

Food and your hormones

Whether it's PMS, perimenopause or menopause, certain foods can help relieve your symptoms.

By May Georgina DeLory



Food choice plays an integral role in physical and mental health. Almost immediately upon eating or drinking, molecules begin to circulate in every cell of your body, producing a myriad of responses in blood, muscle and nerve cells. Many natural health practitioners claim that the foods we eat are so important to our well-being that they can affect hormonal issues, helping or eliminating symptoms of menopause and perimenopause.

Marisha Golla, proprietor of the House of Tea in Toronto, says women in Asia take a softer approach to a woman's transition in life in a variety of ways, using foods and teas for their unique abilities to help manage mood swings, sweating and hot flashes. "I remember my aunt taking belly flower tea," says Golla, who is originally from Sri Lanka. "The water in the king coconut is very body-cooling. To stabilize mood and cool the body, I would suggest Japanese green tea, rooibos tea from South Africa, and evening primrose tea. I would leave out black tea. According to Ayurvedic medicine," she adds, "spinach is very, very cooling."

Dini Petty, Toronto's first female helicopter pilot and a highly successful '80s and '90s Canadian talk show personality, believes that what you put into your mouth to deal with the side effects of menopause is extremely important. [Ste. Anne's Country Inn and Spa](#), which has recently introduced a special diet to address health issues, was the idyllic setting for [Petty's first public talk](#) on the subject of how she resolved her menopause woes with the help of her herbalist.

Some women seem to sail through menopause. [Vegetarianism](#) plays a huge part in life for these women. Many women report that stabilizing blood sugar levels and omitting processed foods and foods laced with artificial colours and hormones from the diet helps with negative PMS and menopausal symptoms. However, there is no one-size-fits-all method when it comes to managing hormone production. One food or group of foods that works wonders for one woman may not offer any discernable benefit for the next woman. It's important to experiment and see what works for you.

Food to help cool the body:

- Black currant and borage oil or tea.
- Papaya: High in vitamins A and C and iron. No sodium content. Excellent liver cleanser and digestive.
- Raspberry: High in fibre and iron and vitamin C.
- Watermelon: High in vitamin C and low in calories, making it an excellent food for people who are watching their weight.
- [Cherries](#) and persimmons: High in vitamin C.
- Broccoli: Excellent source of folate and vitamins A and C.
- Sweet potato/yam: Excellent source of vitamin C and potassium. High source of carbohydrates for energy.
- Brown rice: Excellent source of niacin and magnesium. Moderate source of protein, fibre and zinc.

Foods to help deal with feeling cold:

- Black tea with milk: Excellent source of iron.
- Cardamom, ginger, meats and grains.

Weight management:

- To gain weight, eat grains and nuts for their rich vitamin and mineral content.
- To lose weight, green tea and pu-erh tea are good liver cleansers as is raspberry leaf tea. Boysenberries are high in vitamin C, have good fibre content and are low in calories, as are grapefruit and kiwifruit.

Libido:

- Cardamom is an aphrodisiac.
- Rosemary, other than being a powerful antioxidant, is very good for blood circulation.
- Omega-3, 6 and 9 oils are excellent for circulation.

Stabilize mood:

- Consume foods with B-complex vitamins.
- Green tea.
- Lavender with chamomile and lemon balm.
- Mango: Has been used for centuries to treat depression; it is high in vitamins A and C.
- Jerusalem artichoke is a good source of potassium, iron and thiamine.

Memory:

- Aim for balanced blood sugar levels.
- Eat omega-3 fatty acids from flaxseed oil, oily fish and walnuts.
- Get omega-6 fatty acids from organic, free-range eggs, seeds and vegetables. • Rosemary tea, ginkgo biloba herb.

Fatigue:

- Eat iron-rich foods, cherries, beetroot, and dandelion.
- Tea with ginseng/lemon/ginger/rosemary.
- Asparagus has vitamins C and E.
- Eat brown rice, seaweed, lima beans and mushrooms as well as dark leafy greens.