

WHAT DO I NEED TO KNOW ABOUT MENOPAUSE & MY WEIGHT?



Perimenopause starts for most women in their forties and is the signal that menopause is on its way. Estrogen production is slowing down which can lead to symptoms of menopause like irregular or heavy periods, hot flashes or night sweats, or mood swings. When your ovaries produce so little estrogen that your period stops for one year, you have officially reached menopause. And for women who have their ovaries removed, menopause can occur sooner, along with the symptoms.

WHY AM I GAINING WEIGHT?

1. You're eating more.

Studies show that women are often eating more as estrogen declines for two big reasons. The first is simply changing lifestyles. Many women are finding themselves with more free time, which often leads to consuming more calories from food and alcohol. The second reason is hormonal changes which can lead to an increase in your appetite. Studies have shown that the decline in estrogen can lead to a decrease in the hormone ghrelin, one of the hunger hormones responsible for telling your brain that you're full.

2. You're burning less.

This one is a triple whammy. First, symptoms from perimenopause or menopause like fatigue, difficulty sleeping, and depression can contribute to working out less & being less active overall. On top of that, experts believe that declining estrogen slows down your metabolic rate, which means you could be burning less calories every day than you used to. Every woman naturally begins losing muscle after age 30, and since muscle burns more calories than fat, if you haven't been actively increasing your muscles, you're burning less calories than before. Finally, the natural decrease in maximum heart rate means you're not burning as many calories as you used to from the same amount of exercise.

Aside from being frustrating, unintended weight gain can also increase your risk for health issues including cardiovascular disease, high cholesterol, Type 2 diabetes, and osteoporosis.

WHAT DO I DO NOW?

Time to be proactive. Don't assume a post-menopause weight gain is unavoidable BUT -- don't expect the same behavior to give you the same results. Adopting a smart strategy & integrating healthy habits all day long is the best way to take the reins and be prepared. Research shows that diet cycling - jumping from one diet to the next - has negative long-term results. This not time to diet. It's time to evolve. Arm yourself with the facts, take control of your menopause & make an action plan you can live with.

TIME TO MAKE A NEW PLAN:

Get moving

The exercise routine you relied on in your 30's and early 40's is not going to cut it now. While the CDC recommends 150 minutes of moderate intensity exercise per week, if you're interested in losing weight or maximizing your workout time, a mix of moderate and high-intensity exercise should be a priority. Introduce yourself to HIIT - a form of interval training that alternates high intensity bursts of exercise with low intensity recovery. Try new activities that challenge you & work different muscle groups so you avoid workout ruts. Find workout buddies who keep you accountable & make it fun. Since muscle burns more calories than fat, make sure to include strength training 2 days a week to combat post-menopausal muscle loss & turn up your fat burning. By the way, research shows that working out on an empty stomach is likely to burn more fat, so try to get your workout in before breakfast to maximize your calorie burn. Don't be intimidated to try something new - it's the struggle that makes you stronger.



Reduce your calories

You're burning less, so chances are, you need to reduce your intake by about 200 calories per day to avoid gradual weight gain. Watch your portion sizes, especially when eating out as restaurants tend to give you more than you'd eat at home. Think about starting with a salad, sharing an entree or ordering appetizers as a main course. Focus on sticking to 3 meals a day instead of snacking throughout to keep your weight in check and your blood sugar balanced all day long. Beware of mindless eating opportunities like visiting the office kitchen, heavy snacks while cooking or watching TV with late-night grazing.



It's all about timing

It's not just about what you eat, but when. Your body craves consistency for sleep, exercise, taking medications & eating, so identify the best daily pattern for you and stick to it as often as possible. Research shows our bodies are optimized for burning more calories earlier in the day, so work on making breakfast & lunch really count & don't save your appetite for dinner. It's better for your digestion and your calorie burn. Last thing - while intermittent fasting is a bit of trend at the moment, research shows that restricting your eating to an 8 - 12 hour window per day can be an effective strategy for losing and maintaining weight. More importantly, it works as part of a healthy eating pattern you can maintain over the long run. Set yourself a daily eating start & stop time & stick to it.

Make your calories count

Work on making healthier choices like swapping mocha lattes and pre-packaged “healthy” snacks & bars for whole food sources of lean protein and fiber-rich foods like leafy greens & non-starchy vegetables. Combat muscle loss by prioritizing your protein intake every day through lean animal or plant-based sources. Healthy fats in every meal are a must so include avocados, fatty fish, olive oil & nuts. Fats increase satiety so they keep you full in between meals. They are also essential to pair with fruits & veggies since they prepare your body to absorb the vitamins from your produce. They’re a great source of omega-3s so they are anti-inflammatory & have been shown to reduce your Triglycerides & risk of heart disease. Watch portion sizes to keep your calories lean & mean.

Find ways to destress

Stress can lead to weight gain. When your body stays in a highly stressed state, it increases the production of the hormone cortisol which over the long term can lead to insulin resistance and Type 2 diabetes. High levels of cortisol are generally linked to belly fat in women, so staying on top of your stress is a must. Exercise is a great way to destress, as is yoga, breathwork, and meditation. Find the outlet that works for you and make it a priority.

End with good sleep

Menopause can disrupt your sleep cycle, which can derail your workout goals & can lead to an imbalance in your hormones, including your satiety & hunger hormones. Protect your good sleep by following a consistent sleep schedule, keep your bedroom cool & calming and stay away from screens at the end of the day. Aim for 7 - 8 hours per night for maximum recovery time.

Reframe your life

Don't waste this life opportunity by simply thinking of menopause as something that's happening to you. This is a chance to regroup, rethink and reimagine yourself. It's time to set new goals & decide what changes will better support your body & your mind over the long haul. Integrate healthier habits all day long and not just at meals or during workouts. Take the stairs instead of the elevator & stand up more during the day. It's not all or nothing. If you can't work out one day or you overindulge at the holiday party, tomorrow is a new day so jump on the bike and start again.



Forgive yourself. And remember that many of your menopause symptoms can be addressed with lifestyle modifications like diet, exercise & stress relief so take the reins and take control. You're worth it.

HOW CAN I HELP?

A nutrition game plan is essential for anyone, whether you are facing challenging health conditions or simply striving to live your best life. Personalized nutrition & lifestyle strategies can allow you to be proactive about your health and address issues such as:

- Managing Perimenopause & Menopause
- Reaching a healthy weight at any age
- Cardiovascular disease
- Digestive disorders
- Cancer & treatment side effects
- Lifestyle management for chronic disease

A plan only works if it works for YOU. I can give you the tools you need -- meal strategies, shopping lists, recipes, and resources, always evidence-based & all tailored to what YOU need for a plan you can live with.

ABOUT ME:



As a Registered Dietitian Nutritionist, I provide my patients with personalized and evidence-based advice to help meet health needs & wellness goals. My role is to partner with you & customize a plan suited for your life. I always address nutritional deficiencies with whole food sources first. I provide straightforward and practical guidance and make sure no question goes unanswered. I focus on nutrition for women's health at every age. I work with women on personalized strategies to counter hormonal changes and create a game plan that achieves results. I don't believe in diets and neither should you.

How is a Registered Dietitian Nutritionist different than a "Nutritionist"?

Only an "RDN" has been certified by the Commission on Dietetic Registration of the Academy of Nutrition and Dietetics through passing a national accreditation exam, earned a Nutrition-specific Masters degree & has completed 2200 hours of supervised practice. Only an RDN can provide medical nutrition therapy to address chronic diseases through an individually tailored, evidence based nutrition plan to help reduce the risk of developing complications, or prevent or delay disease.

**All Registered Dietitians are Nutritionists. Not all Nutritionists are Registered Dietitians.
Know where your advice is coming from.**

**Plan for wellness.
Learn to eat right & stay strong.**

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