

Lifestyle and behaviour changes for menopausal symptoms

Many women are interested in the potential of lifestyle and behaviour changes to manage their menopausal symptoms. Unfortunately, the clinical evidence for the effectiveness of lifestyle changes is mixed and limited.

If your symptoms are bothering you, your doctor can explain how specific lifestyle changes might suit your situation. Everyone should consult their doctor before embarking on lifestyle and behaviour changes and this is especially important if you have menopausal symptoms.

Lifestyle changes

Maintain healthy weight

Women often ask their doctors about menopause and weight gain. It is a myth that menopause causes weight gain and in fact the opposite is true – evidence suggests that weight gain can make your menopausal symptoms worse.

Ask your doctor for exercise and dietary advice to suit your situation. General principles of a healthy diet include consuming:

- 6300 to 6700 kJ (1500 to 1600 calories) per day to maintain weight
- 5450 to 5900 kJ (1300 to 1400 calories) per day to lose weight
- three main meals and two protein-containing snacks per day
- smaller portions
- more oily fish such as salmon, trout, sardines, mackerel
- less meat
- less fat and sugar.

Exercise regularly

Exercise may not directly help your hot flushes and night sweats, but it can help to maintain healthy weight and this can decrease the severity of your symptoms.

Exercise has many mental and physical benefits and builds more muscle mass. This extra muscle burns more energy even

MAIN POINTS

- Many women wonder if lifestyle and behaviour changes can help with menopausal symptoms.
- Studies have shown mixed results for lifestyle changes, so speak with your doctor if you have any questions.
- Maintaining healthy weight might be helpful as there is evidence that weight gain can increase the severity of menopausal symptoms.
- Some evidence suggests yoga can help menopausal symptoms. Other activities such as exercising, breathing and relaxation practices or controlling environmental temperature might not necessarily help your symptoms, but they can help with your overall sense of wellbeing.
- Cognitive behaviour therapy (CBT) can improve wellbeing and decrease the impact of menopausal symptoms.
- Hypnosis might give you some benefit, but there is no evidence that acupuncture, magnetic therapy, reflexology or chiropractic interventions help menopausal symptoms.

when you are resting. Exercise can also help reduce the risk of osteoporosis, a possibility for some menopausal women.

You will get the best benefit if you incorporate three types of movement into your day:

- aerobic activity for heart health – climbing stairs, walking the dog and gardening all help to build more movement into your day
- flexibility training such as stretching, yoga or pilates improve both flexibility and balance
- strength training helps to build bone and muscle and can include simple body weight exercises you can do at home. Get advice from your doctor before lifting heavy weights.

Everyone should visit their doctor before starting a new exercise program. For more ideas about exercise, see the AMS information sheet *Lifestyle advice for healthy ageing*.

Control your environment to improve cooling

Common sense changes to your environment can help to make you more comfortable, even if such changes do not directly decrease your symptoms.

If you have any concerns or questions about options to manage your menopausal symptoms, visit your doctor or go to the Find an AMS Doctor service on the AMS website.

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Lifestyle and behaviour changes for menopausal symptoms continued

Changes you can make include:

- adjusting clothing
 - dress in layers
 - wear sleeveless blouses or tops
 - wear clothing made of natural fibres that breathe
 - avoid jumpers and scarves
- using a hand fan or electric fan as required
- keeping cooler at night
 - lower the room temperature
 - put a cold pack under the pillow
 - turn the pillow over to the cool side when feeling warm
 - use dual control electric blankets
 - use a bed fan that blows air between the sheets
- drinking cool liquids such as iced water.

Avoid hot flush triggers

If you have noticed that some triggers can increase the frequency or severity of your hot flushes and night sweats, avoiding these triggers might help.

Triggers include:

- spicy foods
- smoking – a risk factor for hot flushes
- alcohol – can trigger hot flushes and you might find your flushes improve if you avoid alcohol

Mind- and body-based therapies and practices

Cognitive behaviour therapy

Group and individual cognitive behaviour therapy (CBT) can help you to change unhelpful ways of thinking, feeling and behaving. Studies suggest CBT can help you cope with the impact of menopausal symptoms while also increasing your wellbeing.

Yoga, breathing practices and relaxation

While all of these practices can help with wellbeing, only yoga has been shown in some studies to improve menopausal symptoms and sleep.

Other therapies

Hypnosis

Studies have shown varied results, but a recent trial suggested that hypnosis might help with hot flushes and sleep.

Acupuncture

A large Australian trial recently showed that acupuncture has no benefit for menopausal symptoms.

Magnetic therapy, reflexology, chiropractic interventions

Studies have not shown that any of these therapies help women with menopausal symptoms.

What are the other treatment options?

If your symptoms are bothering you, your doctor can help. Your doctor can tell you about the changes in your body and offer options for managing your symptoms. Other treatment options include:

- Menopausal Hormone Therapy (See AMS fact sheet – *What is MHT and is it safe*)
- Complementary therapies (See AMS fact sheet – *Complementary medicine options for menopausal symptoms*)
- Non-hormonal prescribed medications (See AMS fact sheet – *Non-hormonal treatment options for menopausal symptoms*).
- Cognitive behavioural therapy for menopausal symptoms (see <https://www.womens-health-concern.org>).

Information for your doctor to read includes AMS Information Sheets:

- *Combined menopausal hormone therapy*
- *Oestrogen only menopausal hormone therapy*
- *Non hormonal treatments for menopausal symptoms*
- *Complementary and herbal therapies for hot flushes*

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