

menopause: a lifestyle guide



WELLFEMME • WOMEN'S HEALTH SERVICES



EMBRACE

*“Live like the woman you deserve to be,
and so you will be.”*

— Dr Kelly Teagle, WellFemme Founder



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"REFRAME" MENOPAUSE

Around menopause women often get confused about why the things they've always done to look after themselves don't work anymore. It's true: physiologically we are not the same after menopause. Midlife is a prime time for re-evaluation in many areas of our lives. This Menopause Lifestyle Guide is designed to help you keep your postmenopausal health priorities in focus.

REFRAME Menopause

The acronym "REFRAME" is a great way to describe key health priority areas to consider in menopause and beyond. It stands for:

- **R**ecognise the signs and symptoms
- **E**xercise
- **F**ood
- **R**elationships
- **A**ttitude
- **M**ental Health
- **E**xpert advice



R: RECOGNISE THE SIGNS AND SYMPTOMS

Menopause is normal, but different for every woman. No matter what symptoms you have or how you experience them, it's YOUR experience.

Menopause is a normal physiological life-stage, defined as having no ovulations (and hence no periods) for 12 months. 80% of us will get some unpleasant new symptoms along the way, some barely any but others will get the whole shebang. Of those who get symptoms around 1 in 5 women report them as being moderate to severe.

The most common symptoms include hot flushes or night sweats, mood changes, sleep disturbance, muscle and joint pains, vaginal dryness and sexual or urinary issues.

It's important to understand that you can still get menopause-related symptoms well before your ovulations finally stop. In fact, some women get them many years earlier. If symptoms are accompanied by persistent changes in your menstrual cycle, this is called Perimenopause.



E: EXERCISE

Two important things happen at menopause that should guide your exercise and dietary choices from here on: heart disease risk starts to rise, and bone density starts to drop. Both are linked to a decline in estrogen, amongst other things.

The Importance of Cardio

More women die of heart disease than almost any other cause. To help offset the rise in heart disease risk it's very important to focus your exercise on getting your heart rate and breathing going faster. Improving cardiovascular fitness usually requires higher intensity exercise rather than longer duration.

One or two short bursts of intense exercise daily, even just 5 minutes, will go a lot further towards improving your cardiovascular fitness than an hour of comfortable walking. Jogging, running and skipping are common examples.

If you have a condition that limits your activities though (such as arthritis) you might need to get creative about how to up the intensity. A bike is fantastic for doing 30-60 second interval sprints. If getting outdoors is an issue you can even prop up the back wheel on a training stand to turn it into an exercise bike.

Other great low-impact cardio fitness choices include swimming, cross-fit trainers and rowing machines.



E: EXERCISE

Make an Impact and Bone Up

You can lose up to 20% of your bone density in the five years after menopause. Combat this bone loss by making sure to **get some impact into your exercise routines**. You don't need to be madly jumping up and down until you wet yourself, just get some light jolt forces going through your skeleton. Some activities will build and retain bone better than others, as this article demonstrates. Another easy bone-booster is to step up onto the bottom step of your stairs and jump lightly back down about ten times daily.

Strong, not Skinny

Try to also include some strength training in your routine. As we age it's much harder to maintain muscle mass, which is active metabolic tissue that burns calories 24/7. Staying strong keeps your bones strong and protects against falls and fractures.

In case you still need any more convincing about the benefits of exercise, it's also protective against dementia. Check out this factsheet from the CogDrisk site for more information and a dementia assessment tool.



HIIT it!

You can do short intense exercise sessions at home with no special equipment that will tick all the boxes: cardio, strength and impact. It's known as HIIT, or High Intensity Interval Training. Don't let the name put you off; HIIT is an easy, effective way to meet your menopause exercise needs in a time-efficient way.

Here's a simple HIIT program example to get you started in just 10 minutes a day:

- Pop on some music with a beat that makes you want to move. This should be fun!
- Start with 3-5 minutes of cardio interval sprints (ie. 30 second sprint, 30 seconds' rest) on a bike or trainer, skipping, hill walking, jogging, dancing... whatever makes your heart race.
- When your heart's pumping swap to 30-second exercise stations such as fast squats, wall press-ups, situps, tricep dips, handweights or Therabands... whatever you like. Mix it up to include various muscle groups.
- Choose 5 strength exercises, swapping every 30 seconds and then repeat them (5 mins total).
- If you need to get your heart rate back up do some more cardio sprints.

Aim for 5 minutes in total of cardio interval sprints and 5 minutes of strength exercises, and that's your 10mins done!

For more HIIT ideas check out these videos:

- Dr Michael Mosely, from ["The Truth About Getting Fit."](#)
- [Lucy Wyndham's 4-minute HIIT workout.](#)



F: FOOD

Why Do We gain Weight at Menopause?

Declining estrogen around menopause has a range of effects which can increase weight and heart disease risk. Firstly, we are burning less calories because:

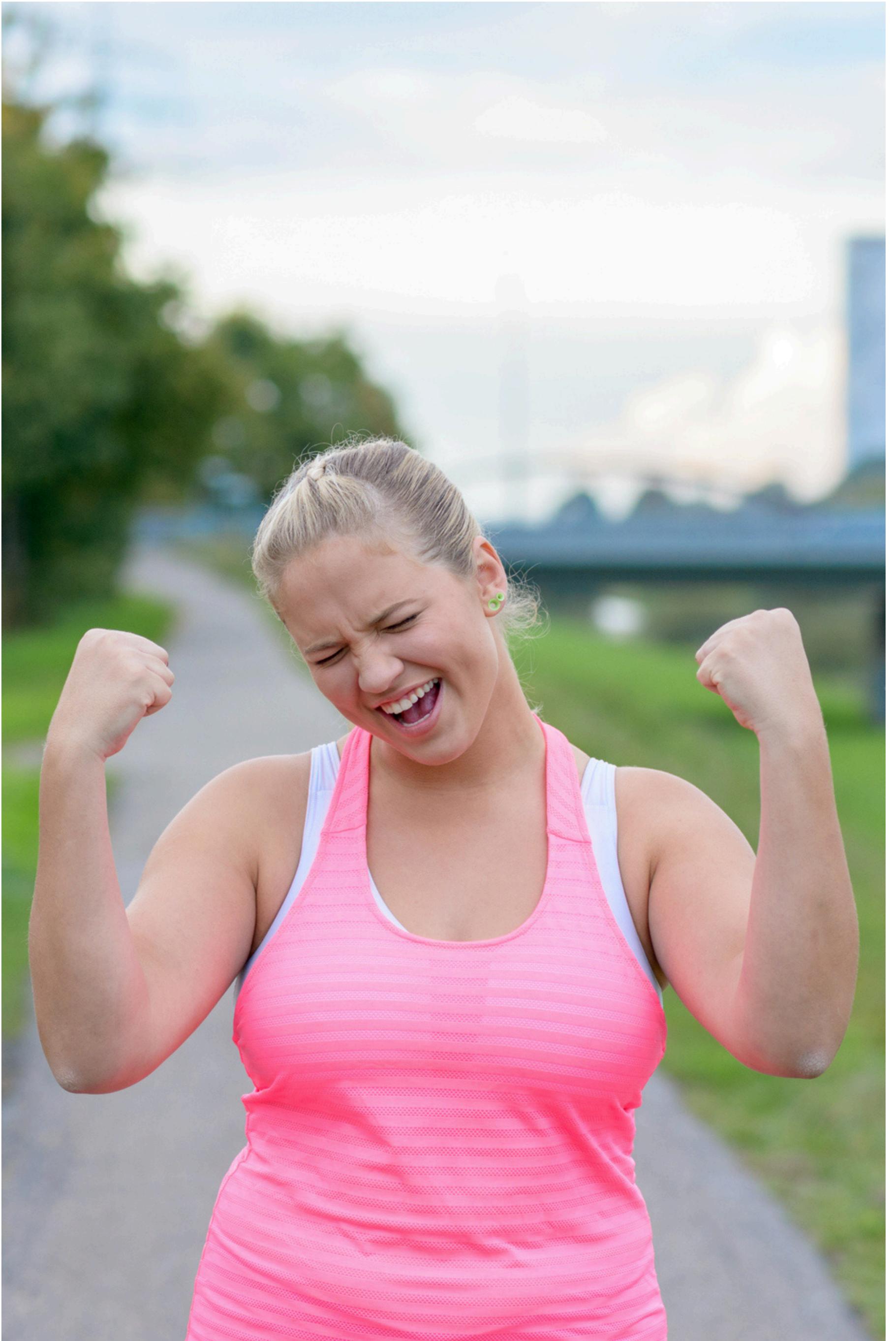
- Women (on average) reduce their activity levels by around 50% after menopause,
- Muscle mass declines so we have less calorie-burning tissue, and
- Metabolism slows.

This process happens gradually, but if we keep eating the way we always have, weight begins to accumulate. Most women don't adequately reduce their calories or portion sizes to compensate for lower calorie burn. Adding insult to injury, extra post-menopausal weight tends to accumulate centrally around our organs, which further increases heart disease risk.

How to Eat Right At Menopause (and Beyond)

The basic principles of healthy eating after menopause are:

- Eat less calories overall,
- Focus on good calcium intake and general nutrition,
- Try to follow a Mediterranean Diet, and
- Check your "Macros"; we need more protein and less carbs.



F: FOOD

Get Set for Success

If you're not yet menopausal and are overweight, now's the time to really get serious about weight loss. Entering menopause at a healthy weight puts you in a great position to maintain it over the coming decades, which will be hugely powerful in reducing heart disease risk as you age. It is possible to lose weight after menopause, but it will generally be more difficult.

For more information about exercise and food around menopause check out our Blog posts: [Diet and Exercise After Perimenopause](#), [Weight Loss After Perimenopause](#) and [How to Beat Weight Gain at Menopause](#).

You can also join our free **"Cheer Squad" Facebook community** for healthy lifestyle information and support.

Could you be at risk of chronic disease and ill health in older age? To find out, try our **"Future Health Forecast" Quiz**.



F: FOOD

Nutrition after Menopause

Very few Australians eat in accordance with recommended nutritional guidelines. If we did there would be hugely reduced rates of diabetes, heart disease, obesity, cancers, and other chronic diseases.

Our bodies are less efficient at absorbing nutrients as we age, but we still require the same amount of nutrients so what we eat has to be more nutritionally dense and less calorie dense. Eating this way also lets you eat bigger portions of food, so you feel fuller with less calories. It also helps in losing weight or preventing weight gain.

How Good is Your Nutritional Intake?

Take the Healthy Eating Quiz to compare your nutritional intake to the Australian healthy eating guidelines.

The quiz is linked to the "No money, No time" recipe planning site, which ties in with quiz's recommendations.



F: FOOD

The Link Between Diet and Mental Health

Mental health issues are incredibly common around perimenopause, with women 3x more likely to have depression at menopause than pre-menopausally. The Jean Hailes article "Foods for your future health" quotes studies demonstrating that a Mediterranean diet is linked to higher psychological resilience, ie. coping better with stress"

"The Mediterranean diet is rich in natural wholefoods, with a particular focus on vegetables, as well as olive oil, fruits, legumes and wholegrains... In this study, consuming high amounts of antioxidants present in these foods and including a large variety of fruits and vegetables was associated with higher mental resilience and stress-coping ability."

A Mediterranean diet has also been shown to reduce risk of heart disease, type 2 diabetes and some cancers. That leads us to...



F: FOOD

Eating for Heart Health

Heart disease and dementia are the equal highest killers of Australian women. A Mediterranean diet is not only protective of your mental health, it also is protective against heart disease.

Other key strategies to improving heart health are:

- Decrease saturated fats, increase monounsaturated fats
- Increase soluble fibre in your diet such as oats, barley and psyllium which can reduce cholesterol, and
- Eat high fibre/wholegrain for optimal nutrition and bowel health.

Eating for Bone Health

Bone density drops sharply with the estrogen decline at menopause. Calcium intake is important for bone health. Good sources include dairy (such as milk, yoghurt and cheese), sardines or salmon (with the bones in). Calcium is also found in vegetarian/vegan-friendly food such as calcium-enriched tofu, soy, almonds and broccoli.

Vitamin D helps uptake of calcium; if you are dark skinned, vit D deficient or don't get much sunlight a vit D supplement might be helpful.



F: FOOD

Iron

Perimenopause often brings frequent or heavy periods (menorrhagia), which can lead to iron deficiency. If you have menorrhagia ask your doctor about getting your iron level tested.

Ways to improve your iron levels include lean red meat, or eating green leafy vegetables with a carbohydrate and some vitamin C to boost its absorption. Avoid eating your iron-rich foods or taking iron supplements with tea or calcium-rich foods such as dairy, as they inhibit iron absorption in the gut.

Soy

About one-third of women may get some improvement in their menopausal symptoms from eating soy – these are the women with the right type of gut bacteria to process it into the required molecules.

Protein

Quality lean proteins help build and retain lean muscle mass, and can help you feel full at meals. Protein also contains zinc which is protective against mood disorders and is important for brain functions like memory, learning and concentration.



R: RELATIONSHIPS

If we only focus on physical wellbeing during this transitional stage of life, we're missing a huge part of the picture. Midlife is an amazingly dynamic time, with changes occurring in many areas of our lives:

- Parenting role: kids more independent, leaving home (or bouncing back)
- Caring role: parents becoming elderly, dependent or dying.
- Work role: more/ less responsibilities, facing retirement
- Partners: divorce, re-partnering or facing life alone.
- Sexual and physical changes with ageing impact on self-image

Humans are social creatures, and our quality of life is intimately linked to the quality of our relationships. Take the time to reflect on whether you are appropriately prioritising relationships with your partner, friends, family, community and yourself.





A: ATTITUDE

There has been a tendency, particularly among youth-obsessed Western cultures, to deny or hide ageing.

Older women can feel “invisible”, and believe that society does not value their skills, experience or opinions. Thankfully we are entering a new age of menopausal enlightenment; the tide is turning.

Never in history have women been so assertive or well-informed. Older women increasingly hold positions of power and respect in corporations and communities. They proactively seek out information and demand services. Enlightened companies now recognise their buying power and actively target more goods and services to mature female consumers. It’s a great time to be older, wiser and more self-assured.

Most of all, stay proactive and future-focused. Our brain’s plasticity (ability to remodel itself) persists into old age, stimulated by learning and adapting to new things. Change is growth, and “use it or lose it” is definitely true when it comes to your brain.



A: ATTITUDE

Celebrate the Positives

Rather than focusing on what's being lost at menopause, shift your attention to what's being gained. Celebrate the wisdom, confidence and insights you've gained throughout your life.

In a practical sense there are many reasons why menopause can be an empowering time. It's different for each of us, but the changes it brings can include:

- Freedom from periods and sanitary products
- Financial security
- Reduced childcare responsibilities
- Time to pursue goals you never could before
- The joys of Grandparenting
- Travel opportunities
- Confidence borne of wisdom and experience
- New or deepening relationships, with self and others
- Letting go of obsessions with youth and beauty



M: MENTAL HEALTH

Perimenopause is a time of increased risk for the development of mood symptoms including anxiety and depression. Hormonal fluctuations around perimenopause can definitely be a contributor but they usually aren't the only cause. Other contributing factors can include:

- Past mental health issues, eg. postnatal depression, anxiety
- Family or relationship problems
- Caring for ageing parents or high-needs family members
- Work stress
- Poor physical health, chronic pain or disease
- Lack of exercise
- No time for self-caring and reflection
- Other perimenopausal symptoms, like hot flushes
- Drug and alcohol dependence
- Negative perceptions of ageing, body image and sexuality
- "Empty nest" grief
- A perceived lack of purpose or meaning in life



M: MENTAL HEALTH

It is difficult to separate out all the possible causes of a woman's mood symptoms, therefore effective treatment demands a wholistic approach. All the contributing factors need to be considered and addressed. The treatment plan may include:

- Counselling or psychological therapies
- Relationship or sexual counselling
- Online education and electronic resources
- Meditation, mindfulness, relaxation therapy
- Exercise
- Reducing alcohol and other drugs
- Treatment of other medical issues
- Improved diet
- Development of hobbies and other meaningful activities
- Medication

Your GP can help guide you to an understanding of your particular issues and connect you with the resources you need to treat them. It may even be possible to treat hot flushes and mood symptoms at the same time with a single medication.

Check out our Blog post and Webinar about [Mental Health Issues Around Menopause](#), this fact sheet about [Mood and the Menopause](#) from the Australasian Menopause Society, and this extensive [guide to electronic mental health resources](#).



E: EXPERT ADVICE

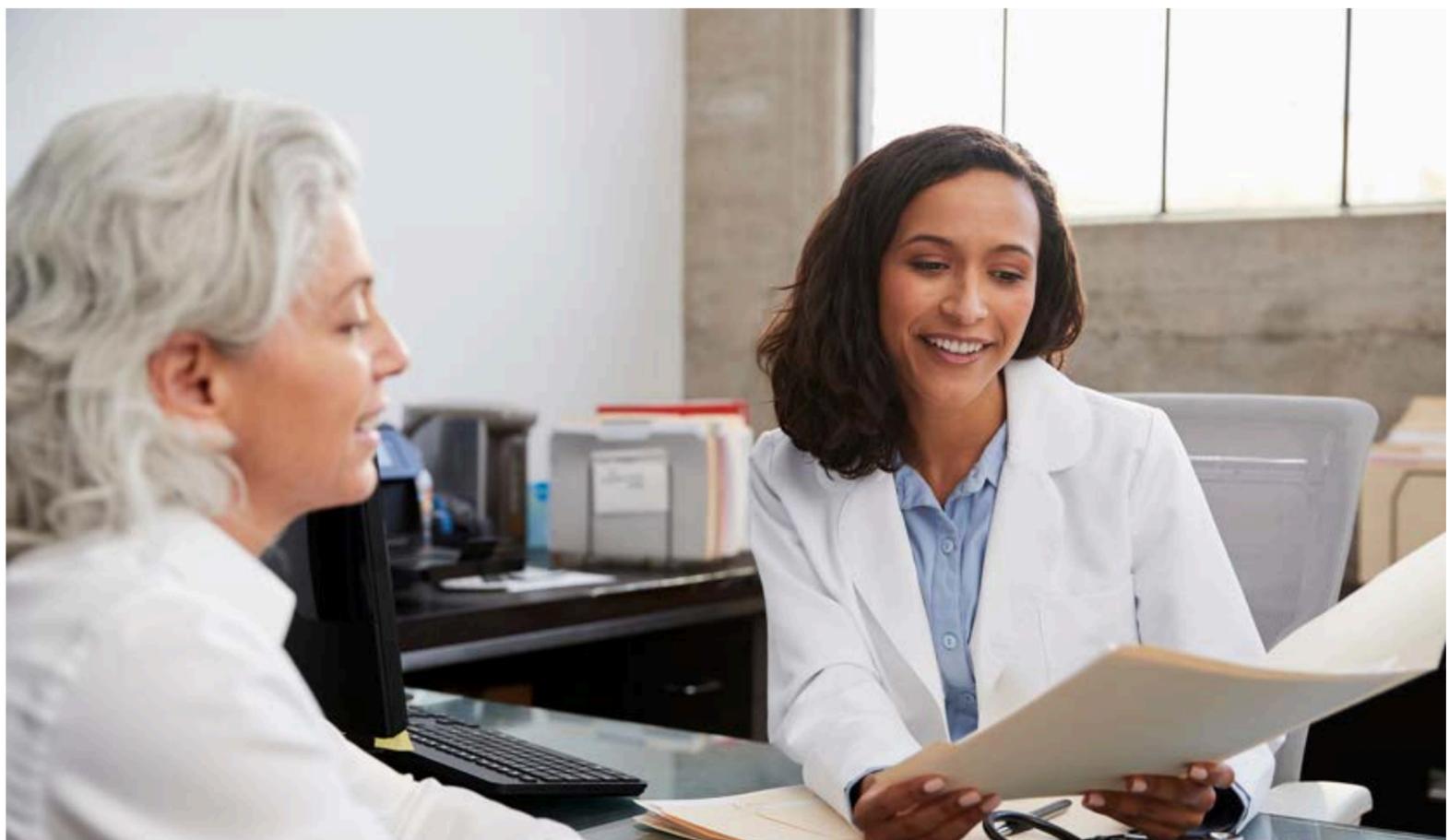
Check in for Check-ups

Menopause has many implications for future health as previously mentioned. At midlife it's more important than ever before to work closely with a trusted health professional. If you don't already have a good a GP, now's the time to find one!

Cardiovascular and osteoporosis risk factors should be measured, monitored and optimised. Chronic conditions must be well managed to maintain function and best quality of life. New symptoms and mental health issues should be discussed promptly with your doctor for early intervention, before they get out of hand.

WellFemme's "Checkup checklist" to discuss with your GP:

HEALTH ACTIVITY CHECKLIST
Cardiovascular risk assessment, including: -blood pressure, cholesterol, LDL, HDL, Triglycerides and fasting blood sugar level -Smoking? -Body Mass Index (weight/ height) -Family history of heart disease or strokes -Alcohol intake and other drug use
Osteoporosis risk assessment, including: -family history -calcium intake -history of minimal trauma cone fractures -Chronic diseases or medication use -Early menopause -consider a bone density scan
Cervical screening (5 yearly if negative)
Mammogram/ Breast ultrasound (2 yearly) Breast self-examinations (recommended monthly)
STI Check
Lifestyle assessment- Diet, exercise, etc
Mental health assessment



E: EXPERT ADVICE

Don't "Put Up With" Debilitating Menopausal Symptoms

There are many misconceptions surrounding menopause. Fear, embarrassment and misinformation prevent women from discussing it or seeking treatment. This deprives them of opportunities for symptom relief, better quality of life and ongoing health benefits.

There is a pervasive "grin and bear it" attitude towards menopause within our community. Women often express the belief that they "should be able to get through it naturally", even whilst experiencing debilitating symptoms. But why? If safe, effective treatment is available to relieve your symptoms and make your life easier – with potential long term health benefits – why WOULDN'T you want to try it?

If you need a startpoint to work out what options might be available to manage menopausal symptoms, try our free online [Menopausal Health Assessment Tool](#).



E: EXPERT ADVICE

Find the Expert Menopause Help You Need

Seeking help to improve your life and health is a strength, never a weakness. A doctor who is experienced and knowledgeable about menopausal treatments can assess your individual symptoms and medical issues. Through this process you'll be able to make well-informed choices for symptom treatment and best future health.

It can be difficult to find a health professional with expertise in managing menopause though. Even excellent GP's can't know everything. They may lack knowledge about treating menopausal symptoms, particularly in more complex cases.

Added to this, people living in more remote areas rarely have a choice about which medical professionals they see. Now expert menopause care is available by Telehealth however, so women can get the specialised help they need regardless of where they live.



CONCLUSION

Live Long and Prosper!

We hope that this little “REFRAME” has helped you see all the possibilities for a fabulous post-menopausal life.

Your life, body, mind and spirit will be irrevocably altered by your menopausal transition. You will never be quite the same, but your “new normal” could be richer and more fulfilling than you ever dreamed possible.

We are what we believe, so believe this: you are a fabulous, unique creature with amazing potential for growth and change.

Live like the woman you deserve to be, and so you will be.



ABOUT WELLFEMME

“Many women simply can’t access quality menopause care, especially those living in rural and remote areas. To those women I’m proud to say that WellFemme is here for you. Our personalised, evidence-based treatment plans are available to all Australian women, wherever they live. Now any woman can access the menopause care she needs from her own home or office.”

-Dr Kelly Teagle, WellFemme Founder & Menopause Practitioner

WellFemme is a Telehealth service provided by General Practitioners who specialise in menopause and midlife care. We offer evidence based peri/ menopause information, advice and treatment in collaboration with our clients' regular General Practitioners.

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