



WIENER PROGRAMM 
FÜR FRAUENGESUNDHEIT

Ease your way through menopause

Information, practical tips and exercises

**Stadt
Wien**

All brochures of the Vienna Women's Health Programme can be downloaded from our website or ordered free of charge.

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Information, practical tips and exercises

Thanks!

This text was prepared with the support of an expert advisory group. We would like to thank the members of the group for their competent support, the lively exchange and excellent cooperation.

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1. A new stage in life: menopause (the climacteric period)

Dancing hormones

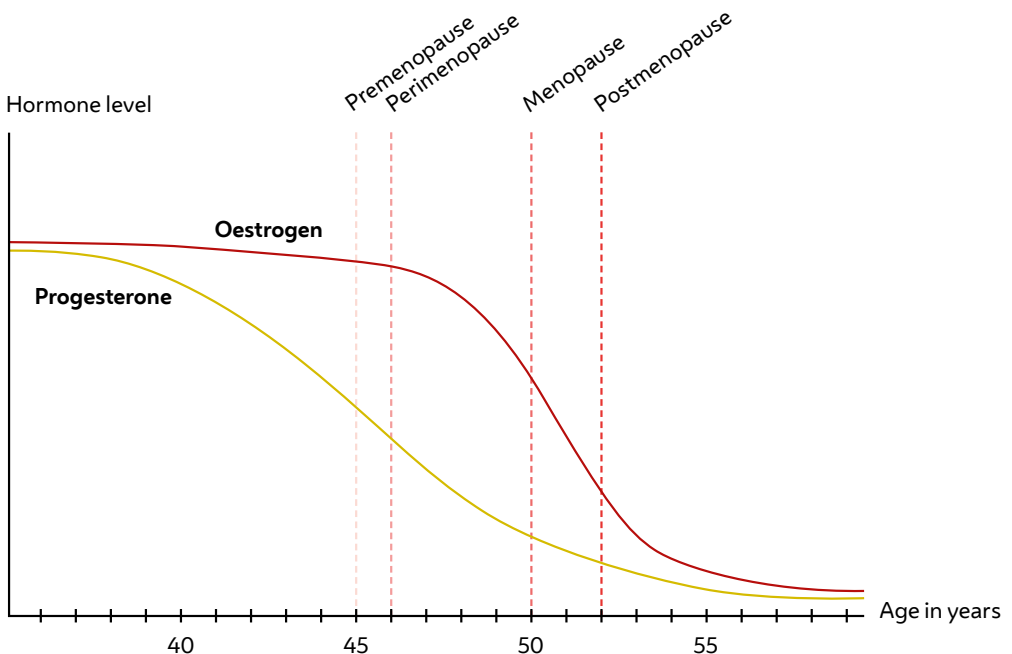
All people pass through a climacteric period – this is perfectly natural. Like in puberty, our body once again changes its hormonal balance. Hormones are messenger molecules in the human body. They are produced by glands and tissues and are released into the blood. Women's ovaries produce the hormones oestrogen and progesterone. Oestrogen stimulates the development of the female sex characteristics and the menstruation cycle, i.e. the period. Progesterone plays an important role in the establishment and maintenance of pregnancy.

During menopause the production of both hormones is reduced. As a consequence, menstruation stops. When hormone production starts to be reduced at the beginning of the menopausal transition, pregnancy will be very difficult to achieve, and later it will become impossible. That is why menopause is also called the "change of life". It marks the transition from our childbearing years to our non-childbearing years. The medical term used to describe this transition period is "climacteric".

The change in hormone levels always involves physical and psychological changes which will take some time to get used to. We know this from puberty or pregnancy. And it is the same when hormone production is again reduced during menopause: We need to get used to the changes that occur quite naturally during this time in life.

Every woman experiences menopause differently. Some women are mostly glad to be done with their periods and not to have to think about contraception anymore. Some women do not notice anything different or only experience slight menopause symptoms, while others suffer more severe ones. The length of the transition to menopause varies from woman to woman, but on average it lasts 9 years.

Menopause can be divided into different stages, which are shown in the figure below. We can see that a woman's oestrogen and progesterone levels start to decline from the age of 40 onwards. Let us look at how the individual stages affect us and find out how we can cope with it.



Changes to the hormone levels of oestrogen and progesterone during menopause

Premenopause: the changes are starting

Premenopause is the time before the transition. "Pre" means "before" and "menopause" is the time when your periods stop. The onset of the menopause process can be very slow or quite abrupt, with very general symptoms.

If you are around 45 years of age and experience new symptoms that are unusual for you, discuss them with your doctor. They might be the first signs of your transition to menopause.

During premenopause, many women have progesterone deficiency, mostly also caused by stress.

COMMON SYMPTOMS OF PREMENOPAUSE

- Periods can be heavier or lighter
- Periods can be longer or shorter
- Length of time between periods can change
- Water retention in your legs, arms or face
- Tenderness in your breasts
- Headaches or joint pains
- Mood swings
- Feeling irritable
- Dizziness
- Feeling more hungry
- Weight gain

Practical tip:

Eating a healthy and varied diet and getting plenty of exercise will help you feel good and maintain your weight.

As your period changes, your menstrual cycle and fertility will also change. Women whose wish for children has not been fulfilled yet should start to come to terms with this issue and finally let go of it for good.

Perimenopause: the actual transition phase

Perimenopause is the transitional time around menopause. The prefix “peri” means “around” or “about”. In this context, it refers to the time around your last period. Your periods will gradually get lighter. Intervals between periods can become irregular. Perimenopause usually begins 1 or 2 years before your periods stop. It ends about 1 year after your last period. During this time, you may also experience symptoms that can be quite severe.

COMMON SYMPTOMS OF PERIMENOPAUSE

- Hot flushes and night sweats
- Feeling tired and listless
- Difficulty concentrating
- Dry skin and hair
- Dry mucous membranes (for example dry eyes or vaginal dryness)

Practical tips to help with hot flushes and sweating:

- Alternate between hot and cold showers
- Exercise helps regulate body temperature
- Eating a light diet and staying hydrated helps reduce hot flushes

Practical tips to help with difficulty sleeping:

- Drink warm milk with honey
This combination contains tryptophan. Tryptophan functions as a precursor to the sleep hormone melatonin, which promotes sleep.
- Minimise your caffeine intake, especially in the evening
- Avoid blue light (for example from your mobile phone display or computer screen)
- Keep your sleeping room dark

THE PROFOUND CHANGES THAT YOU WILL EXPERIENCE DURING THIS TIME MAY ALSO GIVE RISE TO BIG QUESTIONS. FOR EXAMPLE:

- Who am I as a woman?
- How do I act as a woman in society?
- What is my function? Where is the sense in all this?

Practical tip:

This is a time where it is important to discuss and talk about these things with someone else. Talk to friends or family or use professional help.

SUPPORT YOUR WELLBEING: WITH PLANT-BASED PRODUCTS, PSYCHOLOGICAL HELP OR HORMONE THERAPY

There are a lot of ways to improve your wellbeing during this time.

Plants that help make the transition to menopause more comfortable

If your pain or discomfort is not too severe, phytoestrogens may help to ease the symptoms. Phytoestrogens are plant-based oestrogens. They are found, for example, in soy, red clover, black cohosh, beans, grain, nuts, legumes or tofu. Ask your pharmacist what products or teas are best to reduce hot flushes, mood swings, sweating or difficulty sleeping.

Psychological help

If you experience depressive moods or anxiety, irritability or weepiness, seek psychological help or counselling. Do not try to cope with these difficult emotions alone. You do not have to suffer in silence. There is plenty of help available: talk to a counsellor or psychologist. There are also special medicines your doctor may prescribe you.

Hormone therapy and bioidentical hormones

Hormone therapy uses hormones to reduce or eliminate symptoms and conditions that women experience during menopause. Women who opt for this treatment take medication which contains exactly those hormones which the body slows down producing at this stage. Medication is available in the form of pills, patches, creams and gels.

Many women still remember the results of medical studies which relate menopausal hormone therapy to breast cancer. But hormone therapy has changed significantly over the past decades: Nowadays, the therapy uses different hormones and the amount of hormones which women need to take has also been reduced. As a result, the risk of getting breast cancer is only very small. These new findings are based on decade-long research which has shown that hormone ther-

apy which is carried out correctly will improve your health. It has a positive impact on many diseases, such as osteoporosis (a disease that weakens your bones), cardiovascular diseases or Alzheimer's.

How does hormone therapy work? Hormone therapy nearly always uses bioidentical hormones. "Bioidentical" means that those hormones have the same structure than the hormones produced naturally in the body. Thus, they are exactly the same as the hormones that have been previously produced by your ovaries. Which and how many hormones you can take and in what form they should be provided differs for every woman and depends on many factors, such as your physical shape, pre-existing conditions or your family's medical history (diseases or special health conditions in your family). For this reason, it is very important to discuss everything at length with your doctor. Your gynaecologist will advise you as to when which hormone levels will be helpful. Your hormone levels tell you how many hormones there are in your body. If hormone therapy is prescribed by your doctor, you will only have to pay the prescription fee.

Menopause: the final goodbye to your period

Menopause is the time when you have your final menstrual period. You can only know that you have reached menopause in hindsight, when you have had no period for one year.

The average age of menopause is 52 years. During this time, the oestrogen level in the body declines. This can also have some positive effects, for example a remission of fibroids (benign nodules in the uterine muscle) or endometriosis (a condition where tissue similar to the lining of the uterus grows in other places outside the uterus) after menopause.

Postmenopause: the hormones stop dancing

Postmenopause begins 6 months after your final period. "Post" means "after". Your body has accepted the hormonal changes. Oestrogen production drops significantly. Many women feel more assertive and decisive and have a better understanding of their needs now. In most cases, symptoms like hot flushes and sweating will subside. However, some symptoms can persist.

COMMON SYMPTOMS OF POSTMENOPAUSE

- Dryness of mucous membranes, e.g. vaginal dryness. Some women experience pain or often have bladder infections. There are some over-the-counter medicines that you can buy at a pharmacy which may help with these conditions. Your doctor can prescribe creams, suppositories or pills which contain oestrogen.
- Osteoporosis or bone loss occurs more frequently. The hormone oestrogen protects bones. When the body produces less oestrogen, bone density decreases, increasing the risk of a fracture. You can get a bone density test from your doctor.

Practical tip:

Exercise, vitamin D and food containing calcium will strengthen the bones. Calcium is found in nuts, dairy products, soy, fish and green vegetables. Vitamin D can be produced by the body if it gets enough sunlight. Therefore, outdoor activities are very important.



2. My new self

Be open about menopause

Menopause is not talked about widely in our society. In fact, it is still a taboo topic. When women start to be open about their menopause and talk about their experiences and changes, menopause can become a normal stage in life nobody needs to be ashamed of.

The human body changes over the course of its entire life and not only during the menopause years. Adopting a positive attitude to menopause helps you feel happier and enjoy life. By staying positive, this period of transition can become an opportunity to begin something new and beautiful. Because beauty comes from inside. It is not without wrinkles, but it smiles.

Maybe the past years have given you a strengthened self-esteem and new experiences. Take that with you into your new stage of life: Perhaps you are successful and thrive in your professional life. Perhaps you are experiencing a phase of reorientation, change jobs or start further training. Perhaps you have children to look after or your grown-up children have moved out and you are still learning to cope with the situation. Or maybe you have to care for your parents or parents-in-law.

Menopause often coincides with big changes in your professional and private life. But no matter what your specific situation looks like and what challenges you may encounter: staying curious and building on your knowledge and experience will make you enjoy many exciting years ahead. Such a prospect is worth looking forward to. Take as much time as possible for yourself and your needs, regardless of any challenges you face.



3. Time to care for yourself

Do everything that makes you
feel good

Menopause brings on many changes. So do not forget that you are the most important priority in this process. In large part, it is up to you how you go through menopause and the time after. Self-care plays an important role in this. If you take good care of yourself, you will improve your own wellbeing.

Women are often expected, and often want, to be there for others – for their children, partners, family and friends. Thus, they easily forget to look after themselves, and that is a pity.

Because self-care has got nothing to do with selfishness. Self-care means taking time for things that make you feel good and improve your health. It also helps you to cope with stress and build up your strength.

Make sure to schedule some time for yourself. Remember: time for yourself is equally important as all the other appointments in your calendar or diary. Your partner and children will also learn to respect your time for self-care. So, despite all the changes and challenges, menopause can be an opportunity to start caring for yourself.

Relationships as a source of strength

Whether hosting a girls' night, inviting someone over for coffee or talking for hours on the phone with your best friend: talking to others makes you feel good. Talk openly about your menopause and how you feel. Sharing your experience is helpful for both sides and creates a feeling of connectedness. Especially during menopause, this can be a great support and contribute significantly to your wellbeing.

Enjoying sexuality and intimacy

The ability to feel love and sexual desire stays with us throughout life. Experiencing sexual and erotic pleasure is not only important when we are young. Our sexuality changes in the course of a lifetime. By the time women reach their menopause they have gained a lot of experience in life and therefore know better what they want and like. Thus, sex can become a new and extremely sensual experience during and after the menopause.

Good sex depends on a positive attitude towards your own body and your own needs. There are many ways to strengthen your body, for example through exercise, sports, relaxation, a positive attitude towards life, food, and also through medical care. And all of this improves your mental wellbeing too. Enjoying your sexuality, no matter whether alone or with others, is good for your health. Sexual arousal improves blood circulation in general and particularly in the genital area.

SEXUALITY THRIVES ON TOGETHERNESS

Make sure that you have enough time for each other. For example, try to give each other loving touches and hugs every day, have meaningful conversations and do activities together. Going on trips and holidays together also gives you more time for sexual encounters as a couple. Contraception should be continued until menopause.

ADAPTING TO CHANGES

Hormonal changes during menopause can also bring about physical and mental changes, such as a low sex drive, reduced arousal, difficulty achieving orgasm, vaginal dryness and pain during sexual intercourse. Discuss these issues with your gynaecologist. There are many remedies and options to help alleviate these symptoms, like medicines, creams or sex toys.

Practical tips to relieve vaginal dryness:

- Flaxseed stimulates mucus production.
- Flaxseed regimen: Mix one teaspoon of cracked flaxseed into your yogurt or muesli. Drink plenty of water with it.
- Only wash your vulva with warm water. Do not use soap or shower gel, as they will only cause your vulvar skin to get drier.

Healthy eating

Eating healthy means to make sure you get the right amount of protein, carbohydrates, fats and dietary fibre.

PROTEIN

Protein is important for muscle growth. Around the age of 30 people tend to lose muscle mass and gain body fat. Therefore, our body needs a lot of protein.

Practical tips:

- Try to include protein with every meal. Plant-based proteins are found in: soy, beans, lentils, peas, oat flakes, grain. Proteins from animals are found in: low-fat dairy products, such as curd cheese, skyr, cottage cheese, fish, meat.
- Fruit, vegetables and whole-grain products: They provide the body with minerals, vitamins and dietary fibre.

Practical tips:

- Eat 3 portions of vegetables and 2 portions of fruit each day.
- Dietary fibre is important for digestion. Try to eat dietary fibre every day. Fibre is contained in seeds, several cabbage varieties, berries, whole-grain bread and fermented foods, such as sauerkraut and kefir.

FAT

We distinguish between saturated and unsaturated fat.

Our daily diet should include mostly unsaturated fat.

Practical tips:

- Unsaturated fat is found in: olive oil, linseed oil, rapeseed oil, nuts, fish, seafood
- Saturated fat is found in: coconut fat, palm oil, butter, cheese, sausages. Try to cut down your consumption of this type of fat.

PHYTOESTROGENS

Phytoestrogens are plant-based oestrogens. They are contained in many foods and help alleviate menopause symptoms.

Practical tips:

These foods contain a lot of phytoestrogens:

- Soybeans, soy milk, tofu, whole-grain products, legumes, dried fruit
- Green vegetables, such as broccoli, zucchini, Brussels sprouts and other cabbage varieties
- Garlic, onions, flaxseed

CALCIUM AND VITAMIN D

Our bones need calcium and vitamin D to stay healthy.

Dairy products, certain fruits (kiwi, oranges, tangerines, blackberries) and vegetables (pumpkin, broccoli, zucchini, spinach, cauliflower) are rich in calcium. Vitamin D is found in mushrooms and fatty fish like herring or salmon.

Practical tip:

Our body needs sunlight to produce vitamin D. This is why many people do not have enough vitamin D in winter. Your doctor can check the vitamin D level in your body. If it is too low you can take vitamin D drops.

Preventive health check-ups

Preventive check-ups are important for your health. They help to identify many chronic diseases early and to start treatment in time.

Important health check-ups include:

- **Gynaecological screening:** The screening helps your gynaecologist detect early signs of breast cancer or cervical cancer. You can also discuss questions about menstruation, sexuality and contraception.
- **Bone density test:** The test is a special X-ray scan of your bones. If you are suspected to have osteoporosis, the costs will be paid by your health insurance fund.
- **Mammography:** A mammography is used to examine the breast for any changes for the early detection of breast cancer. In Austria, all women aged 40 and older can participate in a free mammography screening programme.
- **Colonoscopy:** A colonoscopy is the most important examination for the early detection of bowel cancer.

Physical activity and exercise

Being active and doing exercise is fun. Strength training and muscle-building exercises help relieve menopause symptoms. Your bones will stay healthy for a longer time when you do sports regularly. Your health and your sense of balance will improve. Being physically active can also prevent pain and diseases.

HERE ARE SOME STRENGTH EXERCISES WHICH YOU CAN DO AT HOME

You can easily do these exercises at home. You do not need any equipment. Aim for 2 or 3 sets of each exercise. Try to do the exercises regularly 2 or 3 days a week.

Important:

- Always start with warming up to prevent injuries. For example: Run in place, start slowly and then get a little faster. Do this for about 3 minutes. Another exercise that gets you moving is rope skipping. Then do 20 jumping jacks and 20 twist jumps, because jump exercises are especially important for your bones.
- If you feel pain during an exercise, stop the exercise. Remember, this is not about achievement, it is about enjoying yourself being active.
- During the exercises, breathe into your belly and breathe out fully. Your belly rises when breathing in and falls when breathing out. We often forget to breathe when we work out hard and are focused on an exercise. Breathing helps you do the exercises.
- Depending on the exercise, make sure that your legs, arms or back have good contact with the floor.
- Start each exercise slowly and accurately. Once you feel confident doing the exercise you can do it at a faster pace. But even when you bring up your pace, make sure to do the exercise correctly. This will help you prevent injuries.

Jumping Jacks



Start by standing on the floor with your feet a little more than shoulder-width apart. Stand straight. Your arms are by your sides. Breathe in. Jump up, spread your legs out and bring both arms together above your head. Breathe out when jumping. Then jump your feet together again and lower your arms back down to your sides.

Aim for 20 repetitions.

Twist Jumps

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Stand on the floor with your feet together. Bend your knees slightly. Jump up and at the same time twist your lower body to the right and then to the left. Keep your arms and upper body straight forward. The rotation only comes from the hip. Do not forget to breathe.

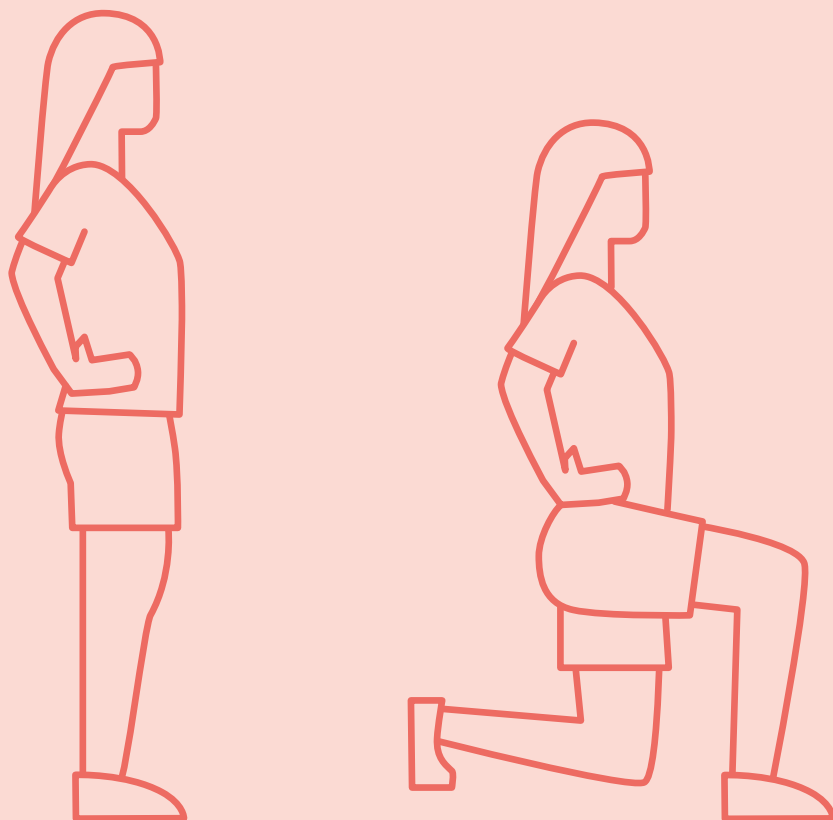
Aim for 20 repetitions.

Squats



Stand on the floor with your feet hip-width apart. Your toes should be pointing slightly outward. Imagine that you are going to sit down on a chair behind you. Stretch out your arms in front of you. As you come up to standing, straighten your legs and squeeze your buttocks. Inhale on the way up and exhale on the way down.

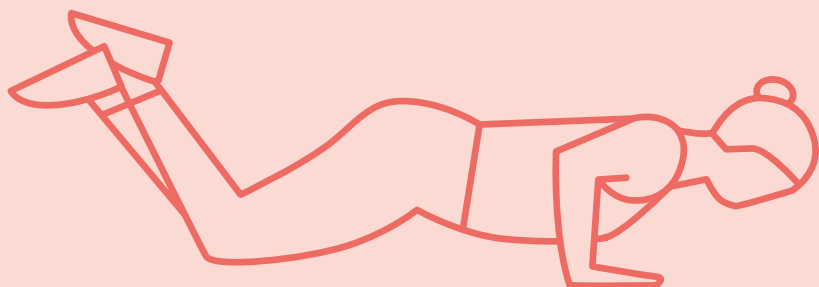
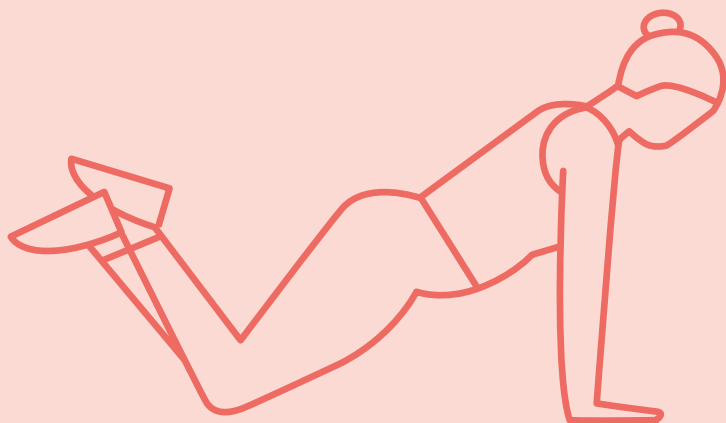
Aim for 15 repetitions.



Stand on the floor with your feet hip-width apart. Put your hands on your hips. Breathe in. Bring your right foot forward as if you would take a big step. Breathe out. At the same time bend your legs and lower your hip until your left knee nearly touches the ground. Then push yourself up to a standing position and bring the legs back together. Make sure to keep your upper body straight. Repeat with the other leg and continue alternating legs until the set is finished.

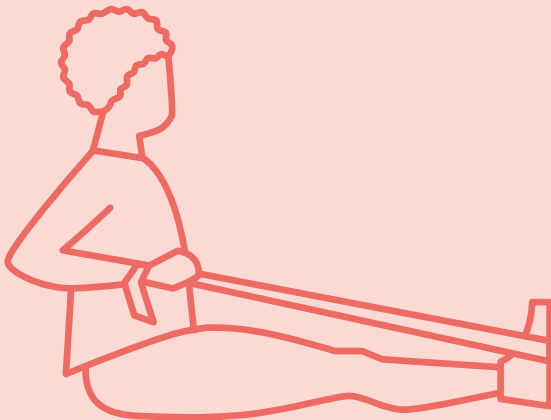
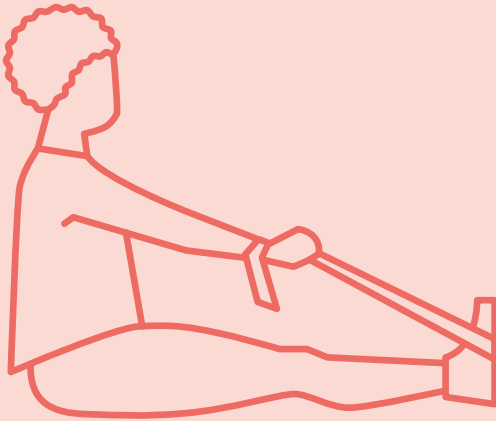
Aim for 30 repetitions with each leg.

Knee Push Ups



Lie down on the floor. Place your hands close to your body under your shoulders. Your lower body rests on your knees. Draw your feet towards your buttocks. Tighten your core. Now bend and extend your arms. Your body forms a straight line from your head to your knees. Keep your head straight up and not sunk between your shoulders. Exhale on the way down and inhale on the way up.

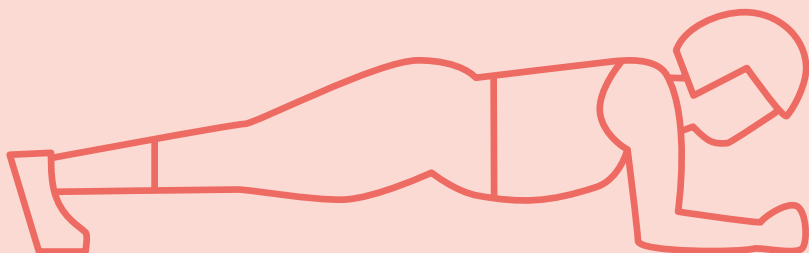
Aim for 15 repetitions.



For this exercise, you can either use a resistance band (an elastic rubber fitness band) or use a towel. Sit on the floor with your legs extended and slightly bent in the knee. Place the band or towel around the soles of your feet. It should be taut, but not stretched. Keep your upper body straight. Your elbows should be close to your body. Your arms should be extended. Breathe in. Now pull your arms back towards your waist. Breathe out as you do so and squeeze your shoulder blades together. Then you extend the arms in front of you to the starting position.

Aim for 15 repetitions.

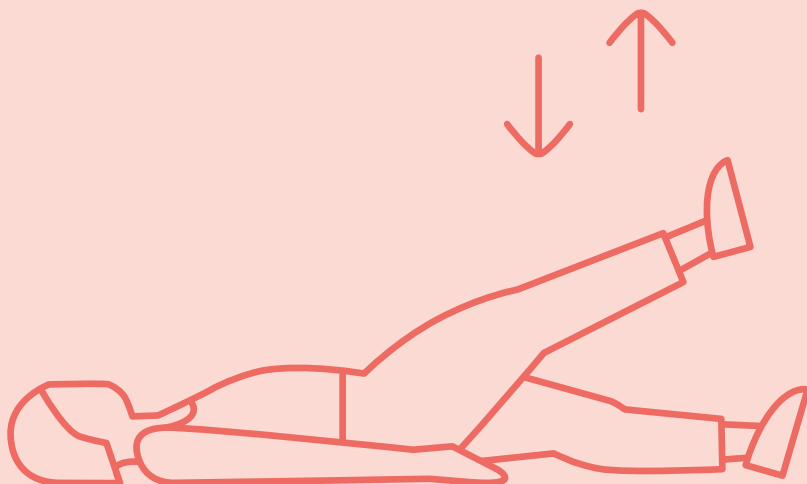
Plank



Lie on your stomach and prop yourself on your forearms, with your elbows directly under your shoulders. Your thumbs are pointing towards each other. Squeeze your abdomen and buttocks. Maintain a straight line from the top of your head to your heels. Keep this position for 30 seconds. Inhale and exhale deeply throughout the exercise.

Beginners should keep the position for 30 seconds and increase the duration gradually. Advanced exercisers should keep the position for 60 seconds.

Scissor Kicks



Lie on your back with your head on the floor and your arms down by your side. Lift your legs in the air until they reach an angle of about 30° off the floor. Keep your legs in the air. Then scissor your legs. Lower your right leg down towards the ground and at the same time lift your left leg up. Then switch, bringing your left leg down and your right leg up. Do not forget to breathe. Note: Make sure to keep your lower back flat against the floor. To make the exercise easier you can put your hands beneath your buttocks. Engage your abdomen. The movement comes from your abs, not from your back.

Aim for 20 repetitions.

Relaxation or cool down

After your workout, you should do some easy exercises to cool down. Your muscles can relax and they will be supplied with a higher amount of oxygen.

Jog in place for 3 minutes and shake out your arms as you do so. Inhale and exhale deeply. Then lie down on the floor. Find a comfortable position, with your body resting firmly on the floor. Keep this position for 5 minutes and close your eyes.

Great work! You did it!



4. Enjoy your period-free life

Stay relaxed during menopause

Every woman reaches menopause at some point. Menopause is not a disease and nothing to be afraid of. Once you know what will happen in your body and what to expect during the menopausal years, you have made an important step towards a smooth transition. There are so many things that help you get through your menopause healthily and with ease. Your attitude to menopause and to getting older can have a great impact on how you experience the changes during this time. Your own living conditions and the challenges you need to overcome also play a role in the process. Some women consider menopause as a good time to look back at their previous lives. Some women see menopause as an opportunity to deliberately recalibrate their lives. Accept this new phase in your life as what it is: a time where YOU take centre stage and an opportunity to fill your life with joy and happiness. Curiosity and equanimity are good companions on this journey.

Addresses and information

PHARMACY SEARCH

apothekerkammer.at/apothekensuche

INFORMATION (IN GERMAN)

- Online magazine for women in menopause
lemondays.de
- A portal to a new phase of life
wechselweise.net

FREE EXERCISE AND FITNESS ACTIVITIES

- "Bewegte Apotheke" – free Nordic Walking groups
wig.or.at/programme/gesunde-freizeit/bewegte-apotheke
- "Bewegt im Park" – free outdoor exercise classes
bewegt-im-park.at
- "Aktiv-Parks" – outdoor fitness parks and street workout parks in Vienna
wien.gv.at/umwelt/parks/anlagen/aktiv-parks.html#bezirk2

MEDICAL GUIDANCE AND ADVICE

FEM Med Women's Health and Medical Centre

femmed.at

PODCASTS (IN GERMAN)

- Menomio – Der Podcast für glückliche Wechseljahre
menomio.podigee.io
- Die fabelhaften Wechseljahre mit Gynäkologin Sheila de Liz
podcast.de/episode/493070750/053-women-on-fire-im-gespraech-mit-dr-sheila-de-liz

- Crazy Sexy Wechseljahre: Podcast mit Angelika Löhr
fuer-sie.de/gesundheits/crazy-sexy-wechseljahre-fuer-sie-podcast-8244.html
- Podcast der Techniker Krankenkasse „Gesundheit zum Hören: Wechseljahre“ mit Gynäkologin Silke Bartens
tk.de/techniker/magazin/digitale-gesundheit/podcasts/wechseljahre-2126642

PSYCHOLOGICAL SUPPORT

- FEM Women's Health Centre
fem.at
- FEM Süd Women's Health Centre
femsued.at

LINK TO THE ONLINE VERSION OF THE BROCHURE
wien.gv.at/spezial/frauengesundheit-wechseljahre-en



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