5 Foods to Help Balance Your Hormones During Menopause

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Hormone-Balancing Foods

Perimenopause causes hormones to change to prepare your body for the menopause. This can last from months to years, and mostly occurs in people in their mid-40s but can happen earlier. In this article, we will be talking about hormone-balancing foods so you can moderate your hormone levels and symptoms despite menopause.

What Are Hormones and What Do They Do?

Some hormones fluctuate throughout our lifetime. Some change when our endocrine system (our network of glands and organs that control and regulate many of our body's functions) receive either too much or not enough hormones. In this case, hormone-balancing foods should be added into your diet.

Signs and Symptoms of Menopausal Hormone Imbalance

Menopause symptoms are linked to hormone imbalance. There are many symptoms linked to hormone imbalance, ranging from mild to severe enough to affect quality of life. These symptoms include:

- Weight gain.
- Fatigue.
- Muscle aches, tenderness, stiffness or weakness.
- Increased sensitivity to temperature, hot flashes and night sweats.
- Bladder sensitivity.
- Sleeping issues (difficulty falling or staying asleep, waking feeling unrested).
- Vaginal dryness during sex, decreased sex drive.
- Mood changes (nervousness, anxiety, irritability and depression).
- Blurred vision.
- Changes in hair composition (thinning or brittleness).
- Skin changes (dry, greasy, acne and itching).
- Menstruation changes (heavy or irregular periods, missed or stopped periods).
- Headaches.

Tests and Diagnosis

Your doctor will ask you questions about your symptoms and order tests to check your levels of estrogen and testosterone. Mine were below the minimum for my age. So, I started hormone replacement therapy (HRT). It eliminated some symptoms. From the diary I kept and through the research and education from my doctor, I realized there were things I could change to reduce symptoms even more.

Natural Remedies to Improve Symptoms

- **Lose weight.** Many menopausal women feel their weight increases. Losing weight may alleviate symptoms such as sweating, flashes, aches and fatigue.
- **Lubricants.** Ask your doctor about using water-soluble lubricants to improve vaginal discomfort.
- **Avoid hot flashes/night sweats.** Dress in light layers. Light-colored cotton reflects the sun's heat. Also, you can use a fan, work on techniques to manage stress levels, and avoid spicy foods. You can also try swapping a duvet with cotton sheets, sleeping naked, keeping the room cool and opening a window.
- **Prioritize mental health.** I regularly meditate and practice yoga. This helps me focus on the now and eliminates stressing about the past or having anxiety about the future.
- **Exercise.** Practicing pelvic floor exercises (the squeezing of muscles that stops the flow of urine) can strengthen your pelvis and may make you feel more comfortable during menopause. With increasing my sleep and regularly exercising, I felt better.
- **Use vitamins or herbs.** Talk to your doctor before starting these, as some can cause side effects and react with medications. I tried black cohosh to help with hot flashes, and it gave me severe gastrointestinal issues.
- **Change your diet.** I always say, "we are what we eat." If I eat a lot of carbohydrates, processed food, sugary foods and drinks, lots of caffeine and alcohol, my menopause symptoms worsen.

Recommended Diet to Counter Hormonal Imbalance

There are certain foods that can alter the hormonal balance within the body, worsening menopausal symptoms. There are key food groups you can eliminate, reduce, or add to balance hormonal fluctuations.

Foods to Add:

- **Soy:** miso, tofu, tempeh, soy milk, soybeans.
- **Calcium:** kale, collard greens, turnip, greens, broccoli, brussels sprouts, green beans.
- **Vitamin D:** egg yolks, saltwater fish and liver and fortified options, such as milk, breakfast cereals and orange juice.
- **Wholegrains:** quinoa, rye, brown rice, whole wheat bread and barley.
- **Legumes and beans:** lentils, chickpeas, green peas, kidney beans, black beans and pinto beans.

Foods to Avoid:

- **Spicy foods:** Strong spices can increase hot flashes. Try using less spice or more mild spices. I avoid processed, spicy foods and prefer home cooking, adjusting spices to a more comfortable level.
- **Sugar:** Foods with sugar can cause weight gain. After the initial sugar rush, I find I have less energy, more headaches and muscle aches. I use natural sugar alternatives or avoid sugar altogether.
- **Caffeine:** Drinking or consuming caffeine can increase urination, causing you to feel jittery and irritable. You could try using alternatives, such as herbal (low-sugar), green or caffeine-free drinks.
- **Alcohol:** Alcohol can cause weight gain, worsen depression and disrupt your sleep due to sugar content. Hot flashes can also worsen menopause symptoms, and you might find hangovers during menopause feel worse and you take longer to recover.

I recommend keeping a food diary and log any symptoms after eating and drinking. This should help you work out which diet changes you benefit from, eliminating some foods completely or just to reducing consumption.