



# *Why Menopause Changes Your Body, and How to Take the Reins*

## **Steering your adaptation**

An essential guide to navigating  
menopausal weight transitions.

**BY SALLY MATHRICK**

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# Welcome to The Sparkle Well School.



I am here to help you nurture your healthiest version of maturity.

The menopausal transition spans between six to twelve years of a woman's life. This period includes:

- Perimenopause
- Menopause
- Post menopause

Referred to as "the climacteric" – climb-act-eric.

Climacteric is a great word to describe this time, when our internal climate changes - yes, hot flushes! – but so much more. It's a time of change in which we acclimatise and adapt to a new way of being.

Maybe you're noticing changes in your body that feel out of your control? This short guide will help you understand some of what's happening, and provide practical tools that help restore balance, vitality, and confidence.

The climacteric is a time of great shifts and transformations on many levels.

One shift is our shape. Often women shift from pear shape to apple shape with a ballooning of their bellies, boobs and bums, and everything in between! Others women may gain additional centimetres of padding around the entire body. For others, there is significant weight loss.

Shifts in weight are due to a raft of interrelated reasons that vary for each woman, but there are some common drivers we can understand to help us adapt and shift into the new hormonal profile we are graduating into.

In this guide, you'll learn 3 key challengers driving menopausal weight changes. When you know why, it's easier to know how and what to do. Plus you'll get 4 simple strategies to help naturally boost your metabolism, increase your energy, and shift your mindset to embrace this stage of life with greater vitality and confidence.

If you like this approach and information, you will love **Shape Your Menopause Program**. Shape Your Menopause is a 12-week, guided, educational transformation that empowers and encourages women to step into their softness and strength; to develop their post-menopausal zeal.

Well wishes,



# Challenges driving menopausal weight gain

## #1 Hormone shifts and changes

The climacteric is essentially a period of adjustment and adaptation.

The ovaries wind down their maturation and release of monthly eggs, slowly closing the door on our capacity to bear children. This sophisticated, life stage, development alters sex steroid hormone levels in the blood.

Hormones have a large influence on how our bodies function. Most notably in menopause, estrogen and progesterone, but other hormones also shift, including Anti-Mullerian Hormone, Inhibin-B and Follicle Stimulating Hormone.

### **Menopause is like a multi-hormone orchestra tuning to a new key.**

Instead of sex steroids coursing through our blood, other parts of the body produce sex steroid hormones to be used locally. This process was called intracrinology by Professor Labrie in 1988. We're still figuring out the complex enzyme construction pathways that are occurring (it's amazing, and a bit mind boggling).

For climacteric women, this local production of hormones occurs throughout the body, including the brain, blood vessels, bones, breasts and fat cells. These cells produce hormones – most notably estrogens but also progesterone and testosterone - to influence in a similar, but gentler, way.

A key building block needed to build sex steroid hormones in these cells is a compound called De-hydro-epi-androsterone (DHEA). DHEA is produced by the adrenal glands. Levels of DHEA reduce with age, and are also lessened when we experience high levels of stress.

We are not clear on all the details, but we know that fat cells produce different hormones that significantly impact how we roll through menopause.

### **In Menopause, it's like fat cells become little estrogen factories!**

## #2 Lowered metabolic rate

We use less energy sitting around when we're in our 40s and 50s, than we used sitting around in our 20s and 30s... and in our 20s and 30s we were less likely to sit around!

The basic amount of energy our body uses for general function (breathing, sleeping, body organs functioning, rebuilding and breaking down cell parts etc.) is a level of energy called our Basal Metabolic Rate (BMR). In menopause, our BMR tends to lower.

**A lowered metabolic rate (BMR) means that we can eat the same food as before, but put on weight!**

Factors that can contribute to lowered metabolic rate include:

- **Less muscle mass.** When we don't use our muscles, aging humans tend to lose more muscle mass than younger humans. Less muscle mass leads to lower metabolic rate.
- **Less energy produced.** You might remember mitochondria from year 10 biology – the squiggly organelles that produce energy? These energy factories can run into issues during the climacteric.
- **Struggling thyroid functioning.** The sensitive thyroid gland, sitting either side of the windpipe, can get a bit sluggish when it is missing essential nutrients, polluted by heavy metals, suffering autoimmune disease, or out of whack due to excessive stress. When it is underfunctioning, our metabolism slows.

When we feel tired, we're less able to work those muscles, and we find ourselves in a vicious cycle of weight gain without any energy to exercise.

*Get more support and direction in Shape Your Menopause Program!*



### #3 Poor sugar control

During the climacteric, eating foods containing refined carbohydrates more quickly lead to fat accumulation, because of changes in the way our body manages blood glucose.

The ZOE Predict study analysed over one thousand women's blood glucose regulation. They compared pre-menopausal women to post-menopausal women eating the same foods, and found that the post-menopausal women had:

- 6% higher blood glucose
- 5% higher HbA1c (an indicator of blood sugar exposure over time)
- 4% more inflammation (GlycA)

These results suggest that sugar, from foods high in refined carbohydrates, stays in the blood at higher levels than desired, for longer after menopause.

The ZOE team concluded that the combination of lowered estrogen and refined carbohydrates (sugars), leads to higher blood sugar levels, which overtime contributes to insulin resistance.

Insulin resistance is when cells are less efficiently responding to insulin's message to bring glucose into the cell. This results in higher concentrations of sugar in the blood.

This can lead to:

- Damage to blood vessels walls due to the prolonged high blood sugar levels. When glucose makes it into the cells from the blood, it gets stored as fat. This happens more when refined sugars are consumed at night.
- Challenges the pancreas gland that produces insulin. All hormone secreting glands are very precious and must be protected, particularly as we age.



Insulin resistance is considered to be a pre-diabetes state.

Thus, during the menopausal transition it is important to be aware of your blood glucose management.

**Tap your inner sweetness and let go of refined sugars all together!**

# Actions and attitudes to control menopausal weight gain

## Action # 1: Eat plant estrogen and plant protein-rich foods.

A key source of these is soybean products. These include organic miso, tofu, tempeh and edamame beans. Choosing certified organic ensures they are not genetically modified.

Soybeans are rich in plant estrogens, aka phytoestrogens. These plant compounds can act in the body as a gentler form of the “locally-made” estrogen that’s produced in post menopause. Eating phytoestrogens reduces the levels of estrogen produced by fat (and other) tissues (Lephart, 2015), giving our little fat factories a rest.

Phytoestrogens can be more suited to women who have ceased bleeding, than for women in the fluxes of the perimenopausal rollercoaster, but everyone is different. Try including them every day. These plant compounds have many additional health benefits too!

## Action # 2: Nourish your adrenal glands.

Adrenal glands are the hormone producing glands that cap both kidneys. This is where the building blocks for sex hormones, DHEA, is made. To support the adrenal glands you need to prioritise deep rest and hearty connections with things that fill you up, and avoid the things that drain you out (easier written than done!).

Dietary improvements and herbal supports can be nourishing too.

## Action # 3: Boost your metabolic rate.

There are many ways to improve your metabolic rate. Here’s a few:

- Support mitochondria to produce energy. This includes providing all the B-complex vitamins each day.
- Get a proper assessment of your thyroid function. Discuss with your health practitioner.
- Use and feed your muscles regularly to build and strengthen them.



# Attitude adaptations

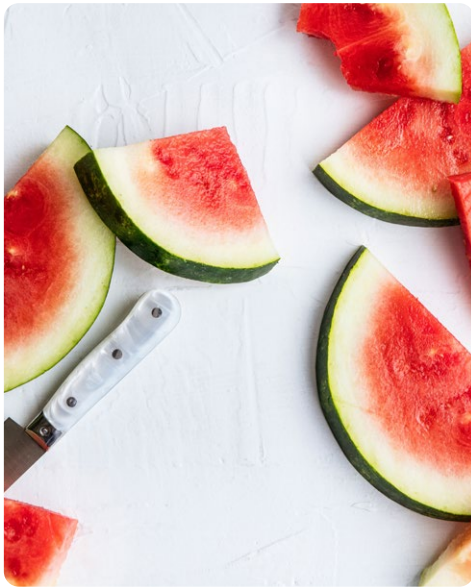
Caring deeply and catering to the needs of others is a hallmark of the “oestrous decades”. The hormonal cascade of the menstrual cycle, particularly nurturing-estrogen and being-loved-oxytocin, compels us to look after everyone - often to the exclusion of ourselves.

With menopause, this compulsion to care for others excessively starts to wane. One joy of the menopausal process is that we start to care less about what others think of us. **As one mid-life lady says “I don’t have enough estrogen for that.”**

It can be unsettling, but ultimately, it’s revolutionary.

Here’s some approaches to support a healthy transformation process:

## Attitude Adaptation #1: Lose the word “lose”.



The words “lose” and “loss” connote feelings of deprivation, neglect, waste, failing and missing out. Our brains are wired for pleasure and enjoyment. We don’t want to stay with negative tasks for too long; we want to focus on juicy, fun, pleasurable ones.

Instead of “dieting to lose weight”, shift your focus to “eating to nourish” a vital, rich and juicy body, and life.

The Minnesota dieting experiment demonstrated how severe restriction was unbalancing for the psyche. Shifting your approach from restriction and denial to pampering and deeply loving is crucial, particularly if, like most modern women, you’ve had a history of dieting and chronic underappreciation of your body.

**Most of us have spent decades on some or other kind of diet. Enough already!!!**

This isn’t about cutting loose and scoffing down a double chocolate cream doughnut or two, it’s about framing the process as a positive.

The approach is **self-love**, not self-loathe.

It's important to recognise and erase the automatic, subconscious resistance embedded in the phrase "lose weight". Replace this with phrases and ideas that describe what you gain.

For example:

- Filling yourself with vital, fresh, colourful, flavoursome, juicy food
- Feeling centered, easeful, and confident in your core
- Enjoying freedom of movement in your skin, and clothes
- Nourishing strong bones, muscles, organs, and whole body
- Connecting to self, nature, animals and people that are harmonising and nourishing

Try swapping negative words like "lose" or "too fat" with "**fabulous**". Fabulous weight. Fabulous belly. Fabulous thighs.

Or "**gorgeous**", "**luscious**", "**strong**", "**sexy**", "**sophisticated**" or whatever is fun for you.

Gather your energy and point it in the direction that YOU want for your menopausal transformation.

## Attitude Adaptation # 2: Choose from Want Power, not Will Power

Another cerebral tweak is to connect you to your true desires; your "why", your purpose and unique spark, and tap the innate motivations of your wise self.

If you make decisions with your purpose in the front of your mind, you'll find that your choices, whether actions, foods or thoughts, will all lead in your preferred direction.

This begs the question, what is your purpose? You might be closer to knowing your purpose after all these decades on the planet.

What you *want* is a powerful force when you align with it. It conquers all the unknown *hows*. Also, your *want* has more endurance than your *will*.

When you are clear and standing in the energy of your true wants, your choices are more aligned with them. That choice might be a glass of water and a stroll around the block to reestablish your true needs, and to shake off any "devilish" impulse to eat a chocolate donut, glass of wine, or tap out with some doomscrolling.



Conversely, maybe your reality recently turned upside down, and you feel like your purpose and way of life is whipped out from underneath you. This can happen at mid-life!

Feeling disconnected from your purpose and innate motivations can indicate a need for clearing out, surrendering, and attuning to your new way. **Carve out time to be presence and curious about what's unfolding.** Stay with yourself, connected with the things that nourish you. You will get through it.

If this is super bumpy for you, please reach out for support or services that provide help lines (Lifeline 131 114 or 1800 Respect 1800 737 732).



### **Attitude Adaptation #3: Eat as much real food as you like!**

We're talking about real food here, not "food-like products".

Not sugar infused, refined flour based, trans fats loaded, salt-heavy, artificial flavouring-added, genetically modified, or preservative-ridden foods that come in packets. Not the water-deficient stuff that can be stored on a shelf for years. Not the stuff often wrapped in layers of plastic (but we talk about xeno-estrogens another time). Not the stuff shipped halfway around the world. "Food like products", as I love calling them, are very high in energy and very low in nutrients. High in sugar and fat, low in water, proteins, vitamins, minerals, and plant nutrients. This combo means we eat one, and shortly after, are hungry for another one! They are totally addictive!

**Despite the huge amount of energy, food-like products leave us malnourished!**

It's hard to binge on real food; that is food that is naturally nutrient rich. No real food has high levels of both refined carbohydrates and high fats. Only processed foods deliver that combination.

We now know that carbohydrate metabolism is altered with the menopausal transition (by around 6% according to Zoe Predict study 2022), which means more easily gaining weight around the middle when eating refined carbohydrates.

**Eat real food**; rich in vitamins, minerals, plant compounds (phytonutrients, including phyto-estrogens), essential fats, complete proteins, complex carbs, fibre rich, sublimely flavoured, and ideally grown and sourced near to where you live. This means mostly plant-foods, and mostly vegetables. Also fruits. And legumes. And seeds and nuts. And herbs. And mushrooms. And fish. And seaweeds. And... You get the picture.

**Eating this way expands your flavour palate and hones your culinary skills.** You can explore fresh and dried herbs, spices, salts, and a huge variety of foods. Travel the world with your tongue! In doing so, you provide a wide range of compounds that provide nourishment to your gut, as well as your cells, aiding harmonious function.

Food is, essentially, information for your cells.

**All your cells are undergoing a significant change during midlife, so give them something real to work with.**

## Attitude Adaptation #4: Beware the Chair

If you are like virtually everyone who sits to work, sits to travel, sits to watch TV, as well as to sits eat and chat, start considering how you might reduce your sitting time.

When we sit for extended periods, blood flow returning to the heart slows down, lessening optimal circulation. This sluggish blood flow can pool and “stagnate”, to use traditional medicine terminology.

Thanks to many researchers, it is confirmed that the more hours sitting the greater risk of early death, heart disease, diabetes, cancer, poor cognitive function, depression, and generally poorer quality of life.

In addition, if stressed and sitting, or sitting eating a double chocolate cream doughnut or other ‘food like product’, the levels of fats (lipids) and glucose in the blood stream rise, increasing the risks of developing diabetes and cardiovascular disease further.



Obviously, if you are sitting, it means you are not standing, nor walking, nor moving about. Less movement means less energy used. And less muscles being used, which can lead to loss of muscle mass. We're talking lower level of general energy use means lower metabolic rate, and subsequently, very easy weight gain.

**So, why not set up your life to move more frequently?** Ideally, every 20- or 40-minutes move for 1-2 minutes. Get a standing desk. Walk a few extra blocks when you can. Always take the stairs. Have walking meetings etc.

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## A final word & invitation

Menopause is akin to a second puberty. Fortunately, this time around we're doing it with decades of knowledge and experience.

**It's a time of significant change to a woman's body and mind.**

We don't expect a pre-teen girl and her thirty-year-old self to think and act in the same way. As with adolescence, the climacteric involves us changing our way of looking at things, and our ways of living - including what we eat and how we exercise. The menopausal maturation process comes with changes in patterns, priorities, needs, tastes, etc. It also presents health risks, including menopausal weight gain, that can be controlled.

**If there was ever an opportunity to break out of limiting patterns or that don't serve you, menopause is the best!!**



## Interested in more?

If you liked these insights and approaches, you will love [Shape Your Menopause Program](#). It's twelve-weeks of step-wise actions to create your best menopausal transition. It delivers food as medicine, herbal insights, exercise, lifestyle, and naturopathic medicines for solid, wholistic, evidenced-based way forward.

You are offered three actions a week – a total of thirty-six different insights, considerations, and actions. You try them on, and figure out which to adopt. Join the live group sessions, chat on the community chat, get support via the Sparkle Well School platform, or go solo with the program on-demand.

Shape Your Menopause helps you take the reins of what often feels to be an uncontrollable process. All are welcome!

Shape Your Menopause was devised and delivered by naturopath, author and health educator, Sally Mathrick **with over 20 years of experience** in empowering women to take control of their health. Sally developed Shape Your Menopause Program so you can navigate your unique menopausal transformation with accurate knowledge and confidence.

Shape Your Menopause is about nourishing genuine appreciation and celebrating your unique and important existence, on this unique and important planet (and dropping anything that's not aligned with that).

As a woman experiencing her post menopausal zeal (most of the time!), and immersed in researching and writing a book on menopause for the past five years (to be released this year), I feel lucky to be able to share wholistic insights and support women moving through this important life stage and transformation.

I hope you feel inspired to join me to [shape your menopausal transformation](#).

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Sally Mathrick', with a stylized, flowing script.



*"What's really important at midlife is prioritising healthy body composition. This means taking action to ensure good hydration, strong, flexible muscles and bones, healthy levels of fat and nourished flow through connective tissues. Shape Your Menopause program optimises metabolism, reduces menopausal weight gain and improves overall state of being using effective natural practices. As a group, we share the joys (and challenges) of menopause to help us all to live, as Margret Mead put it, with "post-menopausal zeal".*

*- Sally Mathrick, Naturopath, Author, Health Education*