

Women, Weight Gain and Aging

As women age, many of us notice that it becomes more difficult to maintain our normal weight. In particular, many women experience weight gain during menopause. Menopause brings a number of ups and downs for women's health. Menopausal women often experience body fat distribution changes, mostly an accumulation of fat mass in the abdominal area. Chronic illness associated with excess fat storage in the abdomen includes coronary heart disease, high blood pressure, type 2 diabetes, cancer, osteoarthritis, and gall bladder disease. Menopause is also linked to a lower metabolism, a reduction in calories burned, and a decrease in fat used as a major fuel source during moderate to intense prolonged exercise. Menopause also causes a decrease in the hormone estrogen, this reduction is associated with an increase in appetite, as well as high cholesterol, and high blood pressure, both of which can elevate the risk of cardiovascular disease.

Now that we have heard the bad news associated with menopausal weight gain, there is good news too! Menopausal weight gain is not inevitable if you take some steps to prevent the added pounds. Research has shown that leading an active lifestyle and including healthy eating habits can reduce the likelihood of gaining menopause-related weight. The Center for Disease Control and Prevention recommends that adults participate in at least 150 minutes of moderate intensity aerobic activity or 75 minutes of vigorous intensity aerobic activity every week. Examples of moderate intensity activities include brisk walking, yoga, mowing the lawn, water aerobics, or heavy gardening. Vigorous activities can include jogging, running, swimming laps, or singles tennis. As we age, muscle mass also declines, so it is important to include at least two days per week of muscle-strengthening activities, this can include lifting weights or bodyweight exercises.

Remember to include exercises that work all major muscle groups (legs, hips, back, chest, shoulders, arms, and the core).

In addition to participating in the recommended amount of weekly physical activity, the Mayo Clinic suggests that in order to lose excess pounds gained during the menopause years, you may need to consume approximately 200 less calories in your 50s than you did while in your 30s and 40s. Reducing calories doesn't mean cutting back on nutrition, choose more fruits, vegetables, whole grains, and fiber-filled foods. Cut back on foods and beverages that have added sugars, and pass on happy hour alcoholic beverages.

It's important to let your family and friends know that you are committed to losing weight, ask for their encouragement and support. Increasing physical activity and changing eating habits can be hard, having the support that you need is a critical part of the process. There's no magic pill to lose weight related to menopause, but research has shown that increasing physical activity, both aerobic and muscle-strengthening exercise, and safely reducing calories consumed can effectively help you prevent or lose those unwanted pounds.

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