain breads and cereals.

To help combat the unwanted weight gain that occurs due to slower metabolism during menopause, reduce your dietary fat intake and focus on eating healthier fats instead of saturated fats. Try olive oil, canola oil, or flaxseed oil. This can also reduce your risk of heart disease later. Increasing your water intake can also help you to lose any water being retained, as well as help your metabolism to kick in.

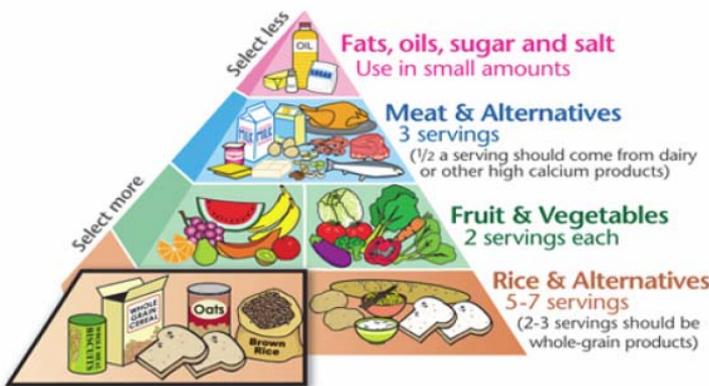
Dietary modifications can prevent osteoporosis too. Menopausal women should be getting between 1200 and 1500 mg of calcium every day. Adding low fat yogurt, milk, or soymilk to your diet is a good way to meet this target. Other foods that are rich in calcium include cheese, sardines and salmon (with bones), prunes, figs, and leafy green vegetables. Avoid taking in too much caffeine, as caffeine affects the body's ability to absorb calcium properly.

Diet does not affect menopause per se. However, menopausal women should be careful to prevent excessive weight gain and to ensure an adequate intake of calcium and vitamin D. As the metabolic rate decreases with age, menopausal women often find that they put on weight despite consuming the same amount of energy as before. Weight gain increases the risk of high blood pressure, diabetes, certain cancers (e.g. breast) and heart disease.

To control weight, menopausal women should continue to eat a healthy and balanced diet, consisting of a variety of foods using the Healthy Diet Pyramid as a guide. If overweight, they should consume the lower end of the recommended number of servings from each food group. In addition, they should also watch the amount and type of fat consumed.

As a general guide,

- (i) Limit fried foods to twice a week or less.
- (ii) Replace saturated fats (coconut oil, palm oil, animal fats) and trans fats (e.g. those found in commercial baked foods like biscuits and cakes; frozen fried foods like frozen fish fingers, nuggets; and fast foods) with healthier fats like canola and olive oil, nuts (e.g. almonds, walnuts) and cold water fatty fish (e.g. salmon, tuna).
- (iii) Substitute animal sources of protein (e.g. meat, chicken) with plant sources of protein (e.g. beancurd, lentils, beans) twice a week.



Apart from weight gain, with menopause, the risk of osteoporosis increases. To reduce this risk, menopausal women should ensure an adequate intake of calcium (1000mg/d) and vitamin D (400 IU, up to 70 years of age, 800IU, above 70 years of age), as well as engage in regular weight bearing exercises. Good dietary sources of calcium include low-fat and non-fat dairy products, fish with edible bones (e.g. ikan bilis and sardines) and calcium-fortified products like soybean milk and bread. As for vitamin D, dietary sources include salmon, eggs and fortified foods like low-fat and non-fat milk. As our bodies also manufacture vitamin D in the presence of sunlight. 15 minutes of daily sunlight exposure can also

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