

# Simple Solutions for 6 Symptoms of Perimenopause



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*Eat Better, Live Better, Be Better*



Maybe you have been experiencing symptoms of hormonal imbalance for years, or maybe just a few months. You've tried your favorite diet and exercise routine, attempting to force your body into submission. Anything to feel better, sleep better, and look better.

Your jeans aren't the only things that don't fit anymore. Something has changed and you need a different approach to get different results. The functional nutrition approach is designed to build sustainable health. In my functional nutrition practice, I work to optimize the function of the body's systems through nutrition and lifestyle interventions, laying a foundation for long-term health.

Every day, women come to me in search of solutions for their symptoms of hormone imbalance. They frequently have exhausted all other options and finally understand that they need to build a foundation to support the function of their body's systems. They are ready to commit to self-care.

Ironically, many of the solutions to our modern health ills are simple. They only seem difficult because our modern lifestyle is opposed to a way of living that supports human health. We are sedentary, chronically stressed, overworked, overwhelmed, undernourished, sleep deprived, toxic, and frequently self-medicated. We must change how we live to get a different result.

If you are a woman over 40, odds are you are struggling with one or more symptoms of fatigue, poor sleep, mood swings, bloating, poor digestion, achiness, brain fog, hot flashes, low libido, and weight gain. The odds are even greater that at least one of these is having a severe effect on your quality of life.

In my practice, I help women build the foundations for hormonal health that will sustain them through the years of transition toward menopause and beyond. I recommend the simple steps below to every woman I work with. I've broken it down by symptom so you can quickly implement the simple intervention that is right for you.

In addition to the specific solutions I share below, I always start with a nutrient-dense, whole food diet, low in refined carbohydrates and sugar, generous in unprocessed proteins and balanced with a moderate intake of healthy fats.

Continue reading below to find your solutions for the following...

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## **Fatigue**

For women, experiencing fatigue in mid-life is frequently related to poor sleep and adrenal health issues. The hormonal changes that happen in the 10 -15 years prior to menopause can contribute to sleep disturbances and poor-quality sleep, leaving women feeling drained and yearning for the deep restorative sleep of their youth.

If you are experiencing this symptom and wondering what to do about it, there are a few things that can help but I recommend taking one step at a time. Addressing diet, as I mentioned before, is the place I start with all my clients.

A simple intervention I recommend to my clients is to practice good sleep hygiene combined with mindful deep breathing throughout the day. Deep breathing resets the balance of the autonomic nervous system, reducing stress, supporting adrenal health and oxygenating the blood to re-energize you keeping you awake and alert. Rebalancing the nervous system also helps restore circadian rhythm balance which governs sleep-wake cycles which means better sleep.

Simple Deep Breathing Exercise:

- 1) Breathe in to a slow count of 4
- 2) Hold for a slow count of 4
- 3) Breathe out to a slow count of 4
- 4) Pause for a slow count of 4
- 4) Repeat 6-8 times.

Practice this breathing exercise 2 to 3 times a day, especially when sensing fatigue or stress. As you get better and your lung capacity expands, you can increase the number of seconds for each breath from 4 to 5 to 6 and so forth.

*Examples of good sleep hygiene include: consistent bedtimes, dim lighting and no screen time up to 2 hours before bedtime, a cold-dark and quiet room, avoiding caffeine or alcohol.*

## **Poor Sleep**

It's estimated that 39% to 47% of women in perimenopause experience sleep disturbance or reduced quality of sleep. Falling progesterone and estrogen, stress, challenges to adrenal glands, thyroid and gut health can all play a role in poor sleep after 40.

Sleep is the primary way that our bodies heal and restore. When you don't get adequate sleep or your sleep quality is poor, your body cannot restore and heal properly leading to further health problems.

As I said before, sleep disturbances and reduced quality of sleep are common to women over 40. If you are one of these women and you are here, you need a solution. In my practice, I want to offer quick relief to women whenever possible. When sleep is an issue, there are a few options to consider.

Nutrition and deep breathing, as outlined above can help greatly, but add to that an important mineral that promotes relaxation and calm and you just might find yourself sleeping like a baby.

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My go-to for most women I work with is magnesium. Magnesium aids the relaxation process by activating the parasympathetic nervous system that is responsible for getting you calm and relaxed. It also regulates the hormone melatonin, which guides sleep-wake cycles in your body.

Most Americans no longer consume enough dietary magnesium to meet their daily needs. It is required for more than 300 biochemical reactions in the body. It is involved in transmission of nerve impulses, body temperature regulation, detoxification, energy production, and the formation of healthy bones and teeth. When you consider also that stress depletes magnesium, it is a no-brainer to try this simple mineral supplement to promote healthy sleep for women of any age.

Leafy green vegetables are high in magnesium and should be included in the diets of most women. As an added benefit, leafy greens are also a source of vitamin C which can support progesterone production as it wanes after 40. Leafy greens are also an important source of B vitamins critical to support detoxification pathways that excrete used hormones from the body.

I generally recommend between 150 mg-350 mg of magnesium in the form of magnesium citrate or magnesium glycinate (or magnesium bisglycinate). If you don't like pills but love a warm relaxing bath, an Epsom salt bath can offer the same benefits (sometimes better). I also recommend avoidance of caffeine, alcohol, sugar, and refined carbs especially in the evening, if you haven't already tried those things.

[This is a popular over-the-counter magnesium](#) that I recommend to clients when they are willing to drink a flavored solution of magnesium or just don't like taking pills. It can also be found in most health food stores and in the healthy living section of your local grocery store.

*\*\* Magnesium citrate is frequently used to treat constipation, so take it easy and slowly titrate the dose to bowel tolerance if you use this form of magnesium.*

## **Mood Swings**

The mood changes of the pre-menopausal years are often characterized by irritability, anxiety and depression. I work with clients dealing with these symptoms daily. The day to day lives of these women are overwhelmed by a reduced ability to deal with things that previously had little effect on them. After entering their 40's—sometimes in their 30's—they find themselves with less resilience and lots of confusion at being stuck on a rollercoaster ride of moods.

Since an overactive stress response is the primary contributor to irritability and anxiety, it is important to eliminate or mitigate as many sources of stress as possible. Since the body responds to all stress with the same physiologic response, identifying and addressing physical, mental and emotional stressors can be helpful.

Lifestyle and diet are just as important when dealing with mood issues and to that end, the first thing that I recommend for all my clients in dealing with mood swings is managing blood sugar. You don't have to be a diabetic to have difficulty managing your blood sugar levels. Many of the women that visit me have poorly regulated blood sugar levels due to irregular patterns of eating, stress, poor diet, high sugar and caffeine intakes.

To support stable moods, start your day with a balanced breakfast that includes a good source of protein, complex carbohydrates and healthy fats. Skip the cereal, breakfast bar, the coffee only

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breakfast, and even the fruit smoothie you think is good for you. Starting your day with stable blood sugars is important not only to energy levels and moods, but it can help you to avoid caving in to refined carb and sugar cravings.

***Here is an example of one of my favorite Balanced Breakfasts:*** Sauté 2 cups leafy greens in ghee & coconut oil combination. Add 1/3 cup of leftover baked sweet potato (diced). Season with a little fresh garlic and sea salt. Topped with 2 poached eggs. Yum!

## **Brain Fog**

Brain fog is not a medical term but is commonly used to describe feelings of confusion, forgetfulness, and lack of focus and mental clarity.

It can be brought on by low thyroid function, dehydration, nutrient deficiencies of B12, vitamin D, or omega-3 fats. I may sound like a broken record, but the foods you eat can have an impact on each of these potential causes of brain fog.

The dietary changes that I have already outlined from the beginning are always the best place to start, but if you have tried these and continue to have symptoms of brain fog, maybe it's time to take it to the next level.

A gluten-free diet trial is often the next step that I recommend in identifying possible gluten intolerance. Gluten, a protein found in wheat, barley, rye and spelt is found in many grain-based foods and even non-grain processed foods. Going gluten-free is not always easy but having an open mind and being an adventurous eater can make this process an educational and enjoyable experience.

I recommend a 3-week trial of a completely gluten-free diet emphasizing the inclusion of nutrient dense foods to bolster nutrition, as well as avoidance of the often low-nutrient gluten-free food substitutes on the market. Many commercially prepared gluten-free foods are made with refined starches and are heavily processed. They frequently don't live up to the quality and characteristics of the food you might be attempting to replace. So, they are disappointing for the most part.

Do yourself a favor and focus on the basics, opting for a variety of vegetables, including dark leafy greens and moderate amounts of root vegetables and winter squash, fruit, unprocessed protein sources, and healthy fats--especially omega-3 sources.

*\*\*If you find yourself lost and confused about where to begin a gluten-free trial, I can help. I offer a 4-week private program to help you navigate the process. [Set up your free 20-minute call with me](#) to find out more about how I can help you go gluten-free.*

## **Hot flashes**

75% of all women report experiencing hot flashes between ages 40-65. Hot flashes may be the most commonly reported symptom of perimenopause when ovarian function is declining. It often comes as a shock and surprise to women who previously only associated hot flashes with menopause.

Hot flashes are caused by a disruption in the body's ability to maintain its temperature within a specific range and it isn't purely an estrogen issue.

We know that hormone therapy is helpful for some women but not for all. Scientists have observed that frequency and duration of hot flashes is related to increased stress, as well as caffeine, alcohol, sugar

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and refined carbohydrate intakes. As I have said before, if those foods are present in your diet and you haven't begun to seriously address them, start there.

One of the simplest interventions that has been shown to have an impact on hot flashes is increasing intake of foods high in isoflavones. Isoflavones are found in unrivalled amounts in soy foods and red clover, however, I do NOT advocate eating soy grown in the US, as 90% of soy grown in the US is genetically modified. I solely recommend Non-GMO and fermented soy foods when including soy in the diet.

Foods that contain the highest amounts of isoflavones are soy (Non-GMO) and red clover extract, and in far lesser amounts chickpeas, alfalfa, fava beans, kudzu. Red clover extract can be purchased in supplement form and as a tea. This may be one of the easiest ways to increase isoflavone intake but remember to **check with your healthcare provider before using any herbal supplement.**

*\*\*I don't recommend red clover or soy for women who have or have had breast, endometrial or ovarian cancers. Red clover is also not recommended for pregnant women, women with estrogen dominance issues, people with liver problems, or women who take birth control pills or blood thinners.*

Daily intake of up to 54 mg of isoflavones appears to be safe. Always pay attention to serving size and dosages on supplements labels. Doses on supplements are not standardized. Never just assume that more is better.

Adding small amounts of Non-GMO soy appears safe but I always recommend clients try stress reduction along with the fundamental dietary interventions I advocate before adding soy to your diet. To validate sources of Non-GMO soy food products on the market, I recommend checking with the Non-GMO project online at <https://www.nongmoproject.org/>

## **Weight gain**

This is the hormonal symptom of perimenopause that perplexes women the most. It has a profound effect on their self-esteem and often affects their social life, leading to increased depression and anxiety.

In my experience, women struggling with mid-life weight gain either give up after trying their usual methods or they over exercise and go on very restrictive diets to get the weight off. These women frequently remain on this merry-go-round for years. The complex choreography of steroid and sex hormones after 40 can keep women off balance and make weight maintenance and weight loss elusive.

The loss of muscle mass is not the only thing that makes weight loss difficult at this stage of life. The decline in human growth hormone (HGH) may have the greatest influence, outside of thyroid issues. HGH declines dramatically after age 30 and appears to remain low for the remainder of the adult life.

Human growth hormone (HGH) acts on many tissues throughout the body. In people of all ages, HGH boosts protein production, promotes the utilization of fat, interferes with the action of insulin, and raises blood sugar levels.

Sleep and exercise are lifestyle factors that influence the production of HGH. Ensuring you are consistently getting 8 hours of sleep nightly and a daily dose of exercise can improve your chances of HGH production in mid-life but research is now indicating that the type of exercise matters.

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High Intensity Interval Training (HIIT) includes short burst exercises at high intensity and has been shown to dramatically increase the production of HGH which is known to increase fat burning. The great news about HIIT is that you don't have to spend hours at the gym. HIIT training can be done with weight lifting exercises, body weight exercises and cardio exercise.

If you are just getting started with exercise, I recommend starting with a short 10-minute, low impact HIIT workout that includes body weight exercises.

[Here is an example of a simple beginner HIIT workout.](#) There are many ways to do HIIT but it is important to find the exercises that work for you, your physical capabilities, and limitations that will help you reach your desired outcome. Always check with your healthcare provider before starting an exercise program.

I hope that I have given you much to think about. Follow these actionable steps to restore hormonal harmony and if you find yourself with more questions and needing further guidance, I would be happy to talk to you to determine how I can help.

To set up your free 45-minute ***Hormonal Harmony Breakthrough Call*** with me, [go here](#) to choose a date and time that works for you. I look forward to hearing from you and learning how I can help you on your journey to hormonal harmony.

**Be Well,**

*Paula Carper*

*Your Hormonal Harmony Coach*