



Easing menopause misery

The menopause can have some unpleasant symptoms but these can be eased by what you eat says London and Berkshire-based Nutritionist Soraya El-Khazen

THE menopause has some horrible debilitating symptoms – most commonly hot flushes, fatigue, headaches, irritability, insomnia, and depression. Many of the women who visit my clinic are more worried about the effect these symptoms have on their daily lives than they are about the more serious symptoms such as osteoporosis, breast cancer or heart disease.

HRT was the usual remedy prescribed by most doctors but due to its proven increased risk of breast cancer it is now being actively discouraged. Nutrition is now being recognised for the relief it can bring from the symptoms that effect the lives of so many women on a daily basis.

Jane (not her real name) is 47 and from Buckinghamshire. She came to see me in April of this year, initially wanting to lose weight but also wanting help with hot flushes, night sweats and extreme fatigue and mood swings. She was obviously in the early stages of the menopause, but was reluctant to start HRT.

First I asked Jane to record her diet over three days. Then I analysed it. Jane needed to regulate her blood sugar levels more. I put her on a Low GI (Glycemic Index) diet. The GI of a food is graded on the speed at which a food releases its sugar into the blood stream. High GI foods, such as refined carbohydrates, will cause a sudden rise in blood sugar level, but a crash soon after that leaving you tired and lethargic. Whereas low GI foods, such as nuts and seeds, give you a



slow release of energy; keeping you active for longer.

Jane's eating habits were preventing good weight loss, so the low GI plan combined both weight loss, while addressing the menopausal symptoms.

For the first three days of this diet plan, she experienced low energy levels and some headaches which is often the case, however. After this, however, she felt a tremendous boost in energy.

This plan also encourages increased consumption of fruit and vegetables which are required to balance hormones levels and help them interact correctly with each other. The menopause is a time when hormone levels are disunited so vitamins are vital.

The other key recommendation for Jane was that she should increase her consumption of essential fats in the form of nuts and seeds and their oils. These also play a role in regulating hormone levels. I use a special recipe of oils that I recommend my patients

take on a daily basis which has had very positive effects – not only for the symptoms of the menopause but also for giving a healthy glow to your skin, aiding hair growth and increasing nail strength.

Eating a lot of fish is also very beneficial – in particular the small, oily ones, such as sardines. In addition I do recommend particular supplements, such as evening primrose oil, that are now being used by gynaecologists due to their recognised positive effects.

After about a month of her new regime Jane noticed fewer mood swings and night sweats.

The final symptom to target was Jane's hot flushes. These were knocking her confidence and consequently leaving her terribly depressed. The hot flushes are decreased marginally by balancing the hormone levels but can be further improved by increasing soya in the diet and by the use of certain herbs.

Jane's new diet was a great success. After only a month on her new regime Jane has noticed fewer mood swings and night sweats. The new diet and supplements have reduced many of her unpleasant menopausal symptoms. Now after three months is hardly troubled by menopausal symptoms and will remain off HRT. ■



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Six steps to ease menopause misery...

Control your blood sugar: If you have 'disglycemia', which means that your blood sugar levels go up and down like a yo-yo, you are more likely to experience fatigue, irritability, depression and hot flushes. The best way to control this is by eating low glycemic-load carbohydrates. I advise my patients to also cut down on sources of sugar and stimulants.

Take more vitamins C and E: Vitamin C actually helps your hormones to work, so when levels are low, 1 or 2 grams per day can help.

Vitamin E is an all-round hormonal helper. A daily intake of 600mg helps vaginal dryness, but it will take a month to start working.

Add the following foods to your diet Eat seeds, such as flax, sesame, and pumpkin, on a daily basis. Their high content of essential fats are vital for balancing hormones and mood.

Soya and red clover: These contain isoflavones, and have been found to if eaten regularly approximately halve the incidence and

severity of hot flushes. So introduce tofu into your diet. It's great with a stir-fry.

Black Cohosh: I have had very positive results with this herb. It helps with hot flushes, sweating, insomnia and anxiety. It also raises Serotonin levels, which relieves depression.

Exercise: Research in Sweden has shown that the more physical exercise that is performed by women the less likely they are to suffer from hot flushes.