Understanding the Relationship Between Menopause and Bloating

by AFRA WILLMORE

Menopause Belly Bloat

As if traversing menopause was not tedious enough, some women have to endure menopause belly bloat, which can range from slight swelling and discomfort to a full-on, pregnant-sized bloat. This can create both physical and mental health issues.

I am one of those unlucky women who can change as much as five dress sizes in a day, depending on how serious the bloating gets. It affects my confidence to the extent that sometimes I avoid going out in case people ask when the baby is due.

But what causes menopause belly bloat, and is there anything that can be done to prevent or at least minimize it?

What is Menopause Bloating?

Menopausal belly bloat looks and feels pretty much like any other type of bloating, such as bloating from food intolerances.

Bloating can cause uncomfortable pressure in the abdominal region, which feels like a fullness or tightness. Most people experiencing bloating will report some distension in that region. Personally, I can go from petite to pregnant in a matter of minutes. I find this menopausal bloating more distressing from the embarrassment factor rather than any physical discomfort.

Like the bloating some women experience during their menstrual cycle, menopausal bloating is linked to hormone activity.

What Causes Menopausal Bloating?

Menopause bloating is usually caused by either gas or water retention. Water retention can be caused by increased estrogen levels during perimenopause — the time leading up the menopause which is officially when menstruation has halted for 12 months or more.

Gas-related bloating can be triggered by a number of factors during menopause, including slowed digestion and menopause-related stress. For instance, a lack of sleep or being self-conscious about hot flashes can be stressful and add to the likelihood of developing gassy bloating.

It can be difficult to identify which type of bloating you have, but as a rule of thumb, water retention can cause swelling in more areas of the body – sufferers may notice swelling or puffiness in hands, get, ankles and face, as well as through the mid-section.

How to Treat Menopausal Bloating

Lifestyle Changes

The good news is, there are some easy lifestyle changes you can make to prevent or minimize menopausal bloating, and to ease symptoms when you feel bloated.

For gas-related bloating, make sure you are careful about what and how you eat. I have found my digestion system is much more sensitive nowadays to foods that are known to cause gas. Ingredients including onions, beans, broccoli and fatty, fried food all can trigger bloating. Try and make a note of what you ate directly before bloating. My friend has cut garlic, onions and leeks from her diet and feels much better.

Some people find probiotics and supplements help with bloating. You can buy special yogurts, drinks and supplements to make this an easy fix.

Try to avoid stress and practice relaxation techniques. For some people that might involve taking up yoga or Tai Chi. Some people find meditation helpful and there are lots of free apps available to help you. I use a mediation app designed especially for bedtime which means I do not lie awake worrying about random things.

Examine your life and identify what is causing you stress and if possible, eliminate it from your life. Walk away from toxic relationships and make lifestyle changes so you have time for yourself. Or, if you feel lonely and isolated, consider joining a couple of clubs or maybe a choir or fitness group. Exercise will also help reduce bloating!

Medical Treatment

There are over-the-counter medications to help ease discomfort from gas or water retention without embarrassment. These are handy to carry with you in case you are caught out.

You can also ask your doctor about prescription medications for water retention or hormone replacement therapy which could also beat the bloat, as well as ease other menopause symptoms like hot flashes, sleep issues and skin problems.

Although bloating can be distressing luckily it is not harmful, even though on occasion it can be quite uncomfortable. Try making lifestyle changes first but do not be afraid to seek advice from your doctor if it becomes unbearable. Bloating can very occasionally be a sign of a serious medical issue so it is definitely worth getting it checked out if the steps above do not relieve it at all.