

The Perimenopause Kitchen

The Plant-Based Perimenopause Kitchen

A Vegan Menopause Diet Cookbook with 58 Easy Recipes for One

*Everyday High-Protein Plant Meals, with
Honest Notes on Soy, Calcium, Iron and B12*

 perimenostage

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Using This Book

All 58 recipes in this book are vegan: no meat, fish, eggs, dairy or honey. There are 11 breakfasts, 15 lunches, 19 dinners and 13 snacks, built on beans, lentils, tofu, tempeh, whole grains, seeds, vegetables and fruit. You don't have to be vegan to cook from it. Plenty of readers eat this way a few days a week, cook for a vegan daughter or partner, or simply want more plants on the plate.

The chapters before the recipes cover what plant eating can and can't do in perimenopause, what the research says about soy and hot flashes, how to get enough protein from plants, and the four nutrients a vegan diet has to plan for. Read them now or come back to them later.

Portions and numbers

Each recipe is written for one person. The panel under the headnote gives five figures for that serving: calories, protein, fiber, calcium and sodium. They were calculated from USDA FoodData Central, ingredient by ingredient, for exactly the amounts listed. To cook for two or four, multiply every ingredient; the per-serving figures stay the same. Bigger batches can take a little longer, so go by the cues in the method rather than the clock alone.

Tofu needs a special word. The numbers use USDA's entry for firm tofu set with calcium sulfate, which has 17 grams of protein and 683 mg of calcium per 100 grams. Many supermarket blocks sold as firm are softer and carry less: about 9 to 13 grams of protein and 80 to 280 mg of calcium per 100 grams, going by the brands listed in the same database. With one of those, a tofu recipe has several grams less protein and a fraction of the calcium in its panel. The label on your block tells you which kind you have. Plant milks vary too, mostly in how much calcium has been added.

US guidance sets a daily limit of 2,300 mg of sodium. Fifty-three recipes here have under 700 mg a serving. The five that run higher, between 722 and 777 mg, are the soba salad, the pinto bean bowl, the chickpea sandwich, the black-eyed pea salad and the mushroom stew; canned beans, bread, broth and soy sauce bring most of their salt. Two recipes use a little maple syrup, 3 grams of added sugar per serving. The other 56 have none.

Labels on each recipe

The line under the title gives the total time and any flags: *batch* for recipes that keep or reheat well, *leftovers* for dinners that make a good lunch the next day, *budget* for those built

on inexpensive staples, and *spicy* for the one recipe with real heat. Times cover the cooking but not the chilling, so the overnight oats and the chia cup say 5 minutes and also need time in the fridge.

The *Contains* line names the major allergens in the ingredients as written. In this book that means soy, wheat or gluten, peanuts, tree nuts and sesame. Two curries use a little canned coconut milk, which the line doesn't flag. Packaged foods differ and change, so check the label of anything you buy if you have an allergy.

Quantities are in US cups, spoons and ounces with grams in brackets. Oven settings are in Fahrenheit with Celsius in brackets.

Food safety

Plant recipes avoid the raw meat, fish and eggs behind most kitchen food-safety worries, but cooked grains, beans and stews still need care. The USDA advises getting leftovers into the fridge within two hours, eating them within three to four days, and reheating them to 165°F (74°C), steaming hot all the way through. Divide a big pot into shallow containers so it cools quickly, and freeze what you won't eat in time.

Source: USDA Food Safety and Inspection Service.

Cook's notes after some recipes add a practical tip. Every kitchen runs a little differently, so treat times as a guide.

The free stage check

The free stage check at perimenostage.com/kitchen3 takes about two minutes and estimates where you are in the transition. More links are in Where to Go Next at the back.

This book uses “women” because the research it draws on studied women. Trans men and nonbinary people with ovaries go through perimenopause too, and the book is for them as well.

BEFORE YOU COOK

Soy and Hot Flashes: An Honest Look



Soy foods appear in 16 of the 58 recipes in this book, as tofu, tempeh, edamame, soy milk and soy sauce. Soy is also the food most often recommended online for hot flashes. Here is what the research supports.

The WAVS trial

The Women's Study for the Alleviation of Vasomotor Symptoms, known as WAVS, was led by Neal Barnard and published in 2021. Thirty-eight postmenopausal women with at least two hot flashes a day were randomly assigned to a low-fat vegan diet that included half a cup of cooked whole soybeans every day, or to make no change to their diet, for 12 weeks. They logged their hot flashes in a phone app. Hot flashes fell by 79% in the diet group and by 49% in the comparison group. A 2023 report added a second group of women, 84 in all, and found that moderate-to-severe hot flashes fell by 88% on the diet and by 34% without it.

Those numbers get quoted a lot, and the limits matter just as much. The authors list most of them themselves. The trials were small and lasted 12 weeks. Nobody can be blinded to a whole diet, so the women knew which group they were in, and placebo effects can't be ruled

out; the comparison group's 49% drop shows how much hot flashes can shift in a few months with no change at all. The diet changed several things at once (no animal foods, little fat, daily soybeans), so the trials can't say which part made the difference. Women on the diet also lost about 3.5 kg (8 pounds) on average, and weight loss is itself one of the options The Menopause Society lists for hot flashes. Both trials were funded by the Physicians Committee for Responsible Medicine, a nonprofit whose stated mission is plant-based diets, and Barnard is its president.

The wider evidence

The expert bodies don't fully agree. NCCIH concludes that soy isoflavone supplements or soy protein may reduce how often and how severely hot flashes occur, but that the effect may be small and the results haven't been completely consistent. The Menopause Society, reviewing the evidence in 2023, did not recommend soy foods or soy extracts for hot flashes, because the evidence is limited or inconsistent. The British Dietetic Association takes the middle line: plant estrogens may help but aren't a given, and the only way to find out is to eat them every day for at least two to three months.

What this means in your kitchen

Treat soy as a low-risk experiment, not a treatment. If you'd like to try it, include soy foods every day for a couple of months and keep a simple note of your hot flashes; the recipes here make that easy. If hot flashes are disrupting your sleep or work, don't wait on soy. The Menopause Society calls hormone therapy the most effective treatment, and several nonhormone medicines work too. A doctor can help you choose.

Is soy safe?

NCCIH notes that some people are allergic to soy, that soy protein supplements have been used safely in studies lasting up to 16 weeks and concentrated isoflavone extracts for up to six months, and that soy in amounts greater than those found in food may not be safe during pregnancy. It also reports interactions between tyramine-rich soy foods, such as tofu and soy sauce, and MAOI antidepressants; there's more in *A Word Before You Cook*. Concentrated soy supplements are a different product from soy foods, and this book doesn't recommend them.



Tofu scramble with spinach on toast

Tofu crumbled and seasoned with turmeric and garlic powder, with spinach stirred through, served on toast. With 32 grams of protein and over 1,100 mg of calcium, it's one of the strongest breakfasts in the book on both counts.

362

KCAL

32g

PROTEIN

7.1g

FIBER

1,139mg

CALCIUM

409mg

SODIUM

Contains: wheat or gluten, soy

INGREDIENTS

Serves 1 · doubles or quadruples easily.

5½ oz (150 g) firm tofu (calcium-set)

2 cups (60 g) baby spinach

1 slice (32 g) whole-wheat bread

1 tsp olive oil

¼ tsp ground turmeric

¼ tsp garlic powder

a pinch of salt

a pinch of black pepper

METHOD

- 1** Warm the oil in a pan and crumble in the tofu.
- 2** Add turmeric, garlic powder, salt and pepper; cook 5 minutes.
- 3** Stir in the spinach until wilted.
- 4** Toast the bread and serve the scramble on it.

COOK'S NOTE

Turmeric gives the tofu its yellow color; it doesn't change the texture.



Curried chickpea and avocado lettuce wraps

Chickpeas mashed with avocado, curry powder, celery and chopped apricots, spooned into lettuce leaves with sunflower and hemp seeds. Crunchy, a little sweet, and 20 grams of fiber.

567 KCAL	24g PROTEIN	20g FIBER	149mg CALCIUM	474mg SODIUM
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Contains: none of the major allergens listed in this book (check labels)

INGREDIENTS

- Serves 1 · doubles or quadruples easily.*
- 1 cup (170 g) canned chickpeas, drained and rinsed
 - ¼ avocado (50 g)
 - ¾ celery stalk (30 g)
 - 2 dried apricots (15 g)
 - 2 tbsp (15 g) unsalted sunflower seeds
 - 2 tbsp (20 g) hulled hemp seeds
 - 1¼ cups (60 g) romaine lettuce
 - 1 tsp lemon juice
 - ½ tsp mild curry powder
 - a pinch of salt

METHOD

- 1 Mash the chickpeas roughly with the avocado, lemon, curry powder and salt.
- 2 Stir in the diced celery and apricots, sunflower seeds and hemp.
- 3 Spoon into romaine leaves.



Red lentil, sweet potato and chickpea curry

Red lentils, sweet potato and chickpeas in a gentle coconut curry with spinach, served over brown rice. It makes a good batch for later in the week.

658

KCAL

27 g

PROTEIN

20 g

FIBER

203 mg

CALCIUM

287 mg

SODIUM

Contains: none of the major allergens listed in this book (check labels)

INGREDIENTS

Serves 1 · doubles or quadruples easily.

⅓ cup (60 g) red lentils (dry)

¾ medium sweet potato (100 g)

½ cup (80 g) canned chickpeas,
drained and rinsed

2 tbsp (30 g) canned coconut milk

⅓ cup (80 g) canned diced tomatoes,
no salt added

1¾ cups (50 g) baby spinach

¼ medium onion (40 g)

1 garlic clove (3 g)

½ tbsp (3 g) fresh ginger

1 tsp mild curry powder

½ cup (80 g) cooked brown rice
(pouch or leftover)

1 tsp olive oil

METHOD

- 1** Soften the onion in the oil, 5 minutes; add the garlic, ginger and curry powder for 1 minute.
- 2** Add the lentils, diced sweet potato, tomatoes and 1½ cups water; simmer 20 minutes.
- 3** Stir in the chickpeas, coconut milk and spinach and heat through.
- 4** Serve with the rice.

Putting a Plant-Based Week Together

There's no fixed menu in this book. Instead, here's how to build a week from the recipes so that protein, calcium and the nutrients from the earlier chapters are covered without much thought.

Give each day a soy or legume anchor. Tofu, tempeh, edamame, lentils, chickpeas or beans at lunch and at dinner do most of the work for protein and iron.

Count calcium on purpose. Aim for calcium-rich foods two or three times a day: calcium-set tofu, fortified soy milk, kale, white beans, chia. The Recipe Finder lists the recipes with the most.

Pair iron with vitamin C. Many recipes already do, with peppers, tomatoes, broccoli or lime. Add a piece of citrus or some strawberries if a meal doesn't.

Cook a big pot once or twice a week. The chili, curries, stew, bolognese and shepherd's pie keep for three to four days in the fridge and reheat well. Cook a pot of grain at the same time.

Make breakfast in advance. Overnight oats and chia cups made the evening before, or on Sunday, cover several mornings.

Keep the extras stocked. Hemp and pumpkin seeds, nut and seed butters, and fortified soy milk raise protein and calcium in any meal with no extra cooking.

Check your fortified foods. At least one food you eat most days should have B12 added; the Nutrition Facts label tells you. Ask your doctor whether you also need a supplement.

A sample week

Here is one week built on those guidelines, to show how the pieces fit. It's an example, not a prescription.

Sunday before: make the chickpea and quinoa salad, two jars of overnight oats and a chia cup. **Monday:** cook the lentil bolognese for two; the second portion is Tuesday's lunch.

Tuesday: make the tofu and broccoli stir-fry for two, for Wednesday's lunch. **Wednesday:** cook the two-bean chili for two, for Thursday. **Thursday:** the red lentil curry for two, for

Friday's lunch. **Friday:** set a chia cup for Saturday. **Saturday:** bake the shepherd's pie for two; the rest is Sunday's lunch.

DAY	BREAKFAST	LUNCH	DINNER	SNACK
Monday 89 g protein 47 g fiber 1,766 mg calcium 1,267 mg sodium	Tofu scramble with spinach on toast 43	Chickpea and quinoa salad with lemon 51	Lentil bolognese with whole-wheat pasta 95	Mango and hemp chia cup 131
Tuesday 94 g protein 47 g fiber 1,752 mg calcium 903 mg sodium	Overnight oats with berries and pumpkin seeds 29	Lentil bolognese with whole-wheat pasta 95	Tofu and broccoli stir-fry with brown rice 111	Edamame with lemon and salt 127
Wednesday 91 g protein 51 g fiber 1,835 mg calcium 1,520 mg sodium	Peanut butter and banana toast with soy milk 31	Tofu and broccoli stir-fry with brown rice 111	Two-bean chili 115	Apple with a handful of pumpkin seeds 119
Thursday 81 g protein 64 g fiber 1,203 mg calcium 1,219 mg sodium	Overnight oats with berries and pumpkin seeds 29	Two-bean chili 115	Red lentil, sweet potato and chickpea curry 105	Cocoa soy milk and a banana 125
Friday 103 g protein 54 g fiber 2,216 mg calcium 2,013 mg sodium	Tofu and black bean breakfast burrito 39	Red lentil, sweet potato and chickpea curry 105	Quick peanut tofu and vegetable rice bowl 103	Hummus with pita and veg sticks 129
Saturday 84 g protein 55 g fiber 1,289 mg calcium 1,641 mg sodium	Berry, oat and peanut smoothie 23	White bean, kale and sun-dried tomato salad 75	Lentil and mushroom shepherd's pie with sweet potato 91	Mango and hemp chia cup 131
Sunday 97 g protein 46 g fiber 1,276 mg calcium 1,462 mg sodium	Tofu and black bean breakfast tacos 41	Lentil and mushroom shepherd's pie with sweet potato 91	Maple-soy tempeh with roasted vegetables and quinoa 99	Edamame with lemon and salt 127

Every day reaches at least 81 grams of protein, 46 grams of fiber and 1,203 mg of calcium with the tofu and fortified milks in the ingredient lists, and stays under 2,100 mg of sodium. The days come to 1,665 to 1,983 kcal. Needs differ, so add fruit, bread or a bigger portion of grain whenever you're hungry. That's far more fiber than most people eat, so if beans are new to you, work up to a week like this one.

If you'd like a plan built around you, perimenostage.com/meal-plan builds four weeks of vegan menus from your answers about allergies, foods you skip, cooking time and household.