Perimenopause Journey

Jo Rowkins, Nutritional Therapist

Welcome to the Perimenopause Journey.

Thanks for joining and congratulations for committing to your own selfcare.

The perimenopause is a time in every woman's life that should be honoured. It's a journey, just like puberty, that has a profound effect on how a woman feels. These hormonal transitions can be honoured and cherished if only we can create a safe and nurturing space for the transitions to occur.

That's what I'm attempting to do here with you. Let's honour ourselves and our hormonal journeys. Just like any other journey, there may be ups and downs and unexpected diversions, as well surprises along the way. I believe that all women, regardless of the stage in their own hormonal journey – whether just starting out in puberty, in the middle of child baring years, or transitioning through perimenopause – deserve to take care of themselves, honour their hormonal cycles and understand how to take good care of their bodies.

Life is a journey, let's live and enjoy every moment...

I'm honoured to be facilitating this journey with you.
Love Jo.

Jo Rowkins,
Nutritional Therapist & Lifestyle Coach at Awakening Health.

I hope you're ready to start a month (and beyond) of hormonal health. You're about to embark on a month of a low carb, relaxed Paleo-style diet that focuses on fresh, real foods as close to nature as possible. You'll be enjoying an abundance of non-starchy plant foods, quality protein and healthy fats, alongside foods that specifically support female hormone metabolism, such as cruciferous vegetables, broccoli sprouts and fermented foods.

In a nutshell...

This programme focuses on a low level of carbohydrates, with most of the carbs coming from vegetables and a few fruits, with limited grains, moderate healthy fats like extra virgin olive oil, good levels of lean protein and elimination of all sugars.

When you cut out refined carbohydrates, sugar, wheat and alcohol, what you actually end up with is an abundance of healthy foods that support the body's hormones and biochemistry. Sugar is definitely your number one enemy if you want hormonal balance, sustainable energy, restful sleep, weight loss and optimum health!

We'll also be working through other areas that support the perimenopausal journey including moving more, sleeping well and taking care of yourself better than ever before.

A Full 360 Degree Approach

Perimenopause is a journey that requires support. I suggest strongly that you check-in with yourself to find out what you need TODAY, not what a younger version of yourself needed previously. Don't get frustrated with a diet or exercise regime that no longer works for you like it once did. I encourage you to stop and listen deeply to what your body needs RIGHT NOW.

I'm going to help you with that. Nutritional requirements for perimenopausal women are different from what your younger self required.

We're going to take a full 360 degree view of the perimenopause. We're going to look at what foods you need to eat to combat stubborn weight gain, hot flushes and brain fog, as well as other uncomfortable symptoms you may be experiencing.

Supporting the hormones involves keeping blood sugar levels balanced, providing optimum nutrition for the body's systems, such as the thyroid and adrenal glands, as well as providing support for the liver and digestion for effective metabolism and elimination of hormones.

We're also going to prioritise selfcare practices, commit to improving our sleep, detox our environment, support our stress response and ensure our inner voice is our best friend and cheerleader, instead of a harsh critic. All of these need to be given equal attention, alongside the diet, to create a truly holistic approach.

The information in this course has been designed to incorporate all of these areas and to help you create your own unique balance.

So, let's get started....

Key Aspects Of The Programme

1. Prioritise self-care. Self-care is the most important lifestyle step you can take towards supporting a smooth hormonal transition. Whatever time you normally allocate for self-care, double it! (I hope you already have some self-care practices in place). Now is the time to nurture your body and mind for a sense of calm, harmony and balance. Choose what works for you. It may be getting into nature, soaking in an Epsom salt and lavender bath, practicing yoga, meditation or Tai Chi, or it may be listening to relaxing music, drawing, reading, talking therapies, spending more time out in the daylight, or cooking yourself a nourishing meal. There are many ways you can take better care of yourself. Choose whatever leaves you feeling calmer, happier and more balanced.

2. Follow the perimenopause diet. We'll be following a low carb, relaxed Paleo-style approach with healthy fats to support blood sugar balance and hormones.

3. Eat within an 8-10 hour window. Eating within a time-restricted window has been proven to support metabolic health, cardiovascular health, sleep, longevity, weight balance and the body's natural circadian rhythm. These benefits become possible when we allow our bodies to stay longer in a fasted state than a fed state. Eating withing an 8-10 hour window, will allow a 14-16 hour overnight fast, e.g. if you eat breakfast at 9am, your last meal will be between 5-7pm. Find out what works for you.

4. Eat 3 meals a day and avoid snacking. This will support your blood sugar balance which is vital for supporting the hormonal transition. Eating a low carb diet with healthy fats and quality protein allows your body to recognise its true hunger signals, instead of having to keep constantly feeding sugar cravings. If you are hungry between meals, eat more fat at each meal and make sure your meals are big enough to satisfy you.

5. Regular Epsom salt (magnesium) baths. Magnesium supports restful sleep and aids the body's stress response. It's known as "nature's tranquilliser" for good reason. Magnesium is needed for over 300 chemical pathways in the body, including those involved with hormonal health. As magnesium is well-absorbed through the skin, taking regular magnesium baths is an enjoyable and soothing way to increase intake.

6. Pay attention to your sleep hygiene. Regular quality sleep is crucial for a smooth hormonal transition, yet often sleep disturbances are the first symptoms to appear during perimenopause. Make your bedroom a restful, clutter-free zone. Ensure it's dark and not too warm. Switch off devices before 7pm and consider using a Lumie Clock to provide a simulated sunset and sunrise for sleep and waking. Create a bedtime ritual to condition your body for sleep, e.g. a warm magnesium bath followed by a relaxing chamomile tea.

7. Detox your life. Use the "Detox Your Life" handout to see how you might be able to remove toxins from your daily life. Switching to natural cosmetics and skincare products and avoiding plastics is crucial for hormonal support, as many of the synthetic chemicals in these products are EDCs (endocrine disrupting chemicals). In addition, reducing your overall toxic burden helps take the pressure off your body's hardworking biotransformation processes.

If you're currently suffering from common perimenopausal/menopausal symptoms such as weight gain, insomnia, achy joints, hot flushes, mood swings and brain fog, it's likely that you are eating a diet high in carbohydrates. If you're eating toast or cereal for breakfast, sandwiches for lunch, pasta or potatoes at dinner, with a couple of snacks of pastry, sweet foods or fruit in between, and alcohol in the evenings, you are eating a high carb diet that will be aggravating your symptoms.

The way you're going to eat during the next 30 days (and hopefully beyond) will be a low carb diet packed with vegetables, moderate protein and healthy fats. You'll be eliminating sugar, starchy foods, gluten, wheat and alcohol. The best approach is to limit grains, beans and legumes, as these are starchy. I have placed a daily limit of 50g on selected grains and legumes. I realise that this may be hard for some people, so listen to your own needs and experiment with what your body likes. If you're trying to lose weight, eliminating grains, beans and legumes will give you the best results.

The recipes:
Please read the notes on the recipes as they offer substitutions, and often vegan options.

All recipes included are dairy-free, however do feel free to use grass-fed butter to cook with instead of coconut oil or olive oil.

Please try to avoid cheese. Vegetarians may wish to include it for protein variety, especially if they are wishing to lose weight and follow a lower carb approach (beans & lentils are good sources of veg protein but are also very starchy). If you do eat cheese on the programme, max limit is 1 portion a day, and preferably organic to minimise toxic load. Listen to your body.

Your Perimenopause Plate

1. **Start with a generous serving of protein** (meat, fish, eggs, cheese, or tofu). Go for a serving about the size of a smartphone. Try to choose grass-fed, high welfare meat and free range organic eggs

2. **Add as many non-starchy vegetables as you want**, trying to fill half your plate with these. All vegetables that grow above ground are non-starchy, such as broccoli, cauliflower, green leafy veg, tomatoes, cucumbers, cabbage etc. If you wish to eat carrots, beetroot and squashes, eat them in very small portions as they are starchy. Make 90% of your vegetable intake the non-starchy ones. Eat garlic, onions and ginger, as well as a variety of herbs and spices. Cruciferous vegetables are particularly supportive of female hormonal clearance as they help the liver in healthy hormonal metabolism with a phytochemical called sulforophane. Cruciferous veg include broccoli, broccoli sprouts, cauliflower, kale, cabbage and Brussels sprouts. Other vegetables that contain this beneficial phytochemical include mustard seeds, watercress and radishes.
3. **Include 1-2 tablespoons of fat** (such as butter, coconut oil or extra virgin olive oil) with each meal for cooking or serving. Fat will make those non-starchy veggies taste delicious, so add dressing, drizzle, or dip - enough to feel satisfied.

4. Add herbs, spices and season (sea or Himalayan salt).

Keep things simple

1. Avoid all sugar in all its forms whether that be sugary foods, white refined carbohydrates, natural sweeteners, dried fruits, fruit juice, high sugar fruits, alcohol.
2. Always add protein to meals.
3. Fill your plate with a variety of vegetables.
4. Fill yourself up with healthy fats.
4. Eat only from the list of allowed foods.

Foods to avoid:

- Pancakes, pastries, cakes, cookies, ice cream, and other sugary desserts
- Tropical fruits, dried fruit, grapes
- Soda, fruit juice and sweet drinks
- Breads, pasta, wheat, white rice and cereals, crisps, chips
- Milk (organic cream is ok to use if tolerated)

Whether you choose to make your own foods using the Allowed Foods List, or to follow TheRecipes, get yourself organised so that you know what you're going to eat a few days ahead of time. If you're not following The Recipes all the time, a typical day's food might look like:
Scrambled Eggs and Spinach for breakfast, Big Salad with Tofu and Sprouts for lunch, , Grilled Fish/Meat and Lots of Veggies for dinner
Basically, you want to be filling your plate up with non-starchy veggies and salads alongside a decent protein source. Do not be afraid of healthy fats. Cook with extra virgin olive oil, grass fed butter or coconut oil, add in olives, avocados and raw nuts and seeds too.

Tips For Low Carb Eating

Using vegetables as substitutes for bread, pasta, and rice is a two-for-one special. It not only reduces the carb content of your meal, it boosts the nutritional value as well:

- Use lettuce in place of bread for sandwiches and burgers.
- Shred cauliflower and pan-fry in oil to make “cauliflower rice” for a low-carb rice alternative or as a side dish for meat or fish.
- Cut courgette into spirals to make “courgetti” noodles. Sauté them in butter and garlic, then top with chicken or protein of choice.
- Boil cauliflower until tender, then blend together with butter, cream and salt to make “cauliflower mash” as a side dish. You can do the same with broccoli too – it’s very delicious.

Basic No-Cook Plates

If you're away from a kitchen or not wanting to cook:

- Deli bits like artichoke hearts in oil, sundried tomatoes and olives, cheese, and vegetables with dip make an easy lunch.
- Pre-chop a selection of veg into bite-sized chucks ready to have crudités to hand.
- Boil up some eggs and keep them ready in the fridge to grab for lunch with crudités.
- A can of tuna or salmon with some full fat mayonnaise and vegetable crudités, is a simple lunch. Or put the fish mayo mix into romaine lettuce leaves or chicory leaves and eat as an open "sandwich".
- Tinned fish, like sardines or mackerel, with raw veggies or a salad, are other easy no-cook choices.
- Avocado chopped with mozzarella, cherry tomatoes, fresh basil and olive oil.
- Cabbage slaw with boiled eggs
- Hard boiled eggs, tuna mayo, cherry tomatoes and lettuce
- Cheese, walnuts, cherry tomatoes, olives, salad leaves
- Smoked salmon and avocado with mayo

Get Yourself Ready

I recommend today you clear your cupboards of any foods that are not on the Allowed Foods List, and if you live with others and can't remove these foods, ask them to mindfully respect your choices for the next 30 days.

Most importantly, take your time, be kind to yourself and enjoy the process. Prioritising nourishing your body with healthy food and making a delicious meal for yourself are acts of great self care. Be your own best cheerleader and be mindful of your inner critic. Speak to yourself as you would to a friend - with encouragement and kindness.

I'll keep reminding you that this is a journey of self discovery. Stay present, stay alert and stay mindful of what your own body needs. If you feel a craving or uncomfortable feeling, notice it, accept it and then let it gently pass.

Our inner voices are longing to be heard, not swallowed down again with alcohol and comfort foods. Simply taking the time to stop and listen can be very powerful in understanding the driver behind our cravings and unhealthy habits. It's time to nurture yourself and give your body all the goodness that it needs and deserves.

Once again, I'm honoured to be here on this journey with you. See you over on the group.

Love Jo.
x

Jo Rowkins, Nutritional Therapist & Lifestyle Coach at Awakening Health.