

Supporting Your Immune System

There are a number of things that impact our immunity but the key ones are: how we deal with stress, what we eat, and improving our gut health. Focus on these three as the first step rather than defaulting to supplements immediately.

Nourish your body with food

While we enjoy food for what it is, what we eat eventually makes it to our cells to power everything our body does. What we eat, matters! Absorption of nutrients happens in the intestine, so the health of our gut matters. Eating a well-balanced diet, that contains enough energy, protein, unsaturated fat and fibre to support immune function.



Zinc

Zinc is involved in DNA replication and cell development. Our immune system is made up of many cells, which require DNA. If we don't get enough zinc the efficiency and breadth of our immune system may be compromised. Zinc can also behave like an antioxidant, neutralising harmful free radicals and minimising inflammation.

The 2008/9 New Zealand Adult Nutrition Survey found nearly 40 per cent of men and 11 per cent of women don't meet their recommended dietary intake (RDI) for zinc.

How much do you need?

| | |
|---------------|----------|
| Adult women | 8mg/day |
| Adult men | 14mg/day |
| Pregnant | 11mg/day |
| Breastfeeding | 12mg/day |

Food Sources

| | | | |
|-------------------------------|-------|-----------------------------|-----|
| 3 fresh oysters (45gm) | 13mg | 2 slices of grainy bread | 1mg |
| 100gm lean beef | 4mg | 1 cup milk | 1mg |
| 1/2 cup mussels | 2mg | 2 eggs | 1mg |
| 100gm chicken breast | 1.5mg | 1/2 cup cooked rice | 1mg |
| 1 cup chickpeas | 1.5mg | 2 tablespoons pumpkin seeds | 2mg |
| 2 tablespoons roasted peanuts | .5mg | 2 tablespoons cashews | 1mg |

Vitamin C

Vitamin C supports the immune system by acting as an antioxidant, neutralising free radicals from causing oxidative damage in the body. It is a water soluble vitamin therefore passes through the body quite easily and is not stored. For this reason vitamin C should be consumed regularly. There is an increased requirement for vitamin C in those with increased oxidative damage such as endurance athletes or smokers.

How much do you need?

| | |
|---------------|-----------|
| Adult women | 75mg/day |
| Adult men | 90mg/day |
| Pregnant | 85mg/day |
| Breastfeeding | 120mg/day |

Food Sources

| | | | |
|-------------------------|------|----------------------------|------|
| Half a cup red capsicum | 95mg | 1/2 cup fresh strawberries | 49mg |
| 3/4 cup orange juice | 93mg | 1/2 cup cooked sprouts | 48mg |
| 1 orange | 70mg | 3/4 cup tomato juice | 33mg |
| 1 kiwifruit | 64mg | 1/2 cup cooked cabbage | 28mg |
| 1/2 cup green capsicum | 60mg | 1 medium baked potato | 17mg |
| 1/2 cup cooked broccoli | 51mg | 1/2 cup cooked spinach | 9mg |

Vitamin D

Vitamin D has many roles in the body including supporting the immune system. Vitamin D is a fat-soluble vitamin that is naturally present in a few foods, added to others, and available as a dietary supplement. It is also produced endogenously when ultraviolet (UV) rays from sunlight strike the skin and trigger vitamin D synthesis.

How much do you need?

| | |
|-----------------------|-----------|
| Adult women | 600IU/day |
| Adult men | 600IU/day |
| Adult women >70 years | 800IU/day |
| Adult men > 70 years | 800IU/day |

Food Sources

| | | | |
|------------------------------|--------|------------------------------|------|
| 1 tbsp Cod liver oil | 1360IU | 1 egg | 44IU |
| 85g Rainbow trout | 645IU | 85g liver, beef | 42IU |
| 85g Salmon | 570IU | 85g tuna in springwater | 40IU |
| 1/2 cup UV exposed mushrooms | 366IU | 40g cheddar cheese | 17IU |
| 1 cup fortified milk | 120IU | 1/2 cup portabello mushrooms | 4IU |
| 2 Sardines | 46IU | 85g chicken breast | 4IU |



Harness stress

- Try a 10-30 second cold shower to feel alive and reinvigorated with this interesting way to build resilience toward stress.
- Get moving! Regular, small bouts of activity ("snacktivity") radically reduce our stress levels and regularly pump feel-good hormones through our body.
- Try something new and challenging; exhilaration not only brings joy and satisfaction but may strengthen our immune system.
- Practice regular microbreaks where your brain is able to mindlessly wander. Thirty seconds a few times a day is all it takes.



Improving gut health

The microbiome that lives in your large intestine is like the guide and trainer of your entire immune system. Because that's where the largest number of bugs live. About 70% of your immune system is in your gut to help decide friend from foe. If our gut is healthy, our immune system will be strong.

Try these tips to improve your gut health:

- Fibre - increase the amount of plant foods you consume across the week (aim for 30+ different types!) and aim for 2 serves of fruit and 5+ serves of vegetables a day.
- Fermented foods - try small amounts (start with 1-2 tsp per day and gradually increase) of kefir, probiotic yoghurt, kimchi, kombucha etc



Manging Perimenopause and Menopause

What is menopause?

Menopause is the natural end of ovarian function that happens in women. The average age for menopause in Aotearoa is 51, but menopause can happen any time between 45 and 55, and it can also be induced by surgery or cancer treatment. Once we're in menopause, the levels of oestrogen in the body have declined to levels similar to what we had as pre-pubescent girls. Progesterone and testosterone also naturally decline. Menopause is technically just one day; the day one year after your last menstrual period.

What is perimenopause?

Perimenopause is all the time leading up to that day. During perimenopause – which can happen as early as the late 30s – the levels of reproductive hormones start to fluctuate – sometimes quite wildy – and this is what can cause many of the symptoms we associate with this life stage.

What are some treatments to consider?

There are many ways to treat the symptoms of perimenopause. There's no one solution and no magic pill! In general, many of the things we do for our general wellbeing will be useful in managing menopause symptoms as well.



MRT or hormone replacement therapy. This is a well-researched, safe and very effective treatment for the main symptoms of menopause, especially hot flushes, mood and brain issues, sleep issues and genitourinary syndrome of menopause or GSM. The risk is very low if you're a healthy woman who starts treatment before the age of 60 or within 10 years of your last period. Talk to your doctor about how this works and whether it's right for you.



Diet and supplements. There's no magical menopause diet, but there are lots of changes we can make to the way we eat to help us feel good. A heart-healthy diet alongside a diet high in anti-inflammatory foods is beneficial. It may be beneficial to include soy foods. Caffeine and alcohol can make some symptoms worse, so reduce where necessary. Maintain appropriate intakes of calcium and vitamin D.



Exercise. This is amazingly beneficial for almost all symptoms of perimenopause and it's also protective of future health. Move regularly and incorporate strength training if you can for strong muscles, bone, heart, and brain.



Eat less higher fat foods. Low carb and keto-esque diets are not friendly for weight management in menopause. Get your dietitian or nutritionist to develop a sustainable, satisfying dietary plan for you that focuses on lower fat, high protein, and wholesome grains.



Include plant proteins several times a week. Plant proteins like legumes, tofu, edamame, and soy milk contain phytoestrogens and other powerful antioxidants that 1. help support the decline in reproductive hormones; 2. reduce the severity of menopausal symptoms; 3. help reduce inflammation and weight gain. Small amounts are safe for all women.



Get enough protein at each main meal. Ensure you have a good source of protein at each meal time. Good sources of protein may come from animals (egg, chicken, meat, fish), plants (lentils, tofu) or be a dairy food (milk, yoghurt, cheese). Insufficient amounts of protein can increase sugar cravings, make us less satisfied and contribute to overeating.



Quality over quantity. To successfully manage the body composition changes that can happen during menopause, the quality of food we eat matters more than the number of calories we consume. Radically restricting our calories will not be sustainable and may inhibit our body from releasing excess weight.



Change success measures. The scales are notoriously incomplete when it comes to body composition changes in menopause. Rather than using the scales, rely more on changes to your waist circumference. Similarly, a body composition analysis can often tell you much more information about how the weight is distributed on your body, so that you're targeting abdominal fat, rather than muscle or bone mass.

Improve Your Sleep



Expose your eyes to natural light in the morning.

This helps to regulate your wake and sleep cycles. Try eating breakfast outside or have an early morning walk without your sunglasses on. At lunch time also aim to get outside.



Aim to get at least 7-9 hours sleep each night.

Keeping to a consistent bed time and wake time is really helpful.



Get your room right for sleep.

Try to keep your bedroom around 18 degrees, make it as dark as possible, and use an alarm clock rather than relying on your phone. A great eye mask can help too!



Minimise screen and device use before bed.

Reduce blue light exposure and mental stimulation. Instead try reading, meditating, listening to a podcast.



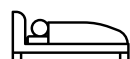
Be informed not consumed.

Manage the amount of bad news you tune into and focus on looking for the good in the world.



Clear your head.

Write things down before you go to bed to get things out of your head. Ideally do this in a room that isn't your bedroom so you don't associate your bed room with your brain dump/download.



If you wake in the night, be sure not to check the time!

Get out of bed and go to another room where it is dark, read or do something relaxing. Return to bed when you're sleepy.



Check your alcohol intake and caffeine fix.

Too much can compromise the QUALITY of your sleep. Aim for less than 400mg caffeine per day and try decaf or herbal tea in the afternoon. If you want to drink alcohol in the evening, the guidance is to stop four hours before bed.

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Create positive changes that last.

If you want to make it easier to live a healthier life, boost your mood and create new healthy habits to help you keep on track, Claire's planner is what you need!

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