

Tracy Gaibisso

FOODS TO SUPPORT MENOPAUSE



Seaweed (kelp, wakame, nori, dulse)

Key Nutrients (typical dried seaweed, per ~1–2 g serving)

- **Iodine:** 150–600 µg (species-dependent)
- **Magnesium:** 10–30 mg
- **Calcium:** 30–60 mg
- **Potassium:** 50–100 mg
- **Iron:** small but bioavailable
- **Trace minerals:** selenium, zinc, manganese, copper
- **Polysaccharides:** alginates, fucoidan

Menopause Benefits

Seaweed provides iodine and a wide range of trace minerals that are needed to support healthy thyroid function at a time when hormonal changes can place greater demand on metabolic regulation. Its natural fibres assist bile flow in the gut, supporting cholesterol metabolism and helping the body clear waste more efficiently through the bowel. This makes seaweed particularly relevant in the post-menopausal years, when both lipid handling and hormone clearance can become less efficient.

Historical use of seaweed

The broad mineral profile also supports muscle and nerve function, helping to reduce symptoms that are commonly experienced during menopause.

In many coastal cultures, seaweed was a famine food, and known as a winter tonic. It was relied upon during scarcity and transition, cultures including Celtic, Nordic, Japanese, Korean, and Polynesian peoples used seaweed to:

- Restore strength after illness
- Maintain vitality through harsh seasons
- Support longevity

Seaweed was often given to older women and elders recognising its grounding, mineral-restorative nature. Unlike grains or fruits, seaweed does not flower, seed or follow reproductive cycles, because of this, it became associated with:

- Post-reproductive feminine wisdom
- Endurance
- Adaptability
- Emotional depth

Seaweed is the food of those who have lived through the seasons.

Practical Use

1–2 small servings, 2–4× weekly

Rotate species rather than the same species

Hemp seeds

Key nutrients

Hemp seeds are unusually complete nutritionally and easy to digest. They provide a full spectrum of essential amino acids, making them a valuable plant-based protein source, alongside a naturally balanced fatty acid profile. Hemp seeds contain omega-6 and omega-3 fats in an approximately 3:1 ratio. They are also rich in magnesium, zinc, iron, and potassium, with modest amounts of vitamin E and B vitamins. This combination makes hemp seeds particularly supportive of muscle, nerve, and connective tissue health.

Menopause Benefits

During menopause, declining oestrogen places greater demand on muscle maintenance, metabolic stability, and nervous system regulation. Hemp seeds support these foundational needs without acting as hormonal stimulants. Their complete protein content assists with preserving lean muscle mass and connective tissue, while magnesium contributes to healthy nervous system function, sleep quality, and mood balance. The presence of gamma-linolenic acid (GLA) supports inflammatory balance and joint comfort, making hemp seeds well suited to the post-reproductive phase. Their neutral effect on blood sugar makes them appropriate for women experiencing metabolic changes during menopause.

Historical Use

Hemp has been cultivated by humans for over 10,000 years, making it one of our oldest companion plants. Historically, it was valued as a plant of structure and survival. Hemp was used to make rope, sails, clothing, paper, and food — the materials that allowed communities to function, travel, and endure.

In traditional cultures, hemp symbolised reliability, resilience, and continuity. It was associated with the maintenance of daily life and the scaffolding of civilisation itself. This symbolism aligns strongly with menopause as a life stage focused not on reproduction, but on stability, strength, and self-support.

Mythically, hemp represents the quiet ally — the plant that holds things together when more dramatic forces recede. It carries an archetype of grounded wisdom, structural integrity, and calm resilience. In a menopausal context, hemp reflects the transition from hormonally driven rhythms to self-generated stability, where the body relies more on nutrition, structure, and nervous system balance than cyclical hormonal cues.

Practical Use

- Typical dose: 1–3 tablespoons daily
- Best forms: Hulled hemp seeds (hemp hearts) for digestibility
- How to use: Sprinkled over vegetables, added to yoghurt, blended into smoothies, or stirred into soups and salads

Hemp seeds are calorie-dense but generally well tolerated. They are suitable for regular use and can form part of a consistent nutritional base during menopause.

Sunflower seeds

Key Nutrients

Sunflower seeds are a nutrient-dense seed rich in healthy fats, plant-based protein, and antioxidant compounds. They are particularly high in vitamin E a fat-soluble antioxidant that helps protect cell membranes from everyday oxidative stress. Sunflower seeds also provide B vitamins, including vitamin B1 and B6, along with minerals such as selenium, zinc, magnesium, and copper, all of which contribute to normal nervous system and immune function. Their natural fat content supports nutrient absorption and overall cellular health.

Menopause Benefits

During menopause, shifts in hormones can influence energy levels, nervous system resilience, and cardiovascular health. Sunflower seeds offer nutritional support during this transition by supplying vitamin E and trace minerals that help protect tissues and support normal cellular function. Their nutrient profile may assist with maintaining comfort during times of physiological change, including supporting skin, vascular, and nervous system health.

Historical Use

Sunflowers have been cultivated for thousands of years, particularly by Indigenous peoples of the Americas, who valued the plant as a source of nourishment, oil, and ceremonial symbolism. The sunflower's distinctive habit of turning toward the sun made it a symbol of vitality, constancy, and alignment. Seeds were traditionally consumed to sustain strength and endurance, while the plant itself represents continuity and trust in natural rhythms.

Symbolically, sunflower seeds represent orientation and conscious direction. Unlike seeds associated with fertility or reproduction, sunflower seeds speak to the ability to face what nourishes and sustains life. In the context of menopause, this reflects a shift toward intentional use of energy — choosing where attention, effort, and nourishment are directed, rather than being driven by cyclical hormonal cues.

Practical Use

- Typical dose: 1–2 tablespoons, 3–4 times per week
- Best forms: Raw or lightly toasted, unsalted
- How to use: Added to salads, vegetables, yoghurt, or blended into seed mixes or home made bread
- Timing: Best included as part of a rotating selection of seeds rather than used daily in large amounts. Sunflower seeds are nutrient-dense and naturally high in omega-6 fats, so moderation and balance with other whole foods is recommended.

Flaxseeds

Key Nutrients

Flaxseeds are a highly nutrient-dense seed, valued for their unique combination of soluble and insoluble fibre, plant-based omega-3 fats, and naturally occurring polyphenols known as lignans. They are one of the richest dietary sources of alpha-linolenic acid (ALA), an omega three, which the body cannot produce and must be obtained from the diet. Flaxseeds provide magnesium, potassium, and small amounts of plant protein as well as providing phytoestrogens. When freshly ground, flaxseeds offer broad support for digestive function and contribute to overall dietary fibre intake, which is particularly important as nutritional needs shift with age. Keep them refrigerated once ground as the oils are very prone to rancidity.

Menopause Benefits

During menopause, changes in hormone production can affect digestive regularity, comfort, and the body's ability to maintain internal balance. Flaxseeds support this transition by contributing fibre that helps promote regular bowel function and supports the body's natural clearance pathways. Their lignan content is often described as gently modulating rather than stimulating, making flaxseeds well suited to the post-reproductive phase.

Flaxseed contains ALA which is anti inflammatory and can assist with mild aches and pains that can occur after menopause. The naturally phytoestrogens contained within flaxseeds, offer food based support after menopause acting in a modulatory way once your body's own oestrogen starts to decline.

Together, these properties make flaxseeds a useful dietary addition for women seeking steadiness of hormones and regulation during menopause.

Historical Use

Flax has been cultivated for thousands of years across Europe, the Middle East, and parts of Asia, valued both as a food and as the source of linen fibre. Traditionally, flax was associated with domestic stability, nourishment, and continuity. Its seeds were consumed as part of everyday diets, while the plant itself was essential for producing cloth used in daily life, ceremonial garments, and rites of passage. This long-standing use reflects flax's role as a plant tied to order, reliability, and sustained care.

Across many cultures, flax is symbolically linked to time, fate, and continuity. The act of spinning flax into thread became a powerful metaphor for weaving life's stages together. In a menopausal context, flaxseed reflects the transition from cyclical fertility to integration and coherence — taking what remains and shaping it into something stable, useful, and enduring.

Practical Use

- Typical dose: 2 tablespoons daily
- Best forms: Freshly ground flaxseeds (whole seeds pass through largely undigested)
- How to use: Stirred into yoghurt, porridge, smoothies, or sprinkled over vegetables
- Timing: Best used consistently, alongside adequate fluid intake

Flaxseeds are generally well tolerated when introduced gradually and used in modest amounts as part of a varied whole-food diet.

Chia seeds

Key Nutrients

Chia seeds are a highly nutrient-dense whole food, valued for their exceptional fibre content, plant-based omega-3 fats, and broad mineral profile. They are rich in alpha-linolenic acid (ALA), alongside providing calcium, magnesium, phosphorus, iron, and zinc. Chia seeds also contain moderate amounts of plant protein and a range of polyphenols. When soaked, they form a natural gel, reflecting their high soluble fibre content and water-binding capacity.

Menopause Benefits

During menopause, changes in hormones can influence digestive comfort, hydration status, energy regulation, and bone health. Chia seeds support this phase by contributing fibre that promotes digestive regularity and helps maintain a sense of fullness and steadiness. Their omega-3 content supports general inflammatory balance, while their calcium and magnesium content contributes to bone and muscle support as nutritional demands shift with age. The gel-forming nature of chia seeds may also assist with hydration and gut comfort, which can be particularly helpful during times of physiological change.

Historical Use

Chia seeds have a long history of use in Central and South America, particularly among the Aztec and Mayan cultures. They were valued as a sustaining food, often consumed by messengers and warriors for endurance during long journeys. Chia was considered a food of strength and reliability rather than indulgence, used to maintain stamina, nourishment, and resilience during periods of physical demand.

The word *chia* is derived from a term meaning “strength.” Symbolically, chia seeds represent contained energy and quiet endurance. They absorb and hold water, expand slowly, and release nourishment over time. In a menopausal context, chia reflects the shift toward conservation, pacing, and self-sustaining strength — supporting the body not through stimulation, but through steady provision.

Practical Use

- Typical dose: 1–2 tablespoons daily
- Best forms: Whole seeds, soaked before use
- How to use: Stirred into yoghurt, smoothies, porridges, or made into chia pudding
- Timing: Best introduced gradually, alongside adequate fluid intake

Chia seeds are generally well tolerated, though their high fibre content means smaller amounts may be more comfortable initially. They are well suited to regular inclusion as part of a varied, whole-food diet during menopause.

Pumpkin seeds

Key Nutrients

Pumpkin seeds (pepitas) are a nutrient-dense seed providing plant-based protein, healthy fats, and a broad range of minerals. They are particularly rich in magnesium, zinc, iron, and potassium, along with fibre and antioxidant compounds. Pumpkin seeds also contain phytosterols and amino acids that support general metabolic and tissue health.

Menopause Benefits

During menopause, mineral requirements often increase as hormonal changes influence muscle function, sleep quality, and nervous system resilience. Pumpkin seeds contribute magnesium and zinc, which support normal muscle and nerve function and help maintain overall vitality. Their protein and fat content supports satiety and steady energy, making them a useful food during periods of physiological transition.

Historical Use

Pumpkin seeds have been consumed for centuries by Indigenous cultures of the Americas as a valued source of nourishment. They were traditionally eaten whole, ground into pastes, or incorporated into sauces and stews, particularly during harvest seasons when strengthening foods were needed.

Symbolically, pumpkin seeds are associated with harvest, completion, and grounded abundance. They represent nourishment after growth — the gathering of resources once active cycles have passed. In a menopausal context, pumpkin seeds reflect consolidation, strength, and preparation for the next stage of life.

Practical Use

- Typical dose: 1–2 tablespoons daily
- Best forms: Lightly toasted, unsalted, or soaked and carefully re-dried in a low oven will break down some compounds contained within them that may stop you absorbing the minerals.
- How to use: Added to salads, vegetables, soups, or blended into seed mixes

Olives and extra virgin olive oil

Key Nutrients

Olives and extra virgin olive oil are rich in monounsaturated fats, particularly oleic acid, along with polyphenols and vitamin E. These compounds support cell membrane integrity and provide antioxidant activity. Olive oil also enhances absorption of fat-soluble nutrients from other foods.

Menopause Benefits

As oestrogen levels decline, cardiovascular and inflammatory balance become increasingly important. Olives and olive oil support overall heart and vascular health and contribute to joint comfort and cognitive resilience. Their fats provide sustained energy and support satisfaction with meals, which can be helpful as appetite and metabolism change during menopause.

Historical Use

Olives have been a cornerstone of Mediterranean diets for thousands of years. Olive oil was used not only as food, but also as medicine, fuel, and ceremonial oil. Cultures associated regular olive consumption with endurance, longevity, and vitality.

The olive tree symbolises wisdom, peace, and elderhood. Long-lived and resilient, it continues to bear fruit for generations. In menopause, olives represent sustained nourishment and calm strength rather than growth or reproduction.

Practical Use

Typical dose:

- Olives: small handful daily or regularly
- Olive oil: 1–2 tablespoons daily

Best forms: Extra virgin olive oil, minimally processed olives

How to use: **Olives:** as healthy snacks: **Olive oil:** As a primary cooking and dressing fat

Dark Leafy Greens

Key Nutrients

Dark leafy greens such as kale, silverbeet, collards, nettle and spinach provide calcium, magnesium, potassium, folate, vitamin K, and fibre. They also contain carotenoids and polyphenols that contribute to antioxidant intake.

Menopause Benefits

During menopause, leafy greens support bone, muscle, and digestive health through their mineral and fibre content. Their natural bitterness can help stimulate digestion, while fibre supports regular bowel function and nutrient clearance. These qualities make leafy greens a valuable daily foundation food.

Historical Use

Across many cultures, leafy greens were traditionally used as seasonal tonics, particularly in spring and autumn. They were valued for their cleansing, strengthening, and restorative qualities and often eaten cooked to improve digestibility.

Bitter greens are often associated with wisdom and discernment. They represent nourishment that may not be immediately sweet, but is deeply supportive over time — reflecting the shift in menopause toward depth, nourishment, and long-term wellbeing.

Practical Use

- **Typical dose:** 1–2 cups daily
- **Best forms:** Lightly cooked for digestibility, especially during cooler months
- **How to use:** Sautéed, added to soups, stews, or salads

Mushrooms

Culinary- edible

Key Nutrients

Culinary mushrooms provide B vitamins, fibre, and minerals such as selenium, potassium, and copper. They also contain beta-glucans and other polysaccharides that contribute to immune and metabolic balance. In addition to culinary varieties, certain mushrooms have a long history of use as medicinal or tonic foods, particularly in East Asian traditions. These include mushrooms such as reishi, shiitake, maitake, lion's mane, and turkey tail. Traditionally, they were not used as quick remedies, but as long-term supports for vitality, immune balance, and stress adaptation.

Medicinal- Used more as extracts/tinctures/capsules

Medicinal mushrooms are characterised by their higher concentrations of beta-glucans and other bioactive polysaccharides, which interact with immune and stress-response pathways. In the context of menopause, these mushrooms are often valued for supporting the body's ability to adapt to ongoing physiological change, rather than targeting specific symptoms. They are commonly used to promote calm resilience, support recovery from stress, and maintain overall vitality during later life stages. From a traditional perspective, medicinal mushrooms were often reserved for elders or periods of depletion, reflecting their role in supporting longevity and endurance.

Menopause Benefits

During menopause, immune resilience and energy regulation can be challenged by hormonal shifts. Mushrooms support general vitality and provide nutrients that contribute to nervous system and immune health. Their savoury flavour also enhances meal satisfaction without relying on refined ingredients.

Historical Use

Across Asia and parts of Europe, mushrooms have been used for thousands of years as both food and medicine. Certain varieties were historically consumed by monks, healers, and elders, and were associated with strength, longevity, and spiritual clarity. In many cultures, mushrooms were regarded as precious gifts of the forest, appearing seasonally and unpredictably.

Mushrooms are liminal organisms, growing between life and decay, above and below ground. Symbolically, they represent adaptation, transformation, and quiet intelligence. In a menopausal context, mushrooms reflect the wisdom of learning to thrive in change — drawing nourishment from what remains, rather than striving for constant renewal.

Practical Use

Culinary mushrooms

- Typical dose: ½–1 cup cooked, several times per week
- Best forms: Fresh or dried, lightly cooked
- How to use: Soups, stews, stir-fries, roasted vegetables

Medicinal mushrooms

- Typical use: As teas, broths, powders, or extracts
- Approach: Used consistently at low to moderate amounts as part of a broader dietary pattern
- Note: Best viewed as long-term supportive foods rather than short-term solutions

Medicinal mushrooms are generally well tolerated but are best introduced gradually, particularly when used in concentrated forms.

Oats

Key Nutrients

Oats are a whole grain rich in soluble fibre (beta-glucans) complex carbohydrates, and B vitamins. They also provide magnesium, iron, and small amounts of protein, contributing to sustained energy release. Beyond the grain itself, the green tops of the oat plant (oat straw) have a long history of use as a gentle nervous system tonic.

Menopause Benefits

During menopause, oats support digestive comfort and help maintain a sense of steadiness and satiety. Their soluble fibre contributes to cholesterol balance and gut health, while their warming, grounding nature can be supportive during times of hormonal fluctuation. In the context of menopause, oat straw tea is often used to support calm, resilience, and nervous system nourishment during times of hormonal transition.

Historical Use

Oats have long been a staple food in northern and temperate climates, valued for their reliability and ability to sustain energy. Traditionally associated with hearth and home, oats were often used to nourish those needing strength and warmth.

Traditionally prepared as a tea or infusion, oat straw was used to nourish and steady the nerves during periods of stress, fatigue, or emotional depletion. It was valued for its ability to provide gradual, restorative support to the nervous system over time

Oats symbolise steadiness, comfort, and endurance. They reflect nourishment that supports daily life rather than peak performance — an archetype well suited to menopause, where consistency becomes more valuable than intensity.

Practical Use

- **Typical dose:** ½ cup cooked, most days if tolerated
- **Best forms:** Steel-cut, rolled, or soaked oats
- **How to use:** Porridge, savoury oats, or added to baking, Oatstraw tea can be used traditionally by adding 25g to a litre of just boiled water and left to brew for at least 4 hours, strained and then sipped across the day (can be rewarmed or used as an iced tea with lemon and a tsp honey)

\

Bibliography

Aakre, I. (2020). *Iodine Status and Thyroid Function in a Group of Seaweed Consumers*. *Nutrients*. <https://www.mdpi.com/2072-6643/12/11/3483>

Barsby, J. P. (2021). *Nutritional properties of selected superfood seeds and bioactive compounds*. Research Repository, Griffith University. <https://research-repository.griffith.edu.au/server/api/core/bitstreams/08cd4bfb-ea03-4f95-b729-05612105ad72/content>

Cerletti, C., Esposito, S., Iacoviello, L., & De Curtis, A. (2021). Edible mushrooms and β -glucans: Impact on human health. *Nutrients*, 13(6), 2195. <https://doi.org/10.3390/nu13062195>

Cetisli, N. E., et al. (2015). *The effects of flaxseed on menopausal symptoms and quality of life*. PubMed. <https://pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/25882265/>

EFSA Panel on Dietetic Products, Nutrition and Allergies. (2011). Scientific opinion on the substantiation of health claims related to beta-glucans from oats and barley and maintenance of normal blood cholesterol concentrations. *EFSA Journal*, 9(6), 2207. <https://doi.org/10.2903/j.efsa.2011.2207>

Gorzynik-Debicka, M., Przychodzen, P., Cappello, F., Kuban-Jankowska, A., Marino Gammazza, A., Knap, N., ... Gorska-Ponikowska, M. (2018). Potential health benefits of olive oil and plant polyphenols. *International Journal of Molecular Sciences*, 19(3), 686. <https://doi.org/10.3390/ijms19030686>

Guasch-Ferré, M., Hu, F. B., Martínez-González, M. A., Fitó, M., Bulló, M., Estruch, R., ... Salas-Salvadó, J. (2014). Olive oil intake and risk of cardiovascular disease and mortality in the PREDIMED study. *BMC Medicine*, 12, 78. <https://doi.org/10.1186/1741-7015-12-78>

Jin, F., Nieman, D. C., Sha, W., Xie, G., Qiu, Y., Jia, W., & Shan, Y. (2012). Supplementation of milled chia seeds increases plasma α -linolenic acid and eicosapentaenoic acid in postmenopausal women. *Plant Foods for Human Nutrition*, 67(2), 105–110. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11130-012-0285-0>

Khalid, W., Arshad, M. S., Kousar, S., Qaisrani, T. B., & Akram, R. (2022). Chia seeds (*Salvia hispanica* L.): A review of nutritional composition, bioactive compounds, and health benefits. *Journal of Functional Foods*, 90, 104989. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jff.2022.104989>

Kulczyński, B., & Gramza-Michałowska, A. (2019). Nutritional value and bioactive compounds in pumpkin seeds. *Food Science and Nutrition*, 7(3), 997–1007. <https://doi.org/10.1002/fsn3.943>

Kulczyński, B., Kobus-Cisowska, J., Kmiecik, D., & Gramza-Michałowska, A. (2019). The chemical composition and nutritional value of chia seeds—Current state of knowledge. *Nutrients*, 11(6), 1242. <https://doi.org/10.3390/nu11061242>

Rasouli, H., Farzaei, M. H., & Khodarahmi, R. (2017). Polyphenols and their benefits: A review. *International Journal of Food Properties*, 20(sup2), 1700–1741. <https://doi.org/10.1080/10942912.2017.1354017>

Singh, A., Sabally, K., Kubow, S., Donnelly, D. J., Gariepy, Y., Orsat, V., & Raghavan, V. (2013). Bioactive compounds in culinary mushrooms: A review. *Journal of Food Science*, 78(4), R563–R576. <https://doi.org/10.1111/1750-3841.12054>

Sunflower seeds: Nutrition, benefits, and how to eat. (2023, February 14). *Healthline*. <https://www.healthline.com/nutrition/sunflower-seeds>

- Ullah, R., Nadeem, M., Khalique, A., Imran, M., Mehmood, S., Javid, A., & Hussain, J. (2016). Nutritional and therapeutic perspectives of chia (*Salvia hispanica* L.): A review. *Journal of Food Science and Technology*, 53(4), 1750–1758. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s13197-015-1967-0>
- US Department of Agriculture. (2019). *FoodData Central*. <https://fdc.nal.usda.gov>
- Welch, R. W. (1995). The nutritional quality of oats and comparisons with other cereals. *Journal of Cereal Science*, 21(3), 221–227. <https://doi.org/10.1006/jcrs.1995.0024>

Foods to support menopause

Discover the transformative power of food during menopause with "Foods to Support Menopause." Drawing on ancient wisdom, this guide explores nutrient-rich ingredients like seaweed, hemp, sunflower, flax, chia, and pumpkin seeds, revealing their vital roles in maintaining strength, balance, and vitality. Embrace a nourishing journey that celebrates the wisdom of post-reproductive life stages and supports your body's unique needs.