

MENOPAUSE SOS

Your Mini Menopausal Survival Guide

FELICE GERSH, M.D.

Bestselling author of *PCOS SOS*

With ALEXIS PERELLA

Health Disclaimer

This book contains advice and information relating to health care. It should be used to supplement rather than replace the advice of your doctor or another trained health professional. If you know or suspect you have a health problem, it is recommended that you seek your physician's advice before embarking on any medical program or treatment. All efforts have been made to assure the accuracy of the information contained in this book as of the date of publication. The publisher and the author disclaim liability for any medical outcome that may occur as a result of applying the methods suggested in this book.

Copyright 2020 by Felice Gersh, M.D. and Alexis Perella

All rights reserved. This book or any portion thereof may not be reproduced or used in any manner whatsoever without the express written permission of the publisher except for the use of brief quotations in a book review.

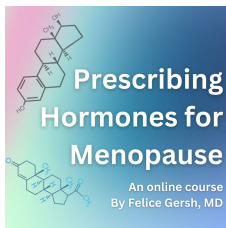
Printed in the United States
First printing, 2020

Integrative Medical Press
4968 Booth Circle, Suite 101
Irvine, CA 92604
United States of America

I'm here for you!

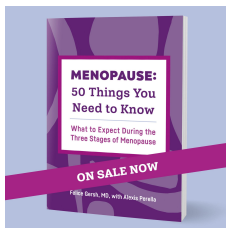
Newsletters,
Social Media,
Youtube...

Never miss an update!



Take my menopause course.

"Thank you for the great program! Arming any woman with this information is important to help get this information out to the masses. Ty!"



Order my menopause book.

"Dr. Felice Gersh's guide to menopause is the straightforward, honest, and practical guide that every woman needs."



Become my patient.

"I just had my first appointment with Dr Gersh. I've been struggling with menopause symptoms & for the first time, I feel I am on a path to wellness."

Contents

Part One: Find your path	4
Welcome	5
What is Menopause SOS?	7
Clinical approaches to menopause	9
What is menopause?	11
My approach to menopause	14
Protocol overview	17
Part Two: The Menopause SOS Protocol	22
The Protocol	23
Light and darkness	24
Time-restricted eating	29
Extended fasting	30
Sleep	33
Diet	35
Supplements	39
Movement	41
Stress reduction	44
Hormone replacement therapy	46
Love and purpose	50
Parting thoughts	52
I'd love to see you!	53

Part One

Find your path





... there are things you can do today that will set the stage for many years of vibrant post-menopausal health to come.

Welcome

Every woman who lives long enough will experience menopause. It is an inevitable transition.

No matter where you are in your menopausal journey, there are things you can do today that will set the stage for many years of vibrant post-menopausal health to come.

Menopause is a condition usually defined by its acute symptoms — hot flashes, brain fog, weight gain, poor sleep, loss of libido,

vaginal dryness, and, of course, the end of the menstrual period. As terrible and life-altering as some of these symptoms can be, they are merely symptoms of an even greater and more significant health event.

Menopause is the permanent loss of ovarian estrogen and progesterone. It is a state of persistent hormone deficiency.

This is not about hot flashes. It is certainly not about periods.

In the female body, estrogen is the Master Hormone. It controls metabolism, immune function, digestion, cardiovascular performance, mood, and brain health. It's not an accident that the same hormone that maintains total female health is also intrinsically tied to reproduction. Reproduction is the ultimate sign of female health.

Consequently, as women age and lose their estrogen, progesterone, and fertility, they simultaneously lose the wide range of health benefits tied to estrogen, progesterone, and fertility.

Today, a woman may expect to live anywhere from 30% to 50% of her life in menopause. And today, we are fortunate to have the tools and knowledge to effectively treat all of the underlying causes of menopausal symptoms and declining health.

Really, truly, your menopausal years should be the happiest, most vibrant, and most fulfilling years of your life.

Menopause is a natural and inevitable female transition. The life-altering symptoms and negative health impacts are not inevitable. With personalized, targeted therapies, every woman, including you, can feel great throughout the menopause transition and beyond.



What is Menopause SOS?

This ebook is an overview of the Menopause SOS Protocol that I use with my patients, my family, and even myself.

“



I'd be thrilled to help you find the health and vitality you deserve.

Make an appt

Although no pamphlet can ever replace a relationship with a trained medical care provider, I hope this mini ebook gets you started on a healthy, informed menopausal journey.

If you would like more guidance and access to all of the tests and therapies I recommend, please consider calling my practice and making an appointment. I am a full-time practicing medical doctor who is board certified in Obstetrics & Gynecology and Integrative Medicine.

I'd be thrilled to help you find the health and vitality you deserve in your perimenopause and menopause years. I see patients both in the office and via telemedicine.

[Integrative Medical Group of Irvine](#)

(949) 753-7475

4968 Booth Circle, Suite 101,
Irvine, CA 92604

Clinical approaches to menopause

Untreated, menopause is, very simply, aging. All of the symptoms that we think of as aging—weight gain, muscle loss, mental decline, heart disease, fragile bones, poor sleep—are actually caused by or accelerated by menopause.

Whoever named this monumental health event “menopause” did all of womankind an enormous disservice. “Meno” is from the Greek language for moon and “pause,” of course, refers to the cessation of the menses. By implying that menopause is about periods, this massive whole-body transition that impacts every organ system is trivialized into a single event—a woman’s final period.

Many women and physicians alike view menopause as nothing more significant than the end of female fertility, manifested by the loss of ovulation and its accompanying cycle of period bleeding. Common treatment protocols focus on reducing symptomatic hot flashes and night sweats, along with vaginal dryness and painful intercourse. The accepted standard of care is to provide the lowest level of treatment that makes symptoms survivable.

It’s crazy, but hormone therapy is only FDA approved for two conditions—hot flashes and vaginal dryness and atrophy. Those symptoms are acute manifestations of dramatic changes happening throughout the female body.

But in standard medicine, very little attention is paid to the



Survive is not the same as thrive.

long-term chronic health risks such as diabetes, cardiovascular disease, osteoporosis, and Alzheimer's that skyrocket in conjunction with menopause. Women may be advised to lose weight, eat well, and exercise, but by-and-large, rapidly deteriorating health is viewed as an expected part of aging.

This is not acceptable.

You should not accept this.

We women must demand more of our healthcare.

Survive is not the same as thrive.

To thrive in menopause, we must thoroughly eliminate debilitating symptoms such as hot flashes, brain fog, anxiety, muscle and joint pain, vaginal dryness, and painful intercourse. We must also take proactive steps to dramatically lower the risks of long-term chronic diseases so that we women can enjoy our health for decades into the future.

This is what every woman should demand of our healthcare system, and this is what my Menopause SOS plan offers.

What is menopause?

To effectively treat menopause, we must first redefine it.

A woman is born with all the eggs she will carry throughout her life. Her eggs, and the follicles in which they reside, are hormonally sensitive, releasing and responding to a wide range of hormones, including follicle-stimulating hormone (FSH), luteinizing hormone (LH), anti-Müllerian hormone (AMH), progesterone, and, of course, estrogen.

The menopausal transition, which typically starts sometime in a woman's 40s but can begin as early as age 35, is a time of tumultuous hormonal imbalance. During this transitional phase, called perimenopause, both the number of remaining eggs and their quality decline. This causes inconsistent ovarian hormonal production—a woman may experience brief episodes of dramatically high estrogen levels followed by abnormal lows. Unpredictable hormonal fluctuations disrupt the regularity of the menstrual cycle and cause well-known menopausal symptoms, such as hot flashes, headaches and body aches, and mood disorders.





I view and define menopause ... as the permanent loss of ovarian estrogen production.

Perimenopause lasts for a few years up to a decade. It varies in severity; some women experience minimal overt symptoms while others suffer miserably through the roller coaster of hormonal shifts. Whether perimenopause is mild or horrendous, all women universally produce lower and lower amounts of estrogen and progesterone until menstruation stops entirely. Menopause is officially defined as a time window of 12 months with no vaginal bleeding. A woman's menopausal transition ends when her ovaries no longer produce any estrogen or progesterone.

The average age of menopause is 51, but there is significant variability. Although the eventual loss of your monthly period is the hallmark of menopause, it is actually the harbinger of something much more profound.

I view and define menopause differently—not as the loss of menstrual periods, but as the permanent loss of ovarian estrogen production.

When I think about managing menopause and all of its short and long term symptoms, I think primarily about this loss of

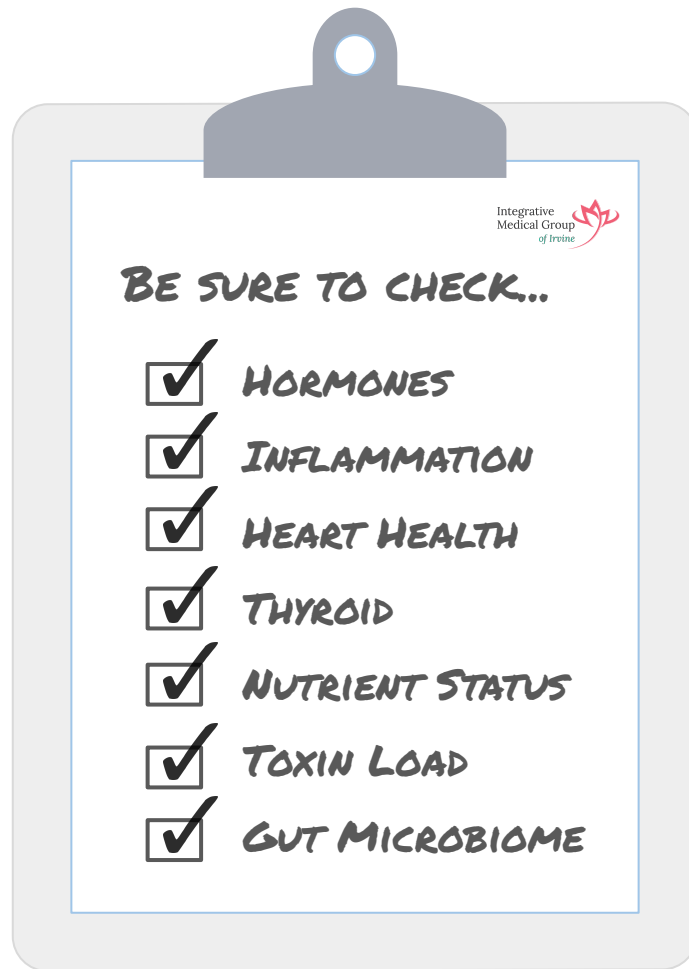
estrogen and how this hormone deficiency affects a woman's entire body.

Estrogen is the hormone of life itself, the giver of new life, and the true Master Hormone. Estrogen has receptors on virtually every organ of the body, which means every organ and system in a woman relies on a natural estrogen rhythm to function properly. Estrogen controls, or modulates, the body's inflammatory response, keeping it in check. It is also the director of metabolic homeostasis, which is the creation, usage, and storage of energy in the body. Estrogen connects reproduction to brain health, gut health, immune health, and cardiovascular health, encompassing total body health.

Nature linked these functions so that a healthy woman would be a fertile woman.

Fertility is inextricably linked to total metabolic health.

This is why, when women lose their estrogen and fertility in menopause, they face an enormous challenge maintaining health in every one of their organ systems. After menopause, women have high rates of cardiovascular disease—we have more strokes than men and we are equal to men in terms of heart attacks. Women have more gastroesophageal reflux after menopause than do men. We have high rates of autoimmune disease, particularly rheumatoid arthritis, because we develop immune dysfunction. Women have double the rates of insomnia and depression and nearly triple the incidence of Alzheimer's Disease. Truly, menopause takes a hit on every organ system in the body.



My approach to menopause

My role, when I support menopausal and transitioning women, is first to help them understand the essential role of estrogen in the female body so they can take all possible steps to maintain health for what may be fully the second half of their lives.

My strategy is straightforward and relatively easy to implement.

Using lifestyle therapies, supplements, and sometimes bioidentical hormone replacement, I work with patients to support all of the organs and systems that once relied on

estrogen for health and resiliency.

I always begin with imaging studies and lab testing because I firmly believe that you cannot properly monitor what you do not measure.

In transitioning women, I often test anti-Müllerian hormone (AMH), a marker of ovarian reserve and remaining ovarian function, which can help determine where in the menopause journey a woman is. Before beginning any therapy, I check the current levels of systemic inflammation within a woman's body, her hormonal state, thyroid function, vitamin B12 and D levels, and the status of the arterial endothelium and the heart. I often look at her levels of heavy metals, micronutrient status, and her gut microbiome. I selectively run genetic tests.

I pay specific attention to the heart because heart disease is the number one killer of post-menopausal women. I like to begin by looking at the function and structure of the heart by reviewing an echocardiogram. I check whether or not there are signs of poor energy production within the heart, which manifests as mild diastolic dysfunction. Surprisingly, this vital sign of heart health is frequently overlooked by cardiologists.

If I find hypertension or arrhythmia, I also order a sleep study to check for obstructive sleep apnea and other sleep disorders, which dramatically increase in women through the menopausal transition.

This may seem like an overwhelming battery of tests but menopause greatly impacts a woman's entire body, and every

woman's body reacts differently.

The early signs of health problems that we think of as aging often begin to show up in conjunction with menopause. By finding, addressing, and monitoring them, we can reduce major debilitating health conditions, thereby enabling you to live vibrantly for decades after the onset of menopause.



Protocol overview

I think of your health as a 1000-piece jigsaw puzzle. For optimal health, you need to have all of the pieces in all the right places. As we age, the pieces sort of disappear, and before we know it, a lot of the pieces are missing. I look at hormones as the 400 center pieces of this jigsaw puzzle.

Lifestyle choices—nurturing a healthy gut microbiome with a plant-focused diet, maintaining fitness status and the health of the musculoskeletal system, working on stress, having proper quantities and timings of sleep, eating and fasting at the right times, having the proper timing of everything—those are the other 600 pieces of the puzzle.

It's hard to believe, but when it comes to health, timing is critical. Throughout every organ and system in your body, one-third of your genes are clock genes. Every organ, system, and cell in your body operates on a day-night, hour-by-hour, 24-hour rhythm. Your body relies on this 24-hour rhythm, called your circadian rhythm, to promote balance, rejuvenation, and overall wellness. Circadian rhythm is the cornerstone of a healthy metabolism.

Up until menopause, estrogen plays a critical role in maintaining circadian rhythm throughout your body, but after menopause and the loss of ovarian estrogen, the timings throughout your body get out of sync. Many of the dysfunctions of old age can be strongly tied to a loss of circadian rhythm and the resulting systemic stress, inflammation, and metabolic dysfunction this causes.



It's like we are living perpetually in jet lag.

The primary driver of your circadian rhythm is your Master Clock, a part of your brain called the suprachiasmatic nucleus located in the hypothalamus. The Master Clock sits atop your optic nerve and senses light and dark. It translates this light-dark, day-night information into a signal that it transmits throughout your body to keep all of the clock genes in your body following the same master beat. Not surprisingly, the Master Clock has estrogen receptors. Estrogen maintains the Master Clock and is part of the system that transmits the master beat out to the rest of the body.

When we lose our estrogen production from our ovaries, we still have some estrogen in our brain and in other organs where it is produced locally, but there is much less of it. With the loss of the rhythmic estrogen production from our ovaries, the Master Clock begins to drift, and it's like we are living perpetually in jet lag.

Jet lag is terrible. You feel terrible and it has a hugely negative impact on your health.

To counteract this, part of my Menopause SOS Protocol creates an extremely strong signal to the Master Clock that overrides the weaknesses caused by low estrogen.

Your body has a secondary timekeeper—the gut microbiome—that also helps set clocks throughout the body. The gut clock is set by eating and fasting. Eating triggers the beginning of daytime circadian signals, and fasting corresponds to night.

To take advantage of this secondary clock system, my protocol incorporates time-restricted eating. This is not a calorie restriction plan. You can eat as much as you want. You simply limit the window of time during each day that you eat, and outside of that window, you stop eating.

Fasting, in and of itself, is extremely healing so in addition to daily overnight fasts, I recommend periodic longer fasts. Sleep is another critical component of circadian rhythm. I have many powerful strategies to ensure that you get enough sleep and that you are sleeping during the proper times of the night.

Every cell in your body requires nutrition to function optimally and your friendly cohabitants, the gut microbiome, also need to be fed. I show you how to eat for the health of your cells and organs and for the health of the trillions of microbes residing within your digestive tract.

In our culture, it is extremely difficult to get optimal nutrition simply through diet, so I recommend a supplement regimen that supports nutrition and metabolism and helps control inflammation.

To maintain body-wide strength, agility, and balance and to reduce stress, I recommend exercise and mind-body practices.

Last but not least, I believe that most women benefit from taking bioidentical hormones. I would never push a woman to take hormones she doesn't want; taking hormones is a very personal decision. I have looked at the research, and based on what the research shows and what we know about estrogen and progesterone, I strongly believe that bioidentical hormones, administered in the proper amounts and in the proper ways, are safe to take long-term. They are extremely beneficial in reducing or eliminating menopause symptoms and may lower your risk of cardiovascular disease, diabetes, Alzheimer's and cognitive decline, depression, anxiety, osteoporosis, autoimmune disease, and aging of your skin. I personally have been taking bioidentical hormones for over 20 years and never plan to give them up.

While it's true that there are a lot of pieces to my protocol, there are numerous pieces of your health to maintain. For most of my recommendations, you don't actually have to do something new. You simply need to do the things you are already doing, such as sleeping and eating, at the correct times.

Estrogen is a bit like a safety net for your overall well-being. It keeps everything working together; it helps you recover from stress and injury; it supports cell energy production and use. When you lose your estrogen, you lose your safety net.

Even if you go on bioidentical hormone replacement therapy, it's not the same. Natural youthful estrogen levels rise and fall throughout the day and throughout the month. We can't mimic that medically for menopausal women.

Bioidentical hormones help immensely, but they are only part of the puzzle. Lifestyle makes up the rest.

Every part of my Menopause SOS Protocol helps combat the changes of menopause to maintain long-term health and vitality. Each piece is beneficial on its own, and when done together, these therapies can preserve whole body health for decades.

You are an individual.

This plan is full of general guidelines and recommendations, but you and your doctor know your body best.

I hope this book is the beginning of a conversation. It is not meant to be a substitute for the doctor-patient relationship. I hope that you find a doctor who supports your medical goals and beliefs, and I hope this book is a resource for your menopause healthcare plan.



Part Two

The Menopause SOS Protocol





... the Menopause SOS Protocol will help you feel like you for many, many years to come.

The Protocol

There is no silver-bullet fix for the inflammation, hormonal chaos, and systemic dysfunction that menopause causes.

The only way to feel really great and maintain metabolic health is to make a wide range of lifestyle commitments that span sleep, diet, and exercise. You'll need to plan your days in accordance with your circadian rhythm. You'll want to practice fasting and mindfulness. You should take the supplements I recommend and strongly consider bioidentical hormone replacement therapy.

No single piece of this health puzzle can sustain your health but combined, these therapies can reduce or eliminate all of the acute symptoms of menopause, such as aches and pains, brain fog, and hot flashes. They can dramatically lower your risks of developing chronic, debilitating diseases. And most importantly, the Menopause SOS Protocol will help you feel like you for many, many years to come.



Light and darkness

Our bodies did most of their evolving back when humans spent nearly all of their time out-of-doors and so our bodies rely on the bright light of day and the deep darkness of night to keep all of our bodily systems in sync.

Your body's primary timekeeper is a part of the brain nicknamed the Master Clock, which sits atop the optic nerve that connects your eyes to your brain. Its number one job is to monitor the light entering your eyes and broadcast a signal to the rest of your body charting where in the earth's 24-hour daily cycle you are.

Your eyes are your primary pathway to your Master Clock.

To give your Master Clock a strong signal, you need to see three things every day:

1. Bright light in the morning.
2. Dim, warm light in the evening.
3. Total darkness at night.

Bright morning light

In the morning, when you wake up (at around 7AM, please), you need to get a dose of sunshine. 15 minutes is the bare minimum; more is better.

Open your curtains and eat breakfast in a sunny spot. Even better, and this what I recommend for all of my patients, go for a 15 minute walk.

Be out in the sunshine.

Let the sunshine go into your eyes. Don't look at the sun; that's dangerous. But don't wear sunglasses. Your Master Clock needs full-spectrum sunshine to register that it's morning, and sunglasses block too much light to create the signal you need.

Don't worry. 15 to 30 minutes of sunshine won't hurt your eyes. But it will create a strong morning signal that will get your Master Clock and the other clocks in your body synched

and ready to start the day in perfect harmony.

If you live someplace that doesn't get a lot of year round sunshine, I strongly recommend that you invest in a light therapy lamp. Get one that emits 10,000 lux, set it up according to the manufacturer's directions, and use it for 30 minutes every single morning.

Dim evening light

Around the time of sunset, about 6PM, start to limit your exposure to light, particularly blue light.

Outside in the natural world, bright morning light has a blue tint, and evening light is warmer, yellower, and dimmer. We humans are very sensitive to this color and intensity shift.

Maybe you've heard that screens emit blue light and you should limit screen use in the evening? I strongly agree with this advice. Blue light from screens and even from bright light bulbs tell your Master Clock that it's still morning. Blue light in the evening keeps your Master Clock and your body on daytime mode and prevents you from transitioning properly to evening and sleep mode.

We often think of sleep as the thing that happens when we go to bed, but your body prepares for sleep hours before bedtime.

Shortly after sunset and well before you actually start to feel tired, your body shifts from producing primarily cortisol (your

wake-up hormone) to producing mostly melatonin (your sleepy hormone). Melatonin levels rise slowly so if you don't start early enough, you won't be tired enough to fall asleep at bedtime. Then, you won't sleep soundly, but you may be very groggy in the morning.

So, after 6PM, put away your screens and dim the lights in your house.

If you absolutely need evening screentime, turn on your device's night shift function and wear a pair of blue light filtering glasses.



Total nighttime darkness

When you finally go to bed (at 10PM to 11PM, please), your bedroom needs to be as absolutely dark as you can make it.

Any amount of light, even dim light that seeps through your closed eyelids, will stop your body from producing adequate amounts of melatonin.

Melatonin is your sleepy hormone, so plenty of melatonin is needed for a good night's sleep. This incredible hormone is also a powerful anti-inflammatory and antioxidant. It plays a critical role in repairing the cells of your body while you sleep, and there is evidence that melatonin is a potent anti-aging weapon. While you sleep, you want as much of it as your body can produce.

So make your bedroom perfectly dark. Hang blackout shades in your windows. Remove or cover any source of light, no matter how small. And if you can't get your bedroom dark, sleep with a sleep mask. That's what I do.



Time-restricted eating

Your primary timekeeper is your Master Clock and your secondary timekeeper is your gut.

Living deep in your intestines are trillions of microbes that we call the gut microbiome. These tiny organisms are essential to your health. They help digest your food, modulate your immune system, and release a wide range of signalling agents that impact the functioning of organs such as your brain, intestines, and liver.

One role of the gut microbiome is to send out time signals that are supposed to sync with the signals from the Master Clock. Your gut microbiome identifies day as any time you are eating and night as any time you are fasting, or not eating.

To foster this signaling process, I recommend time-restricted eating. I tell my patients, “Eat during the day and fast at night.”

If you sleep, you are already doing this, but most people don’t fast for long enough. It is essential that you fast for 12 to 14 hours every night. 13 hours is the sweet spot.

You do this by setting a daily eating window. When the window opens, you can eat. When it closes, stop eating. While your eating window is open, you can eat as much as you want. This is not a calorie restriction diet. Eat three good meals every day. Just eat them close together, and if you can, eat a relatively larger breakfast and a smaller dinner. And no snacking!

The schedule I recommend is:

7:00AM Eat a large, hearty breakfast.

12:00PM Eat a nice lunch.

5:00PM Eat a light dinner of mostly fruits, vegetables,
and whole grains.

6:00PM Stop eating.

After 6:00PM, you can have herbal teas but nothing with calories. Your eating window is closed until 7:00AM the following morning.

Extended fasting

Humans evolved with fasting. They may not have enjoyed it, but our ancestors fasted periodically when food was scarce. Miraculously, our bodies developed processes that help us not only survive short, periodic fasts, but harness this time for deep healing and regeneration.

Fasting triggers a process called autophagy.

“Auto” means “self,” and “phagy” means “eating.” Eating yourself? It sounds terrible, but we are designed to do that.

When no food comes in, eventually your body will burn the fat it's been storing. That is one of the first steps in triggering autophagy, but it's not autophagy itself.

Autophagy happens on the cellular level. When an individual cell stops receiving sugar as energy for an extended time, the

cell looks for other sources of energy. It finds this energy within its own organelles, tiny organ-like structures. It breaks down old, diseased, dysfunctional organelles into their foundational building blocks, such as amino acids and fatty acids, and uses those building blocks to create new, rejuvenated organelles.

In autophagy, our cells cannibalize and regenerate themselves without dying. This extends their life and can help you stay younger longer.

A periodic fast, one lasting just a few days, improves your metabolic health and may improve blood sugar control, lower hypertension, sharpen cognition, lower cancer risk, improve autoimmune disease, and reduce your risk of Alzheimer's disease. Periodic fasting stimulates stem cells to produce brand new, youthful cells in lab-testing animals. It's an incredible process, loaded with potential to improve health, that we are just beginning to understand.

The safest approach to periodic fasting is the fasting mimicking diet, a medical meal plan researched and developed by the Longevity Institute at USC. Although research is still underway to discern all the benefits of the fasting mimicking diet, studies have shown that it helps manage inflammation, which underlies most every health issue.

They've created a product that they market directly to the public called ProLon. It's a five-day meal program that mimics fasting. You eat small amounts of specially designed foods, I call them stealth foods, that fly under the radar of nutrient sensors in the brain.



[Periodic fasting] can help you stay younger longer.

You get the benefits of eating (you feel good and don't lose muscle mass or stress your body as with true fasting) and you simultaneously reap the phenomenal benefits of periodic fasting. I am proud to say that I am on the medical advisory board for the company that manufactures ProLon, L-Nutra, and have done the fasting mimicking diet 16 times myself.

Most perimenopausal and menopausal women qualify to do the fasting mimicking diet, but I recommend that you seek out a knowledgeable healthcare provider to advise you on the appropriate frequency for your specific health needs. For those who are ill, frail, too elderly, or have certain conditions, fasting is not recommended. I usually recommend that women do the fasting mimicking diet monthly for three consecutive months and then four times a year.

For women with diabetes or other health conditions, it is imperative to consult with your doctor and never undergo the fasting mimicking diet without medical supervision.

Sleep

It is a myth that older women need less sleep simply because they sleep less. Older women sleep less because they experience circadian rhythm dysfunction caused by estrogen deficiency. And they may also experience melatonin deficiency, which can be related to estrogen deficiency.

All healthy adults, regardless of age, need seven to eight hours of sleep every single night. Any less, or any more, will negatively impact your health.

Once you enter your menopausal transition, getting adequate sleep can be hard.

First of all, make sure you are following all of the circadian rhythm advice I've given. You need to send your body the strongest possible day-night signal you can. In the morning, get bright sunshine and eat a hearty breakfast. Go for a walk. In the evening, dim the lights and have a small, early dinner. At night, go to bed in a cool, extremely dark room.

Aim to go to bed between 10PM and 11PM and plan to wake up between 6AM and 7AM. Most people do very well on this schedule. Stick to it every day, even on the weekends.

The majority of women will benefit from small doses of melatonin. I recommend taking a very small dose, usually 0.5 mg, around 8PM to trigger your natural rise in melatonin levels.

At bedtime, around 10PM or 11PM, take an instant release dose of 1 to 2 mg. If you frequently wake up in the middle of the night, add a 2 mg extended release tablet. Studies show that 3 mg nightly is both safe and beneficial for extended periods of time. Don't take more than 4 mg per night without discussing with your doctor, and be very careful to take melatonin according to my schedule.

Melatonin is a powerful hormone. If you take too much or take it off-schedule, you could easily create circadian rhythm dysfunction.

If hot flashes disturb your sleep, definitely sleep with a bedside fan. You'll also want to strongly consider bioidentical hormone replacement therapy (BHRT). I recommend BHRT to most of my patients dealing with menopause, but especially to those with symptoms that impact sleep.

While addressing sleep issues, pay attention to all aspects of sleep hygiene—a cool dark room, white noise, no evening screens, no alcohol, no afternoon caffeine, etc.

If you are at risk for sleep apnea or other sleep disorders, be sure to schedule a sleep study.

Other powerful therapies that I recommend to patients who struggle with sleep are a pre-bedtime hot bath, ashwagandha or passionflower tea, guided imagery, and lavender aromatherapy.

When it comes to getting a good night's sleep, there's rarely

one thing that a woman can do that will be a fix-it-and-forget-it solution. You should expect to incorporate melatonin, good sleep hygiene, and several relaxation techniques every night.

It may feel like a lot of work, but I promise: It's worth it. Good sleep is essential for good health. Commit to nurturing restful, rejuvenating nights so you can enjoy vibrant, fulfilling days.



Diet

Humans have extremely high, complex nutritional needs. We can survive on empty calories for a while, but without proper nutrition, a person will eventually develop chronic, debilitating illnesses such as diabetes, heart disease, fatty liver, cancer, and autoimmune disease.

In addition to nutrition, humans need significant fiber to support the health of the gut microbiome and digestive organs. Beneficial gut microbes eat fiber, and without adequate fiber, they die and are replaced by pathogenic bacteria.



We all need to eat a bare minimum of 30 grams of fiber every day!

The average American consumes about seven grams of fiber per day, but we need to eat a bare minimum of 30 grams of fiber every day to support a healthy, diverse gut microbiome.

All of this becomes even more critical for women once they begin to lose ovarian estrogen. Without adequate estrogen, the health of the GI tract, which is rich in estrogen receptors, declines and this leads to a high incidence of impaired gut barrier permeability, nicknamed “leaky gut.” Your intestines are designed to be mildly permeable such that they allow nutrients to pass through the intestinal wall into the bloodstream. The intestines rely on molecules called short-chain fatty acids (SCFAs) to maintain just the right amount of permeability to support nutrition without allowing dangerous molecules to pass through the intestinal walls.

SCFAs are primarily produced by the gut microbiome, and to produce SCFAs, you need the right types of bacteria and those bacteria need dietary fiber.

Low estrogen contributes to gut dysbiosis, which is essentially too many bad gut bacteria and too few beneficial microbes. Low estrogen, gut dysbiosis, leaky gut, and a low-fiber diet

contribute dramatically to obesity, cardiovascular disease, diabetes, cancer, bone loss, and deterioration of brain health.

One of the best things you can do throughout your life and specifically during menopause is eat a diet that nourishes your body and your gut microbiome. This means eating as many whole, plant-based foods as you can.

For most women, I recommend what I call a modified vegan diet. Eat primarily plants—fruits, vegetables, nuts, beans, and whole grains. Eat a very small amount of organic meat three to five times per week.

Every single day, your goal is to eat as much fiber and nutrient-dense, plant-based foods as you can. You should aim for one cup of beans plus six to nine cups of fruits, vegetables, nuts, and gluten-free whole grains like quinoa, millet, amaranth, and buckwheat daily.

I recommend that some of those plant-based foods be what we call phytoestrogens, plants that can bind to estrogen receptors in your gut. They improve the composition of the gut microbiome, facilitate the production of neurotransmitters, particularly serotonin, and help maintain the integrity of the gut barrier. By reducing leaky gut, phytoestrogens lower systemic inflammation in menopausal women.

Common sources of phytoestrogens are ground flaxseeds and soy. I specifically recommend organic whole soybeans (edamame), miso, and tofu.

I also recommend that women avoid inflammatory foods. Do not eat wheat and gluten, dairy, and alcohol. Added sugars, including cane sugar, high fructose corn syrup, honey, agave, and concentrated fruit juices, are extremely inflammatory and damage metabolic health. High saturated fat foods cause gut dysbiosis. Processed foods are often high in sugar and fat and contain artificial ingredients that are toxic to you and your gut microbiome.

Eat mostly plants and just a little meat. Avoid gluten, dairy, alcohol, added sugars, high-fat foods, and processed foods. This is how humans have been eating for thousands of years, and it's how you should eat to support the health and longevity of your body and your precious gut microbiome.



Supplements

I truly believe supplements should be just that—an addition to all of the other things needed for health. But in today's modern society, it is nearly impossible to eat a perfect diet, live by a perfect schedule, get the perfect amount of light and darkness, and sleep well every night.

Supplements can improve nutrition, counteract inflammation, and take over during estrogen deficiency to maintain the proper function of organs and systems throughout the body. As we age, our bodies lose resiliency. Supplements can improve our ability to handle physical and emotional stress.

There are dozens upon dozens of supplements out there so the perfect blend for you will depend on how your body is adjusting to your changing hormones and what your greatest needs are.

My core supplement regime for women in menopause is:

- A good multivitamin
- Melatonin
- Vitamin D + K2
- Magnesium
- Omega-3
- N-Acetyl Cysteine (NAC)
- Probiotic

Depending on a woman's unique needs, I may recommend additional products.

There are many supplements specifically helpful for the cardiovascular system. For heart energy, I suggest COQ10 (as ubiquinol), D-ribose, and acetyl-L-carnitine. I am not a fan of statins, particularly for women, but should someone be on one, be sure to supplement with COQ10. Many pharmaceuticals deplete the body of nutrients and it is important to replace what is lost.

A supplement I commonly use for the treatment of hypertension is a nitric oxide enhancer. Nitric oxide is a potent antioxidant involved in facilitating dilation of blood vessels, reducing blood clotting, lowering inflammation in arterial walls, decreasing LDL cholesterol oxidation, reducing arterial wall thickening, and lessening free radical formation. As women transition through menopause, they produce less nitric oxide, which results in more oxidative stress, damaged arterial walls, vasoconstriction, and plaque formation. I avoid arginine (found in many products) and prefer a product with citrulline, which has been shown to be more advantageous.

For women with fatty liver, I recommend liver support, including Vitamin E as mixed tocotrienols and tocopherols, milk thistle or a derivative, NAC or glutathione, and selenium. Gut healing is aided by fiber prebiotics, glutamine, zinc carnosine, and some vitamin A. Bone broth can also be beneficial.

I often recommend cannabidiol (CBD), the non-psychoactive component of cannabis that is legal throughout the United States, for mood disorders and chronic pain.

Some additional supplements I frequently recommend are berberine, bergamot, resveratrol, grape seed, quercetin, alpha lipoic acid, polyphenols such as pomegranate or pycnogenol, and plant sterols.

You need to work with a knowledgeable healthcare practitioner to find the right supplement combination to support your optimal health.



Movement

If you eat well, support your circadian rhythm, and take targeted supplements, you are going to need your body to last for a good 30 to 50 years after the onset of menopause.

Research supports that women who exercise lower their blood pressure and fasting blood sugar levels, improve lipid profiles, and maintain a healthy weight. Exercise also improves the



Take a 10 to 15 minute walk after every meal.

composition of the gut microbiome and the integrity of the intestinal wall.

When it comes to physical fitness, the old adage, “Use it or lose it!” is 100% true. If you want to be able to do something tomorrow, you need to do it today.

I talk a lot about functional fitness, which focuses on preserving your ability to do the physical things that keep you safe and enabling you to continue doing all of the things in life that give you joy. You want to build and maintain cardiovascular fitness so you can walk long distances and be out and about all day long without getting tired. Do activities that require strength, especially upper body strength, so you can carry things safely and get up and down off of chairs, beds, and the floor. Work on your balance so you don't fall down. And stretch so you preserve a full range of motion throughout your body.

Be sure to do some movement every day. One of the best pieces of advice that I give to all of my patients is, “Take a 10 to 15 minute walk after every meal.” You don't need to change clothes or take a shower afterwards. There's no equipment beyond a pair of walking shoes. And you get 30 to 45 minutes of movement every single day. It adds up. On top of that, a post

meal walk is excellent for blood sugar control and lowers your risk of diabetes and cardiovascular disease.

In addition to daily walks, try to do something more physically demanding at least three times per week. More is better.

If you enjoy going to the gym, work with a fitness trainer to design a program that includes all of the key elements of functional fitness.

For most of my patients, I recommend finding a few physical activities that they enjoy. Go for a hike. Take a yoga or dance class. Golf or play a sport. Bike. Swim. Climb.

The great thing about sports and other physical activities is that they tend to incorporate a wide range of movements and muscles. Do a few different things every week and your body will stay in great shape for years to come.



Stress reduction

In this world, people are stressed at every age, but as we get older, our ability to control and manage stress decreases. Estrogen deficiency, all on its own, is an enormous risk factor for anxiety, depression, and mood swings. Combine that with the emotional upheaval of a major life transition and it's no wonder so many women experiencing menopause also have mood disorders.

Your mind is connected to the rest of your body through your nervous system and through signalling agents called neurotransmitters. This connection is bidirectional. Your brain reacts to changes in your body, and changes in your brain cause reactions throughout your body.

Patients sometimes ask me if their depression or anxiety is “all in their head.” I want to tell you: Nothing is ever all in your head. If it's in your head, then it's also in your body, and vice versa.

What this means for women in the various stages of menopause is that changes in hormones, inflammation, and the gut microbiome can cause changes in your mental state. Improving health throughout your body will improve your mood.

It also works in the other direction. Taking care of your mental health will improve both your mood and your quality of health throughout your body.

For this reason, I am a huge advocate of mind-body medicine.

Every day, I recommend 15 to 30 minutes of guided imagery, a simple, passive form of mindfulness that is completely foolproof. If you are feeling stressed during the day, then schedule your guided imagery for the morning. If you are struggling with sleep, do it in the evening. Find a quiet, comfortable space and a guided imagery recording to listen to. Then press play.

Once a week, I also recommend doing something that creates a deeper mind-body connection. This could be yoga, massage, meditation, or acupuncture.

If you are struggling emotionally, seek out a mental health professional well-versed in cognitive behavioral therapy (CBT), which is one of the most research-supported forms of emotional therapy.

There are a wide range of additional natural therapies that can address mood disorders. Light therapy and exercise are excellent. Aromatherapy can take the edge off of a stressful experience. Several supplements, including CBD, stabilize mood and reduce anxiety.



Hormone replacement therapy

In a mini ebook, I can only briefly touch on the topic of hormones, so here's what I want to say: I strongly believe that bioidentical hormone therapy is safe and beneficial. I have personally been taking bioidentical hormones since my own menopause transition. However, taking hormones is a very personal decision. If you do your research and you feel like hormones are not the right option for you, do everything else in the Menopause SOS Protocol with full commitment and you should be in okay shape.

Hormone replacement therapy (HRT) became controversial in 2002 when the Women's Health Initiative showed that HRT was linked to increases in breast cancer, cardiovascular disease, stroke, and pulmonary embolism. This was all very scary and scores of women avoided HRT.

But here's the thing: The Women's Health Initiative did not use human hormones. The women were given oral tablets made from metabolized estrogen byproducts and extraneous hormones collected from the urine of pregnant horses. These excreted horse hormones were combined with medroxyprogesterone acetate, a progestin that is a progesterone-mimicking endocrine disruptor, into a pill called Prempro.

When we look at the human body's reaction to hormone-mimickers, we usually see diseases. That's expected. Bisphenol A (BPA) is very similar to estrogen; it fits into estrogen receptors, but it causes all sorts of metabolic and



When people say that HRT is not safe, they are referring to studies done with hormone-mimicking chemicals.

reproductive disorders. The same goes for phthalates and flame retardants. Your body thinks those chemicals are hormones but they are not human hormones. Instead, they wreak havoc by altering the normal function of the cells they bind to. The same is true for Prempro.

It's not at all surprising that Prempro led to some alarming findings. What's actually surprising is that the increased risk was as small as it was.

For my patients, I only prescribe bioidentical hormone replacement therapy. Bioidentical hormones are exactly what they sound like—hormones that are identical to the estrogen and progesterone that your ovaries produced during your entire reproductive life.

The bulk of the research on hormone replacement therapy has been done on hormone-mimicking chemicals, not on bioidentical hormones. When people say that HRT is not safe, they are referring to studies done with hormone-mimicking chemicals.

Based on the science and the research that does exist on bioidentical estrogen, estradiol that is delivered through the skin via creams or patches appears to be safe and beneficial for long-term use. Recent studies have been very reassuring.

Estrogen is the Master Hormone of the female body. It is anti-inflammatory. It modulates every system in the body, including the immune system, gastrointestinal system, and cardiovascular system. It is essential to brain health and maintains circadian rhythm by supporting the Master Clock.

During the menopause transition, the ovaries stop producing estrogen, but nothing happens to all of your estrogen receptors. There is no mechanism by which estrogen, the Master Hormone, could become a poison. Without estrogen, eventually estrogen receptors atrophy, but even then, estrogen doesn't become a poison. It simply loses effectiveness.

After menopause, women's risks of chronic health conditions skyrocket. When women experience late-onset menopause, menopause after 55, they have lower risks of all chronic diseases, better mental function, a more youthful appearance, and they often live longer. Conversely, when women go through menopause earlier, their risks go up earlier and, statistically, they have a lower life-expectancy.

Chronic health conditions after menopause aren't an age problem. They are an estrogen deficiency problem. I believe that replacing lost estrogen and progesterone is a powerful part of the solution to the body-wide challenges that women face after menopause.

If you choose to use hormones, I want to emphasize that only human bioidentical hormones should be used. Estradiol should always be given in a topical form as a patch, gel, or cream, and not as an oral pill. Avoid the use of systemic estriol, a different form of estrogen, due to concerns of hormone-receptor issues. Do not use Premarin, Prempro, or Provera.

My dream is for there to be studies on the use of hormones in a physiologic manner—used cyclically to approximate the levels and rhythms found throughout the menstrual cycle of a premenopausal woman. Together with like-minded physicians, I am now actively designing such a study. In the meantime, I recommend hormone dosages sufficient to get to a level found midway through the follicular or luteal stage, essentially an average level.

Bioidentical hormones must be ordered by a physician and filled either by a compounding pharmacy when a compounded product is used, or a traditional pharmacy for a standard manufactured bioidentical hormone product. You will need to work closely with your medical care provider to find the right product and dose for you.

With bioidentical hormone replacement therapy, there's a certain amount of trial and error. Every woman is unique. This is where personalized precision medicine comes in. If I put the same estrogen patch on 10 different women, they will have 10 different estrogen levels in their bodies because every woman's skin has a different thickness, temperature, and vascular supply.



It's important that you work with a doctor who knows what to look for and really understands and respects your goals. Bioidentical hormone replacement therapy is a highly individualized therapy that requires monitoring, fine-tuning, communication, and a huge dose of patient respect.

Love and purpose

Human beings, in general, and women, specifically, are social beings. There's something amazing about women. We are designed to interact. We need love and relationships.

People who are lonely have much shorter lives, and people who have passions and purpose live longer.

Seek out the people and activities that bring you love, joy, and meaning.

At the end of the day, the goal of healthcare is not to make people live longer for the sake of living longer. I want to help you and all of my patients live *well* for the longest amount of time possible.

“

Seek out the people and activities that bring you love, joy, and meaning.

So do all of the things your body needs. Follow the Menopause SOS Protocol to the best of your ability. And make sure there's always a big dose of love on top.



Parting thoughts

Human bodies are extremely complex. Every cell, organ, hormone, enzyme, and system is multitasking. We can't micromanage things.

Instead, we need to deal with foundational problems.

We need to use supplements and natural treatments to support balance and wellness in our bodies.

Throughout our lives, and in menopause even moreso, we need to focus on the core needs of a female human body. We must connect to the light-dark, day-night rhythms of our planet. We need to give our bodies nutritious food, clean air, and water. We require deep, restorative sleep. We need exercise and movement. We need quiet peacefulness. And lastly, we need love and purpose.

I put all of these elements together to help my women patients as they navigate menopause. And it has tremendous benefit.

I know this personally because this is the life I lead as a menopausal woman.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "felice". The signature is written in a cursive, lowercase style.

I'd love to see you!

If you are interested in making an appointment with me, please give my office a call. I'd be honored to help you as you navigate menopause in all of its physical and emotional complexity.



The Integrative Medical Group of Irvine is conveniently located about 15 minutes from John Wayne Airport in a quiet, suburban area of Irvine in sunny Orange County, CA. Our office building is centrally located near the 5 and 405 freeways and we always have plenty of free parking.

Integrative Medical Group of Irvine

<https://integrativemgi.com/>

(949) 753-7475

4968 Booth Circle, Suite 101,

Irvine, CA 92604

About Dr. Gersh

Felice Gersh, M.D. is an award-winning physician with dual board certifications in OB-GYN and Integrative Medicine. She is the founder and director of the Integrative Medical Group of Irvine, a practice that provides comprehensive health care for women by combining the best evidence-based therapies from conventional, naturopathic, and holistic medicine.

She taught obstetrics and gynecology at Keck USC School of Medicine for 12 years as an Assistant Clinical Professor, where she received the Outstanding Volunteer Clinical Faculty Award. She now serves as an Affiliate Faculty Member at the Fellowship in Integrative Medicine, through the University of Arizona School of Medicine, where she lectures and regularly grades the case presentations written by the Fellowship students for their final exams.

Additionally, she is a sought after medical forensic expert and has worked on numerous high profile legal cases.

Felice Gersh, M.D. is a prolific writer and lecturer and has been featured in several films and documentary series, including *The Real Skinny on Fat* with Montel Williams. She is a regular contributing expert for many mainstream media outlets, including HuffPost, Bustle, and mindbodygreen.



Follow her on Instagram at [@dr.felicegersh](https://www.instagram.com/dr.felicegersh).