

Gut & Liver Supportive Foods

A Food-as-Medicine Guide for Women in Perimenopause & Menopause & Beyond

During perimenopause and menopause, hormonal changes impact the gut microbiome, liver detoxification pathways, inflammation levels, and nutrient absorption. Supporting gut health and liver function through whole foods can help improve digestion, balance hormones, stabilize blood sugar, support mood, and reduce inflammation.

Use this guide to **intentionally incorporate supportive foods throughout the week.**

Bitter Greens (Liver & Digestive Support)

Examples:

Arugula, Dandelion Greens, Mustard Greens, Radicchio, Endive, Chicory

Bitter greens are nutrient-rich, providing a variety of vitamins, minerals, and antioxidants essential during hormonal changes.

They are especially high in **magnesium**, which can help calm anxiety—a common symptom during perimenopause. They're also rich in **vitamins A, C, and K**, supporting the management of inflammation and oxidative stress that often increases with estrogen decline.

Bitter greens stimulate **bile production in the liver**, aiding digestion and detoxification. By promoting liver health and toxin elimination, they help stabilize cortisol levels and support hormonal balance.

Goal: Include ½ cup at least 3 times per week.

Cruciferous Vegetables (Hormone & Detox Support)

These vegetables contain compounds that support **healthy estrogen metabolism** and liver detoxification pathways.

Examples

- Broccoli
- Broccolini
- Brussels Sprouts
- Cauliflower
- Cabbage
- Kale
- Bok Choy

Brussels Sprouts

- Rich in **Indole-3-Carbinol (I3C)** which helps the body metabolize estrogen more efficiently.
- High in **fiber**, supporting digestion, gut health, and blood sugar control.
- Loaded with **vitamin C** for immune and skin support.
- Rich in **vitamin K** for bone health.

Cauliflower

Contains **sulforaphane**, a powerful antioxidant that supports liver detoxification and reduces inflammation.

Additional benefits:

- Supports blood sugar stability
- Provides **B6 and folate** for mood and energy
- Contains **choline**, important for brain health and memory

- Supports gut microbiome health
 - Provides minerals like **calcium and magnesium** for bone health.
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Beneficial Vegetables

Asparagus

High in **folate**, crucial for neurotransmitter production to reduce anxiety and promote mental wellness. Its natural diuretic properties help minimize fluid retention.

Green Beans

Provide **vitamins A, C, K, folate, and magnesium**, supporting muscle relaxation, sleep, and cortisol regulation.

Artichokes

Extremely supportive for **liver function and bile production**, helping improve digestion and detoxification.

Beets

Contain **betalains**, which support liver detox pathways and improve circulation.

Carrots

High in **beta-carotene**, which supports immune function and helps the body process estrogen more efficiently.

Fermented Foods (Microbiome Support)

Fermented foods provide **beneficial probiotics** that help restore microbial balance in the gut, improve digestion, and support immune health.

Examples:

- Sauerkraut
- Kimchi
- Fermented pickles (naturally fermented, not vinegar-only)
- Kefir
- Yogurt with live cultures
- Kombucha
- Miso
- Tempeh

These foods help support the **gut-hormone connection**, as a healthy microbiome plays an important role in estrogen metabolism through the **estrobolome**.

Goal: Include **small amounts daily** if tolerated.

Prebiotic Fiber Foods for a Healthy Microbiome

While fermented foods provide beneficial bacteria, **prebiotic foods feed those beneficial bacteria**, allowing them to thrive and multiply.

Prebiotics are specific types of fibers that beneficial gut bacteria ferment, producing **short-chain fatty acids (SCFAs)** such as butyrate. These compounds help:

- Strengthen the gut lining

- Reduce inflammation
- Support immune function
- Improve digestion
- Support metabolic health

A diverse microbiome depends on **regular intake of prebiotic fibers.**

Garlic

Garlic is one of the most powerful prebiotic foods.

- Rich in **inulin**, a fiber that feeds beneficial bacteria.
 - Contains antimicrobial compounds that help balance harmful microbes.
 - Supports immune function and cardiovascular health.
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Onions

Onions provide both **prebiotic fibers and antioxidants.**

- Rich in **inulin and fructooligosaccharides (FOS).**
 - Support beneficial bacteria such as **Bifidobacteria.**
 - Help reduce inflammation and support heart health.
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Leeks

Leeks are part of the allium family and contain similar beneficial compounds as garlic and onions.

- High in **prebiotic fibers**.
 - Support digestive health and microbial diversity.
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Asparagus

Asparagus is a natural source of **inulin fiber**, which supports beneficial gut bacteria.

- Also provides folate and antioxidants that support brain and hormone health.
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Jerusalem Artichokes (Sunchokes)

One of the **richest natural sources of inulin**.

- Strongly supports beneficial gut bacteria.
 - Helps improve insulin sensitivity and blood sugar balance.
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Green Bananas

Green bananas contain **resistant starch**, a type of fiber that feeds beneficial gut bacteria.

Benefits include:

- Improved gut microbial diversity
 - Increased production of beneficial short-chain fatty acids
 - Improved metabolic health
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Cooked and Cooled Potatoes or Rice

Cooling these foods increases their **resistant starch content**, making them beneficial for the microbiome.

Resistant starch helps:

- Feed beneficial gut bacteria
 - Improve insulin sensitivity
 - Support gut barrier health
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Simple Tip for Supporting Your Microbiome

Aim to include **both probiotics and prebiotics** regularly.

Examples:

- Sauerkraut + roasted vegetables
- Yogurt + berries
- Garlic and onions in cooked meals
- Asparagus or leeks in salads or stir fries

The goal is **diversity**, not perfection.

Citrus Fruits

Examples:

Oranges, Lemons, Grapefruit, Limes

Citrus fruits are rich in **vitamin C**, which can lower cortisol levels and strengthen the immune system.

They are refreshing, hydrating, and relatively low on the glycemic index, helping stabilize blood sugar during hormonal changes.

Adequate vitamin C intake is linked to **reduced fatigue, better immune resilience, and improved skin health.**

Berries

Strawberries

Packed with antioxidants and vitamin C that help reduce stress and systemic inflammation. Their low glycemic impact makes them an excellent option for supporting balanced blood sugar.

Blueberries

Provide powerful antioxidants called **anthocyanins**, which support brain health, reduce inflammation, and protect against oxidative stress.

Raspberries & Blackberries

High in fiber, supporting **gut motility and microbiome diversity.**

Wild Fatty Fish (Omega-3 Support)

Examples:

- Salmon
- Sardines
- Mackerel
- Trout

These fish are rich in **EPA and DHA omega-3 fatty acids**, which help:

- Reduce systemic inflammation
- Support heart health
- Improve mood stability
- Enhance brain function
- Support hormone balance

Regular consumption may improve resilience to stress and support cardiovascular health after menopause.

Seeds for Hormone & Gut Support

Flaxseeds

Provide **ALA omega-3 fatty acids and lignans**, which gently modulate estrogen levels.

Benefits include:

- Improved digestive regularity
- Hormone balance support
- Reduced inflammation

Chia Seeds

Loaded with fiber, omega-3s, and protein.

Benefits:

- Blood sugar stabilization
 - Improved satiety
 - Microbiome support
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Nuts & Seeds

Pumpkin Seeds (Pepitas)

- Rich in **magnesium** for sleep and stress support
- High in **zinc** for hormone production
- Contain **tryptophan** to support serotonin production

Sunflower Seeds

- Excellent source of **vitamin E**
- Support skin health and immune function
- Contain B vitamins for mood and energy

Almonds

- Rich in magnesium and calcium for bone health
- Help stabilize blood sugar

Walnuts

- High in plant-based omega-3s

- Support brain health and reduce inflammation
- Contain natural **melatonin**, supporting sleep.

Brazil Nuts

- Extremely high in **selenium**, important for thyroid function.

Macadamia Nuts

- Rich in monounsaturated fats that support heart health and reduce inflammation.

Quality Animal Proteins

Examples:

Grass-fed beef, pasture-raised poultry, eggs, wild fish.

These foods provide essential nutrients including **B vitamins, zinc, iron, and amino acids**.

Benefits:

- Stabilize blood sugar
- Support neurotransmitter production
- Improve energy and mood
- Support muscle maintenance during midlife.

Important amino acids include:

Tryptophan → serotonin production

Tyrosine → dopamine support

Glycine → improved sleep and stress reduction

Whey Protein & High-Quality Protein Powders

High-quality protein powders can be a helpful tool for supporting muscle maintenance, blood sugar balance, and recovery during perimenopause and menopause.

Whey Protein

Whey protein is one of the **most bioavailable sources of protein**, meaning the body can easily absorb and utilize it. It contains all essential amino acids and is particularly rich in **leucine**, an amino acid critical for muscle maintenance and metabolic health.

Benefits of whey protein during midlife include:

Supports Lean Muscle Maintenance

As estrogen declines, women naturally lose muscle mass. Whey protein provides the amino acids needed to support muscle repair and maintain strength.

Blood Sugar Stability

Protein helps slow digestion and reduce blood sugar spikes after meals, helping prevent energy crashes and cortisol fluctuations.

Gut Barrier Support

Whey contains compounds that may help support **intestinal barrier integrity**, which is important for preventing gut permeability.

Immune Support

Whey protein contains **immunoglobulins and lactoferrin**, which support immune function.

Supports Satiety

Protein helps keep you fuller longer, which can support weight management during midlife.

How to Use Whey Protein

- Added to smoothies
- Mixed into yogurt or cottage cheese
- Blended into coffee or protein drinks
- Added to high-protein baking recipes

When choosing whey protein, look for:

- **Grass-fed whey isolate or concentrate**
- Minimal ingredients
- No artificial sweeteners if possible

Collagen-Rich Foods (Gut Lining Support)

Collagen provides key amino acids that support **gut lining integrity** and reduce intestinal permeability.

Examples:

- Bone broth
- Collagen peptides
- Slow-cooked meats
- Skin-on poultry
- Gelatin

Glycine and proline help support **tissue repair and gut barrier function**.

Herbs & Teas for Gut, Liver, and Hormone Support

Herbs have been used for centuries to support digestion, liver detoxification, stress resilience, and hormone balance. Many herbs contain powerful plant compounds that help reduce inflammation, support the microbiome, and assist the liver in processing hormones such as estrogen.

Incorporating fresh herbs in cooking or drinking herbal teas regularly can gently support overall wellness during perimenopause and menopause.

Basil

Basil is more than just a flavorful culinary herb—it contains powerful plant compounds that support inflammation control, hormone balance, stress resilience, and cardiovascular health during perimenopause and menopause.

Powerful Anti-Inflammatory

Basil contains compounds such as **eugenol**, which naturally reduce inflammation. This can help ease joint pain, muscle stiffness, and inflammatory symptoms that often increase as estrogen declines.

Stress and Cortisol Support

Certain varieties, especially **Holy Basil (Tulsi)**, are considered **adaptogens**, meaning they help the body adapt to stress and regulate cortisol levels. Managing cortisol is important for weight management, mood stability, and improved sleep.

Hormone Balance Helper

Research suggests basil may help regulate **blood sugar and insulin sensitivity**, which supports hormone balance and helps reduce midlife weight gain and belly fat.

Brain and Mood Support

Basil contains antioxidants such as **flavonoids and polyphenols**, which help protect brain cells from oxidative stress and support memory, focus, and mood stability.

Heart Health Protection

Rich in **vitamin K, magnesium, and protective plant compounds**, basil supports cardiovascular health, which becomes increasingly important after menopause.

Immune System Support

Basil's natural antimicrobial and antioxidant properties help support immune function and defend against infections.

Easy Ways to Use

- Fresh basil in salads and pesto
- Added to soups and sauces
- Blended into green smoothies
- Basil or holy basil tea

Parsley

Parsley is a powerful detox-supportive herb that supports both the **liver and kidneys**.

- Rich in **vitamin C, vitamin K, and antioxidants** that help reduce inflammation.
- Acts as a gentle **natural diuretic**, helping reduce fluid retention common during hormonal shifts.
- Supports **kidney detoxification**, which works alongside the liver to eliminate toxins.

Easy ways to add parsley:

- Fresh parsley in salads
- Blended into green smoothies
- Added to soups, eggs, or roasted vegetables

Cilantro

Cilantro is known for its ability to support **detoxification and digestive health**.

- Contains plant compounds that may help bind and remove **heavy metals** from the body.
- Supports **healthy digestion and bile flow**.
- Rich in antioxidants that help reduce inflammation.

Easy ways to add cilantro:

- Added to salads
- Mixed into guacamole
- Topped on fish or chicken dishes
- Blended into sauces and dressings

Oregano

Oregano is one of the most powerful **antimicrobial herbs** available.

- Helps support gut health by reducing harmful bacteria and supporting microbial balance.
- Rich in antioxidants that help reduce inflammation.
- Supports immune health and respiratory function.

Easy ways to add oregano:

- Added to tomato sauces
 - Sprinkled on roasted vegetables
 - Mixed into salad dressings
 - Used in Mediterranean dishes
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Thyme

Thyme supports digestion and immune health.

- Contains natural **antimicrobial compounds** that help support gut balance.
- Helps stimulate digestive enzymes, improving digestion.
- Rich in antioxidants that support respiratory and immune health.

Easy ways to add thyme:

- Added to roasted meats or vegetables
 - Used in soups and stews
 - Mixed into marinades
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Peppermint Tea

Peppermint tea supports digestion and gut comfort.

- Helps relieve **bloating and gas**.
 - Supports relaxation of digestive muscles.
 - Can help calm the nervous system and reduce stress.
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Lemon Balm

Lemon balm is a calming herb that supports the nervous system.

- Helps reduce **stress and anxiety**.
 - Supports sleep quality.
 - May help regulate cortisol levels.
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Chamomile

Chamomile is well known for its calming and sleep-supportive properties.

- Promotes **restful sleep**.
 - Helps reduce anxiety and digestive discomfort.
 - Supports relaxation during times of stress.
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Sage

Sage contains antioxidants that support brain health and hormonal balance.

- May help stabilize **mood swings**.
 - Supports cognitive function and memory.
 - Traditionally used to help reduce hot flashes.
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Rosemary

Rosemary is known for supporting **brain health and circulation**.

- Improves memory and focus.
- Supports liver detoxification pathways.
- Contains powerful antioxidant compounds.

Dandelion Tea

Dandelion is one of the most supportive herbs for **liver detoxification**.

- Stimulates bile production to improve digestion.
- Helps the liver process hormones and toxins more efficiently.
- Supports gentle detoxification and fluid balance.

Ginger

Ginger is widely used for digestive health.

- Helps relieve **nausea and bloating**.
- Supports healthy digestion and gut motility.
- Contains anti-inflammatory compounds that support overall health.

Healing Spices

Turmeric

Key compound: **Curcumin**

Benefits:

- Powerful anti-inflammatory effects
- Supports liver detox pathways
- May improve mood and reduce depressive symptoms

- Supports joint and brain health

Tip: Combine turmeric with **black pepper** to increase absorption.

Cinnamon

Key compounds: **Cinnamaldehyde and polyphenols**

Benefits:

- Supports blood sugar balance
- Improves insulin sensitivity
- Reduces inflammation
- Supports cardiovascular health

Tip: Choose **Ceylon cinnamon** for regular use.

Hydration for Detox & Digestion

Adequate hydration supports:

- Digestive function
- Detoxification pathways
- Healthy bowel movements
- Energy and cognitive clarity

Helpful options include:

- Filtered water
- Mineral water
- Lemon water
- Herbal teas
- Electrolyte-rich beverages.

Simple Daily Gut-Supporting Habits

Try incorporating these simple habits daily:

- Include **fiber-rich vegetables** at meals
- Eat **fermented foods regularly**
- Add **healthy fats and protein** to stabilize blood sugar
- Drink **adequate water**
- Include **bitter foods** to stimulate digestion
- Prioritize **whole foods over processed foods**

Small daily choices help create **long-term improvements in gut health, hormone balance, and overall wellness.**
