

# Mail Online

## The experts' guide to menopause (and they should know ... they've all been there)

By [Angela Epstein](#)

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A vanishing waistline, hot flushes and mood swings that have the family heading for the door - most women associate the menopause and its symptoms with dread and confusion.

It's not surprising given conflicting advice surrounding treatments such as hormone replacement therapy, which this month has been linked to an increased risk of skin cancer.

Around one million women are on HRT, which provides synthetic oestrogen in tablet form, and can help alleviate menopausal symptoms. It also protects against osteoporosis and reduces the risk of colon and rectal cancers.



**Cold comfort: Many women suffer hot flushes during the menopause**

However, the latest study, by experts at Leiden University in the Netherlands, found those on HRT for more than six months at a time were twice as likely to develop a malignant melanoma, the most deadly form of skin cancer.

HRT has previously been linked to breast cancer, but many experts and women alike still believe the benefits outweigh the risks if taken for no more than five years. Natural remedies haven't fared better under scrutiny. Those taking the herb black cohosh, said to reduce symptoms, were recently warned that they could suffer liver damage and an increased risk of breast cancer.

So we asked ten female health experts who have been through the menopause for their tips.

### THE SPECIALIST NURSE

Jan Brockey, 52, a menopause specialist nurse at the John Radcliffe Hospital, Oxford, lives in Oxfordshire with her husband and four children.

'My main problem was joint discomfort, for which I take a daily fish oil supplement in a capsule. Clinical studies have found evidence that it works and I do notice a difference if ever I stop taking it. I've also started to use a magnetic device called LadyCare (£19.95, [www.magno-pulse.com](http://www.magno-pulse.com)), which clips on to my underwear near the pelvis area. The magnet is thought to balance moods and help hot flushes and insomnia by boosting hormone levels.'

### **THE FERTILITY GURU**

Zita West, 50, founder of the Zita West fertility clinics, lives in [London](#) and Oxfordshire. She is married with two grown-up children. 'I'm going through the menopause and my blood pressure and cholesterol have crept up, so I go running and meditate. I also take sterols - plant substances that block the uptake of cholesterol in the gut - in the form of supplements, though you can get them from Benecol yogurt (£3 for six, major High Street chains). Any woman facing the menopause should have a full medical; taking your health in hand can give you the lease of life you need.'

### **THE PHARMACIST**

Norma Goldman, 65, founder of the Menopause Exchange, is married with two daughters, and lives in Middlesex. 'Coping with mood swings can be difficult. Tell friends and family how you are feeling so they can be supportive. Eating regular meals regulates blood-sugar levels, which help balance mood. Yoga and Pilates help as exercise releases endorphins, the brain's feel-good chemicals, which improve mood. Exercise will also help offset aches and pains and improve body shape, which will make you feel better.'

### **THE LIFE COACH AND BREAST CANCER SURVIVOR**

Kim Knight, 48, lives in Surrey with her husband and three children. 'I was diagnosed with breast cancer at 46, which meant I couldn't take HRT as this was associated with an increased risk of developing the disease. Instead I take Solgar PM PhytoGen Complex (£20.35 for 60 tablets, [www.solgarvitamins.co.uk](http://www.solgarvitamins.co.uk)) which is safe, even though I'm on a daily dose of Tamoxifen for my cancer, too. One of its key ingredients is the plant extract Thai Kudzu, which is used in alternative medicine to promote youthful skin and hair, strength and vitality. It's made a huge difference to how I look and feel.'

### **THE NATURAL HEALTH AUTHOR**

Maryon Stewart, 53, founder of the Natural Health Advisory Service, lives in Brighton. She is divorced and has four grown-up children. 'I started the menopause at 47 and one way to combat my hot flushes was to have at least 20 minutes of relaxation a day, such as a walk in the park. Research shows this can reduce hot flushes by 60 per cent. I also take an alternative remedy called Femenessence (£19.99, [www.nutricentre.com](http://www.nutricentre.com)), made from organic Peruvian Maca root, which has been shown to raise oestrogen and progesterone levels, resulting in fewer hot flushes and night sweats, and improved sleep and mood.'

### **THE GYNAE NURSE**

Doreen Robinson, 58, is married and lives in Solihull. She is a gynaecological outpatients sister at Solihull General Hospital. 'When my menopause began eight years ago, I felt absolutely dreadful. I was tired all the time and had poor memory. I decided to try HRT because I knew it had a good success rate. I know there have been conflicting reports about the link between HRT and breast cancer, but having taken it for so long I feel the benefits far outweigh the risks. I take a daily tablet and have so much energy I am back to my old self.'

### **THE GENERAL PRACTITIONER**

Dr Sally Hope, 51, lives in Oxford with her husband and their two children. 'I opted for a diet high in phytoestrogens - plant molecules found in beans, peas, lentils, flax, linseed and soya products that act weakly on the body's oestrogen receptors. Not only should you lose weight, but this should help reduce hot flushes and cholesterol levels, and improve fibre intake, too. Red clover tablets (£11.99 for 90 tablets, [www.healthydirect.com](http://www.healthydirect.com)) have been found to be quite effective.'

## THE NUTRITIONIST

Fiona Kirk, 54, lives in Glasgow. She is married, with one daughter. 'I had an early menopause, at 36, and really felt the effects, particularly hot flushes and irritability. I looked for natural ways to balance the oestrogen and ate lots of foods with naturally occurring oestrogen, particularly soy. I swapped dairy milk for soya (Alpro sweetened soya drink with added calcium, 91p, major High Street chains), but used products enriched with calcium to offset the risk of osteoporosis.'

## THE RADIOLOGIST

Dr Sarah Burnett, 46, lives in South London with her husband and their two children. 'I had an "enforced" menopause at the age of 43, brought on by chemotherapy for breast cancer. The symptoms are much more severe, but I couldn't touch HRT because of my diagnosis. I slept under thin covers and wore layers so I could take them off easily. Wild yam root - a West Indian, non-oestrogenic remedy, (£3.69, [www.hollandandbarrett.com](http://www.hollandandbarrett.com)) - helped.'

## THE HOMEOPATH

Irene Roberts, 54, lives in Cheshire with her husband. They have two grown-up children.

'I went through the menopause at 46, and though for the main part I didn't have any real problems, I did suffer hot flushes. I addressed this by avoiding things which triggered the flushes, such as alcohol and spicy food, which dilate the blood vessels and make you flush even more. You also absorb a lot of heat from your partner when you share a quilt so keep cooler by having your own cover.'



HRT fan: Jane Seymour, 59

## Stars who learned to cope

- British beauty Jane Seymour, 59, swore by HRT and ate a diet high in natural phytoestrogens.
- Hollywood star Susan Sarandon, 62, took a daily tablespoon of 'green stuff' - powdered, organically grown broccoli, kale, turnips and parsnips.
- Actress Julie Walters, 59, suffered hot flushes, so avoided coffee - and too much worry.

- Whoopi Goldberg, 53, took her mind off her mood swings by throwing herself into work.
- Ingrid Tarrant, 54, ex-wife of DJ Chris, tried an all-natural menopause supplement called Isovon.

## Changes that mark the end of fertility cycle

The menopause is when the ovaries no longer produce eggs, marking the end of a woman's natural fertility cycle. It can occur as early as 35 or as late as 60, though generally it's between the ages of 45 and 55.

Levels of the hormone oestrogen, created by the ovaries when they produce eggs, drop. Oestrogen mainly regulates the growth and function of reproductive organs and is also involved in other bodily functions such as bone formation.

As levels decrease, the pituitary gland produces follicle-stimulating hormone (FSH) to try to stimulate the ovaries. Because they are inactive, FSH may trigger hot flushes, insomnia and joint pain as well as an increased susceptibility to infections.

The menopause results in the increased likelihood of osteoporosis, heart disease, stroke and rising blood pressure. Many women experience symptoms several years up to the menopause, known as 'perimenopause', due to gradual decline in ovary function.

## How healthy diets help control the symptoms

By CATHERINE COLLINS, principal dietitian at St George's Hospital, London.

- Medical research has shown that hot flushes are worse if you have extra tummy fat.
- High calorie snacking contributes on average 5lb (2kg) weight gain and 1in waist gain. Instead, choose a piece of fruit or add soup, salad or more vegetables.
- Soya beans, beansprouts, chickpeas, runner beans and red kidney beans provide natural plant oestrogens, but research has shown that these foods have no effect in controlling hot flushes in two thirds of women. Caffeine and spicy foods can be triggers, so avoid hot curries and use decaffeinated tea, coffee and soft drinks.
- Risk of heart disease increases after the menopause. Magnesium and potassium in vegetables helps lower blood pressure, while fibre in green, leafy vegetables, peas, beans, lentils and some fruits helps lower blood cholesterol.
- Low-fat dairy and calciumfortified soya foods boost bone health and protect against bowel cancer.
- Without Vitamin D the body won't absorb calcium. A daily Vitamin D supplement (10-20mcg) is especially necessary if you avoid the sun. One portion of oily fish each week boosts both Vitamin D, and omega-3 fat intake helps ease muscle and bone aches and pains.

## Mild cauliflower curry

Cauliflower is rich in protective glucosinolates. Soya beans that are rich in plant oestrogens are simple to cook and an easy substitute for green peas in this recipe.

Herbs and spices are rich in antioxidants, and using spices without chilli prevents the heat that may trigger a hot flush.

Olive oil is a monounsaturated rich fat, good for heart health, as is garlic, and a healthy part of the Mediterranean diet. Yogurt contributes protein and calcium, and also helps reduce perception of 'hotness'.

### For the curry powder

*2 tsp each of ground cumin and coriander*

*1 tsp each of ground ginger and turmeric*

*12 tsp of ground cardamon*

*12 tsp of ground red pepper (not paprika)*

*12 tsp of cinnamon powder*

*Pinch of mustard seeds*

Combine all ingredients. Store in an airtight container in a dark, cool place for up to two months.

### **The curry**

*1 cauliflower, cut into florets*

*8oz frozen soya beans*

*1 red onion, finely diced*

*1-2 cloves of garlic, crushed*

*Half a bunch of coriander, chopped*

*1-2 tbs olive oil*

*1-2 tsp home made curry powder*

*2 tbs of plain yogurt*

1. Boil cauliflower and soya beans for 4-5 minutes until cauliflower starts to soften.
2. Heat oil in pan, then gently fry onions, garlic and spices for 2-3 minutes until vegetables soften and brown.
3. Add cauliflower and beans and cook for a further 3-4 minutes, stirring regularly.
4. Add chopped coriander just before cooking finishes.
- 5 Remove from heat and stir in the yogurt to serve.

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My mum has been through the menopause relatively painlessly, but she eats well, has lots of interests and is looking forward to her years in the 'wise woman' phase of her life. Chinese medicine celebrates this phase of a womans life as a time for her to

congratulate herself on all she has achieved, to take stock and to adopt a more gentle role now that she has raised her children and they no longer need her in the same way. Typical of Western Meds to make a big show and dance of it and see it as something negative which needs 'fixing'.

- Sarah, Hull, 16/3/2009 11:07

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Some years ago some recipes (including one for cake) were published in the Mail that helped with the menopause. Does anyone have these recipes?

- Sara, London, 16/3/2009 10:33

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I've tried a lot of remedies but nothing has helped with the hot flushes which I've suffered from for 10 years. I cannot take hrt. Has anyone found anything that really works?

Gwyn, I've also suffered with facial hair and the only thing I can suggest is to look into either laser hair removal or electrolysis.

- Sara, London, 16/3/2009 10:28

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This is all a bit negative!

I found the meopause cured my acne and my greasy skin and hair.

It also fixed my monthly migraines and gave me more room in my handbag as I no longer need to carry tampons/towels.

I had very few hot flushes, and some mood swings (which make sure my husband and sons now treat me with a bit more respect!)

- Jean, Huddersfield ,West Yorks, 16/3/2009 10:04

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I went through the menopause three-and-a-half years ago and found that a combination of eating healthily, being active, managing stress and taking a supplement containing soy isoflavones,black cohosh, red clover, agnus castus, wild yam and dong quai, helped to reduce unpleasent symptoms, such as hot flushes.

All I'd like to say to women currently going through the menopause is 'hang on in there' - things will get better. The postmenopause is great - no more monthly bleeds or mood swings to contend with!

- Wendy Green, Peterlee, Co. Durham, 15/3/2009 20:44

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Soy supplementation is controversial: soy is hard on the thyroid gland.

After eating a lot of soy milk and tofu daily for a few months, my own experience was that my thyroid switched between under- and over-active. Now I am on daily thyroid supplementation to stabilize it.

I no longer eat any soy at all, if I can help it.

- Jstmytake, Midwest, USA, 15/3/2009 20:29

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