

# KEY NUTRIENTS IN PERIMENOPAUSE: GUT HEALTH



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**Carbohydrates, fat and protein are all important fuel for the body's needs.**

**Carbohydrates** are broken down into glucose, which can be used for immediate energy, or sent to the liver and muscles and stored as glycogen. Our body draws on these glycogen stores when it needs energy, which helps to spare the amino acids in your muscle tissue from being broken down for energy - thus saving you muscle tissue you worked hard to build. Your body needs this stored fuel for energy, performance in your workouts, and recovery too.

We want to choose our carbs from **fiber-rich, whole food sources** to ensure a healthy gut microbiome and stable energy source.

## **FIBER**

**Fiber** is an important component in whole food carbohydrates that slows the release of sugar into the blood, giving us more steady energy. It supports our healthy gut bacteria and immune system, and supports an optimal digestive flow.

Fiber is a really important part of our diet at every age, but becomes essential starting in **perimenopause** when our cycle becomes erratic, and our hormone levels can fluctuate high to low, causing hot flashes and other uncomfortable symptoms. Fiber in the diet helps bind to excess hormones and shuttle them through the gut and out of the body with regular bowel movements more efficiently, contributing to better balance for us overall.

- **Soluble** fiber attracts water and turns to gel during digestion, which helps slow our digestion down and better regulate blood sugar levels. Soluble fiber is found in oat bran, barley, nuts, seeds, beans, lentils, peas, and some fruits and vegetables. It is also found in psyllium, a common fiber supplement.
- **Prebiotic fiber** is a type of fiber that feeds beneficial bacteria in the gut, promoting a healthy gut microbiome. It's also called "resistant starch," because it "resists" digestion in the upper part of the intestinal tract and reaches the colon intact where it can feed those beneficial bacteria. Foods like seeds, nuts, unprocessed whole grains, green banana, onions, garlic, beans, greens, and cruciferous vegetables are all good sources.
- **Insoluble fiber** is found in foods like wheat bran, vegetables, and whole grains. It adds bulk to the stool and helps food pass more easily through the digestive tract.

## PROBIOTICS

**Probiotics** contain live organisms that support the gut microbiome and can be found in things like fermented dairy products (if you're good with dairy) like yogurt or kefir. They're also found in sauerkraut, kimchi, tempeh, miso and more.

There is a lot of variety in the availability of probiotic supplements (and supplements in general), and what you need individually actually depends on what diversity is lacking in your system currently. So some experimentation (and testing) may be helpful - but don't just rely on supplements alone: include food sources as well.

## ANTI-INFLAMMATORY FOODS

As estrogen and progesterone levels decline, inflammation can rise, increasing many symptoms of perimenopause like joint pain, mood swings, and sleep disturbances. Anti-inflammatory foods rich in things like omega-3 fatty acids, antioxidants and phytonutrients help balance things out and reduce overall inflammation.

**Omega-3's** support the body's inflammatory response, which is activated when we work out. They also help protect our blood vessels and our brain from inflammation, support mood regulation, our sleep, and our temperature regulation. As our hormone levels fluctuate and gradually decline in perimenopause, we frequently deal with things like hot flashes and internal temperature disruption. Ensuring your diet contains this essential nutrient can be really beneficial. Some great food sources include salmon and other fatty fish, flax seeds, chia seeds and walnuts.





**Fat** in general helps fuel our muscles for low to moderate intensity activity, so the daily energy we expend doing regular activities like walking and moving around, and any exercise performed at or below 65% of our aerobic capacity.

Our body digests the fat we eat and uses it for immediate energy or stores it for later in the fat cells. It uses your stored fat for fuel in low impact activities, sparing your amino acids from being broken down in your muscle tissue. Our body also uses fat for hormone production, brain function, and helping to absorb certain vitamins, like A, D, E, and K.

Healthy fat in our meals is also very satisfying, and can help us feel full when we include it in balance with the other nutrients. It is more than twice as nutrient dense as carbs or protein, so a smaller amount goes a long way. It might be the oil you're cooking your veggies in, or it might be the natural fat that is present in the protein source you're having. Fat also helps slow gastric emptying, which is a fancy way of saying it slows down how fast food exits our stomach. This is helpful in keeping our blood sugar levels stable, which prevents insulin spikes that can trigger fat storage.

We become more insulin sensitive starting in perimenopause, so it's important to pay attention to whole foods that help support blood sugar regulation.



## MORE ANTI-INFLAMMATORY FOODS:

- **Berries:** berries like blueberries, strawberries and raspberries are rich in antioxidants, minerals and vitamins.
- **Tart cherries:** along with their anti-inflammatory compounds, tart cherries are also a natural source of melatonin (which helps regulate sleep) and antioxidants.
- **Leafy greens:** leafy greens like collards, spinach, kale and more are rich in minerals and vitamins and antioxidants.
- **Turmeric:** turmeric contains a compound called curcumin, a potent antioxidant, anti-inflammatory, antimutagenic, antimicrobial, and anticancer agent.
- **Ginger:** gingerols (the main bioactive compounds in ginger) have anti-inflammatory properties. Ginger is known for its antioxidant benefits, aiding digestion, and reducing nausea.
- **Dark chocolate (70% or higher):** a great source of antioxidants, minerals and flavenols, which support blood pressure regulation and blood flow to the brain, plus good cholesterol levels.

## Other Important Nutrients in Perimenopause:

- **Calcium:** helps to reduce bone loss, alongside Vitamin D.
  - > *Example food sources: dairy products (milk, cheese, yogurt, etc), leafy green vegetables, certain fish with bones (sardines, salmon), fortified foods (i.e. soy, almond based products, rice based products, cereals)*
- **Vitamin D:** needed for the absorption of calcium. Also needed for bone health, blood sugar regulation, immune health and mood.
  - > *Example food sources: rainbow trout, salmon, tuna, herring, sardines, milk, yogurt, fortified foods, mushrooms (depending on their exposure to natural or UV light)*



- **Magnesium:** supports overall metabolic health, bone density, supports sleep, muscle tissue, mood and more.
  - > *Example food sources: avocado, legumes and seeds, almonds, cashews, brazil nuts, peanuts, dark green leafy vegetables, beans (lima, black eyed peas, navy, black beans), pumpkin seeds, edamame, salmon*
- **B12:** supports thyroid balance, energy regulation, cognitive function and mood regulation.
  - > *Example food sources: fish, meat, poultry, eggs, milk, and other dairy products. Some fortified foods like certain breakfast cereals and nutritional yeast.*
- **Selenium:** supports thyroid health, protects cells from oxidative damage, immune support.
  - > *Example food sources: Brazil nuts, seafood, meat, poultry, and organ meats; grains and dairy products contribute to selenium intake; the amount of selenium in plant-based foods can vary depending on the selenium content of the soil where they were grown.*
- **Zinc:** supports immune system balance, stabilizes estrogen receptors, stimulates hormone production, supports bone health
  - > *Example food sources: shellfish (especially oysters), meat (beef, pork, lamb), poultry (dark meat), nuts and seeds (almonds, cashews, pumpkin seeds), legumes (chickpeas, lentils, beans), dairy products, and fortified cereals.*
- **Iron:** helps to alleviate fatigue and brain fog, supports overall health. Heme iron, found in animal products like red meat, poultry and fish, is more easily absorbed by the body. Non-heme iron, found in plant-based sources like leafy greens, beans and fortified cereal is also important for iron intake.
  - > *Example food sources: meat (Beef, lamb, and pork), chicken and turkey (especially dark meat), liver (especially beef or chicken), tuna, salmon, eggs (especially yolks), legumes (beans, lentils, peas), dark leafy greens, nuts and seeds, some fortified cereals and grains*
- **Vitamin C:** antioxidant properties, supports collagen production, supports the immune system,
  - > *Example food sources: oranges, lemons, strawberries, raspberries, blueberries, kiwi, pineapple, guava, cherries, cantaloupe, red and green peppers, broccoli, tomatoes, Brussels sprouts, potatoes*



## COLLAGEN

You might also consider adding more nourishing **bone broth** into your daily meals, or using a **collagen supplement** to support the gut lining and the intestinal epithelial cells that help your body absorb nutrients and support a healthy immune system.

As we age, we don't produce as much collagen, and we need it for the health of our joints, skin and bones - but also the cells that line our intestines for good gut health. Aside from aging, a lot of people don't have enough collagen due to a poor diet. Your body can't make collagen if it doesn't have the building blocks - the amino acids - to create them.

When your body synthesizes collagen from the amino acids in the protein rich foods you eat like meat, beans and dairy products, it also uses vitamins and minerals like Vitamin C, zinc and copper. Those are also part of a typical healthy diet.

We can use bone broth, gelatin or collagen powders to help provide the body with what it needs. If you're using a powdered collagen, use a hydrolyzed collagen like mine ([Full Body Collagen](#)), which is broken down to the smallest particle so our body can more easily absorb it. It's also very useful, because it has no taste or smell, and can be dissolved in any liquid.

Want to learn more about your gut and your hormone balance in perimenopause? [Listen to this podcast!](#)





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