

Nutrition During Perimenopause



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What is Perimenopause?

Perimenopause is the transitional phase leading up to menopause, marked by hormonal changes, primarily a decline and fluctuation in estrogen that causes symptoms such as irregular periods, hot flushes, sleep disturbances, mood swings and changes in weight and bone density. This stage usually begins in your 40s and can last between 2 to 8 years. Perimenopause formally ends once you have gone 12 consecutive months without a menstrual period.

Common Health Concerns

Nutrition and weight concerns are amongst the most common health issues reported during perimenopause. Hormonal fluctuations, especially declining estrogen, causes significant metabolic shifts resulting in changes to body composition, eating patterns, nutritional needs, and the risk of chronic conditions.

Nutrition Concerns

- Decreased metabolism: As estrogen drops, basal metabolic rate slows, making weight gain more likely.
- Muscle loss: Lean muscle mass tends to decrease, making it easier to gain fat mass and harder to keep weight stable or lose weight.
- Bone health: The risk of osteoporosis increases due to changes in levels of estrogen, the bone protective hormone.
- Inadequate intake of key nutrients: Low calcium, vitamin D, folate, iron, and iodine are common, increasing the risk for anaemia, weak bones, and poor immune function.
- Higher cardiovascular risk: Reduced estrogen increases heart disease risk, so focusing on heart-healthy nutrition becomes even more crucial.
- Micronutrient deficiencies: Especially vitamin D, calcium and sometimes iron, B vitamins and magnesium.

Weight Concerns

- Weight gain: Most Australian women experience gradual weight gain between 2-5kg during perimenopause.

- Fat redistribution: Waist circumference and total body fat tend to rise as more fat is stored in the abdomen, increasing the risk for metabolic and cardiovascular disease.
- Difficulty losing weight: Slower metabolism, increased appetite and cravings due to hormonal changes, sleep disturbance, and stress all contribute.
- Emotional eating: Mood swings, poor sleep and stress can prompt overeating or snacking.

Nutrition and Weight Management Strategies

Key dietary strategies include:

- Focus on variety and whole foods: Emphasise a diverse, wholefood, anti-inflammatory diet rich in vegetables, fruits, whole grains, legumes, nuts, seeds, and lean proteins.
- Prioritise lean proteins: Increasing protein intake can help maintain muscle, manage appetite, and may reduce fat gain.
- Get enough calcium and vitamin D: Include calcium rich foods and vitamin D sources to help protect bone health.
- Avoid restrictive eating patterns and diets: Overly restrictive eating or rapid weight loss can worsen nutrient deficiencies, lead to muscle loss and aren't sustainable.
- Limit highly processed foods and excessive alcohol: Excess sugar, saturated and trans fats, alcohol and sodium increase chronic disease risk and make it harder if your goal is to prevent weight gain or lose weight.
- A balanced diet along with regular physical activity, mindful eating, and good hydration provides a strong foundation for maintaining a healthy weight and supporting well-being through perimenopause.

Getting Personalised Nutrition Advice

Perimenopause brings challenges with muscle loss, increased abdominal fat, and higher risk of nutrient deficiencies and chronic disease. Every woman's experience of perimenopause is unique. A balanced diet alongside lifestyle strategies is an important part of this life transition.

Dietary management should be tailored to suit your specific goals, nutrition concerns and food preferences. An accredited dietitian can provide personalised nutrition plans and evidenced based strategies.

Ready to take the next step in your journey? **Book a consultation today** to receive practical, compassionate support tailored to your stage of life and unique needs.