Think Menopause Might Be Behind Your Weight Gain? Here’s Why and What You Can Do About It

by AFRA WILLMORE

How to Lose Weight During Menopause

You have possibly heard that weight gain and a changing body shape is an inevitable side effect of menopause. Before you abandon your skinny jeans for stretchy lounge-wear, read on to find out how to lose weight during menopause.

Why Do Some Women Gain Weight During Menopause?

Hormone changes are to blame for some women adding pounds, often around their abdomen rather than the hips and thighs. This added belly fat, often nicknamed “middle aged spread” is called android fat distribution.

The fluctuations in the levels of estrogen and progesterone cause your body to deal with the food you eat in a different way, so even if your diet or levels of exercise do not change, you can still start to gain weight.

It’s all down to a change in your metabolic rate, which is the rate you burn calories. The metabolic rate often reduces with age without any lifestyle changes, so you end up storing calories instead of burning them. Those calories are stored as fat. Getting stressed about weight gain or your thickening waistline will actually make things worse, as the hormone cortisol rises with stress and can also cause fat to accumulate round your middle.

It is important to keep an eye on that crucial waist measurement as fat carried around the middle is actually more serious than saddlebags on your thighs. It's a potential health risk, because belly fat is associated with an increased risk of cardiovascular problems, such as heart attack, stroke, or high blood pressure.

Don’t panic. There are ways to avoid gaining weight and you might even end up understanding and loving your body more.

Is It Harder to Lose Weight During Menopause?

It can be harder to lose weight during menopause because of the change in metabolic rate, but it is not impossible. You may have to make some lifestyle and dietary changes. I used to practically inhale doughnuts by the dozen but now it seems like I only have to look at one to gain weight. It’s true that simply cutting down what you eat can be enough to help shift some of that unwanted weight.

Menopause can also coincide with changes in life and, for many other reasons, your activity levels may have dropped while your intake of food or drink may have increased. I know my mornings with racing around toddlers to playgroups have been replaced by relaxed coffee mornings with friends, often with a side of homemade cake or cookies.

Strategies for Maintaining or Losing Weight During Menopause

Check Your Portion Sizes

Try piling your dinner onto a smaller plate; your eyes (and brain) will see a full plate but you will not consume so many calories.

Also, you should be aiming for half a plate of veggies and/or salad, one quarter of a plate of carbs like rice, potatoes or pasta, and a quarter of a plate (around 30 grams) for protein like meat, eggs, tofu or fish. Include a small portion of “good” fat like healthy oils, nuts, seeds or avocado.

You can buy special portion control plates online for an easy way to make sure your proportions are correct. Start reading labels. Like home drink measures, portion guesses can be way over what the recommended serving should be. Use the guidelines on individual portion sizes on packaged food.

Get Moving

Boost your metabolic rate by increasing your activity. Just by walking more and faster, taking regular bike rides, swimming, hiking or dancing, you can help prevent weight gain.

Toning muscles has been proven to help achieve and maintain healthy weight more than crash diets, so maybe treat yourself to some dumbbells for a home workout or use a couple of cans of peaches to help tone your arms. Or join a gym and see if you can find one offering a free trial to see if you enjoy it.

Love Yourself and Your Body

Menopause can be a stressful time as some women find it difficult to come to terms with the end of their fertile years, a changing body shape and other life stresses like caring for elderly relatives, empty nest syndrome and a feeling that career dreams may be fading.

Learning to be proud of yourself and your body are both essential for good mental health and can lead to better physical health too. Choose a look that suits you. You can still be fabulous in your 40s, 50s and beyond. If you have a friend who has an aesthetic you admire, ask them for tips on fashion, hair and makeup.

Head to a salon or department store for a makeover. Experts can help you choose a flattering hair color, suitable skincare products and makeup. I found that my long beach blonde hair was starting to look different, as the effects of the menopause dried it out and made the color react differently. I braved a drastic pixie cut revealing my white and grey hair and love it! I have had many complements on it too. I feel more comfortable in my own skin now than I did in my 20s.

Take this time to rediscover yourself so you can move forward with confidence.