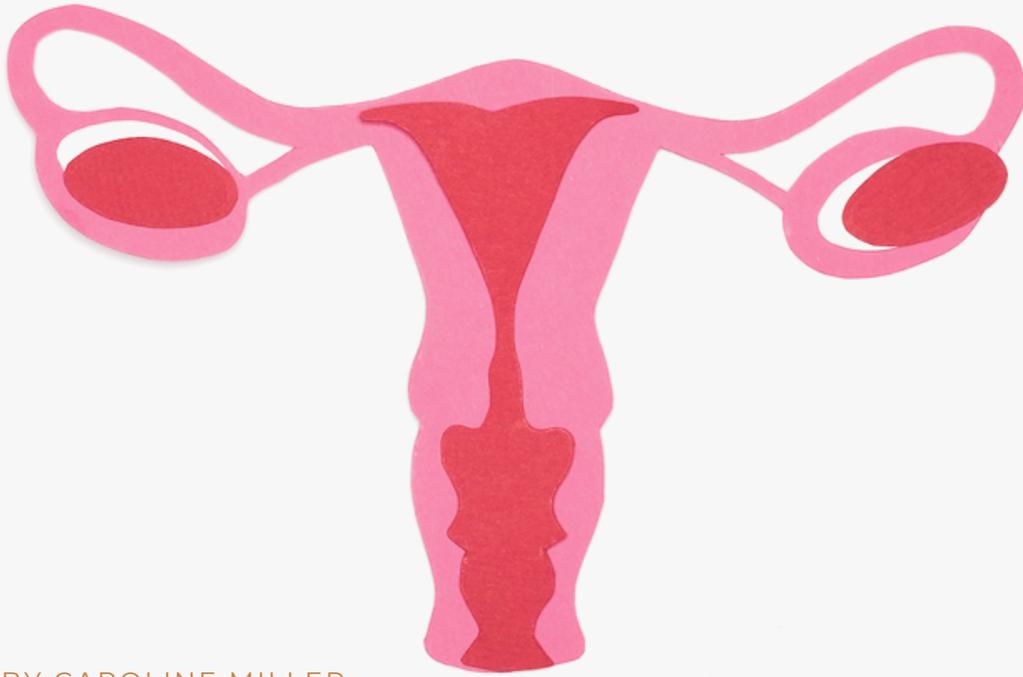


APRIL 2022

MENOPAUSE & YOGA

Official blog of [Yoga Nut](#)



WRITTEN BY CAROLINE MILLER

Perimenopause is the stage before menopause, when the sexual hormones are in flux and start to decrease. Women's sexual hormones: estrogen, progesterone and testosterone stimulate the ovaries to produce eggs, and regulate periods. When they decline menstruation can alter and eventually stop. Women are termed menopausal when they haven't menstruated for 1 year. The average age in the UK of perimenopause is 45 and menopause 51 years (young!).

For a wealth of (free) knowledge head to [Newson Health - Menopause and Wellbeing Centre](#)

Symptoms associated with these stages are often lumped together, and can affect women's physical and psychological health, and many symptoms continue well after menstruation has stopped. Common symptoms include hot flashes, night sweats, fatigue, insomnia, pain, anxiety, and depression.

So, how can yoga support women through this transition? A meta-analysis (1) (this means a big study of available research from varied sources) states that:

'...yoga seems to improve all menopausal symptoms (not just psychological symptoms) when compared to no intervention, and it seems to be at least as effective as other forms of exercise...yoga can now be clearly recommended as an adjunct intervention for menopausal women.'

Yoga is a system, referred to as the Eight Limbs of Yoga, as written in the classical yoga text 'The Yoga Sutras of Patanjali'. Yoga encompasses all that makes us human: body breath energy mind spirit. With its aim of enlightenment/Samadhi. Yoga therefore offers us a variety of tools to become the best version of ourselves and to meet life's challenges in the kindest way that we can.

So, let's look a few of these most common symptoms and how yoga can help.

- reduced muscle mass and bone strength

This occurs to all of us as we age! But in postmenopausal women bone mineral density is reduced due to loss of estrogen (2). Bone strength can be maintained, reducing the risk of bone fractures, through weight bearing exercises, such as cat/cow, inverted V/dog face down, plank pose, trikonasana and warrior.

Yoga asana (postures) also challenges one proprioceptive awareness, or to put it more simply, challenges balance. If you come to one my classes then, whilst balancing on one leg, I even encourage those that choose to, to close their eyes! Better balance reduces risks of falls, which in turn reduces risks of bone fractures. Best to keep one's eyes open though!

- weight gain and increased fat distribution to the belly

We need this like a hole in the head, but our saving grace is that hopefully by the time that we succumb to an expanding waistline, we have learnt to love our selves more than perhaps we did in our 20's and 30's?! Again, it's the reduction of estrogen that is the likely cause of belly fat gain. Obviously eating a diet rich in whole grains, leafy greens and lean protein, and drink water, rather than wine is of huge benefit to us all. Yoga's diverse and broad exercises include many spiralling postures, in the form of standing, seated and supine twists, that help tone and massage the intra-abdominal organs. A well-balanced physical yoga practice includes varying tempos of movement, some faster paced, fluid sequences balanced with restorative, melting like poses. Movement that stimulates our cardiovascular, fat burning system, balanced with postures that help to relax and calm us.

- anxiety/depression and insomnia

Whilst asana (postures) is the stalwart of a yoga class, the traditional yoga system includes breathing techniques (pranayama) and mindfulness practices (dyhana). There is a direct relationship between the sex hormones and breathing biochemistry, for example, in postmenopausal women levels of estrogen and progesterone are lower increasing sensitivity to rising carbon dioxide in the blood, which in turn acerbates anxiety, depression and sleep disturbances. By breathing lightly and slowly through the nose women can help to control these symptoms (McKeown 2021).

Try this seated yoga practice comprising of meditation, breath practice and movement:

Breath awareness:

Breath awareness is a meditation practise where one concentrates the mind on the breath without its alteration. The breaths qualities, its speed, depth, sound and feel are focused upon. You may decide to choose one of the breathes qualities that stands out to you, such as, the feel of the breath on the inside of your nose as you breathe in and out. Use the breath as an anchor for your meditation practice. When you notice that your mind has wandered away from the focus of your breath, and attached itself to another sound, sight or thought, then simply guide your attention back to the breath, your anchor, your focus of meditation.

Breath practice: Breathe deep Breathing deep with the breath flowing lightly and quietly through the nose calms the mind, increases oxygen in the body and has positive benefits for centred postural alignment and breath mechanics. Place the hands to the side of the body, on the lower ribs encourages the full use of the diaphragm and external intercostal, the main breathing muscles. Slow breathing (4-6 breathes per minute) has many physical and psychological health benefits, such as increased oxygen in the arteries, reduces blood pressure and encourages parasympathetic dominance aka relaxation and calm (Russo 2017)

- Sit up straight yet relaxed, imagining a string or golden thread lifting you upwards from the crown of the head.
- Place your hands to the side of your body on the lowest ribs.
- Quietly, gently and slowly draw the breath through your nose.
- As you breathe in feel your ribs expanding under your hands and as you breathe out feeling the lower ribs relax and move inwards.
- The breath is quiet. The breath is gentle. the breath is slow.
- Continue this practice for 5 minutes or longer.

Access an instructional recording of this breathing practice via Yoga Nut's YouTube Channel https://youtu.be/M0SrpF7_deA

APRIL 2022

Movement sequence for optimal breathing:

This is a seated sequence that creates space in front, back and sides of the body, aiming to release tension in the rib cage for optimal breathing.

- Seated pelvic tilts
- Seated spinal flexion & extension
- Seated side bend
- Side stretch with spiralling and posterior pelvic tilt

Access an instructional recording of this movement practice via Yoga Nut's YouTube Channel <https://youtu.be/UjqAsg32hOM>

Repeat breathing practice enquiring as to whether you can breathe with great ease.

I hope that you enjoyed your practise and feel great movement ease, freedom of breath and calmness of mind.

Om shanti, shanti, shanti

Caroline x

References

(1) Cramer, H., Peng, W. and Lauche, R., 2018. Yoga for menopausal symptoms—A systematic review and meta-analysis. *Maturitas*, 109, pp.13-25 Available at: <<https://scihub.yncjkj.com/10.1016/j.maturitas.2017.12.005>> [Accessed 18 April 2022].

(2) Fernández-Rodríguez R, Alvarez-Bueno C, Reina-Gutiérrez S, Torres-Costoso A, Nuñez de Arenas-Arroyo S, Martínez-Vizcaíno V. Effectiveness of Pilates and Yoga to improve bone density in adult women: A systematic review and meta-analysis. *PLoS One*. 2021 May 7;16(5):e0251391. doi: 10.1371/journal.pone.0251391. PMID: 33961670; PMCID: PMC8104420. [Accessed 18 April 2022]

McKeown, P., 2021. *The breathing cure*. OxyAt Books.

Russo, M., Santarelli, D. and O'Rourke, D., 2017. The physiological effects of slow breathing in the healthy human. *Breathe*, 13(4), pp.298-309.

AUGUST 2021

Contact Caroline Miller

07596 107341

yoganut@btinternet.com

<https://www.yoganut.org>

Find me on

Facebook <https://www.facebook.com/carolineyoganut/>

Instagram <https://www.instagram.com/yoganut2018/>

YouTube

<https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCf6VWy706UAy1Jxvk0BPn0Q>