Menopause and Weight Loss

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Weight Management and Menopause

The war against weight gain is a common struggle for so many people and one that often find themselves losing. Sedentary lifestyles paired with the convenience, availability and low cost of nutritionally low but calorically high foods stack the odds against you accomplishing your goal of maintaining your weight or losing weight. It seems that the entire outside world is committed to you weighing more.

When you enter into menopause, it appears that even your own body is siding against you. All of your best efforts are met with poor results as the weight slowly accumulates. You feel hungrier. You lack the energy to exercise at the frequency or intensity that you did previously. Additionally, the biological changes negatively influence your mood which makes you more likely to seek out high calorie “comfort food” rather than healthier options.

To add to the problem, you are aware of the risks of weight gain. The media constantly splashes the information across the TV and computer screen. Weight gain leads to higher blood pressure, increased risk of heart disease and diabetes. The more weight you gain the higher the risks.

It may feel that it is you against the world. It may feel that you can never win. This is a lie, though. Taking action to understand the changes your body is experiencing, finding new ways to modify your diet, changing your exercise routine and finding ways to improve your mental health will improve your likelihood of winning the war against weight. Here’s how:

Why Weight Gain?

Menopause is a period of huge transition for any woman. Your body’s chemistry is changing and you mental health often follows. Estrogen is the main factor in the shift of menopause. Studies show that lower levels of estrogen lead to less physical activity. Less activity means less calories burned throughout the day and less time to strengthen your heart and lungs through movement.

Lower estrogen is also linked to lower resting metabolic. Resting metabolic rate is the pace at which your body burns energy during periods of inactivity. People with high metabolic rates are burning larger amounts of calories while they are sitting at work or watching TV at home. People with lower rates are burning smaller amounts doing the same level of activity. Having a low resting rate gives you quite a disadvantage in maintaining weight.

Thirdly, lower estrogen is related a worsening of your body’s ability to process starches and sugars optimally. When your body does not do well in using this possible energy source, they become stored as fat. This aspect further hinders your efforts.

Along with the changes linked to estrogen levels, people going through menopause are impacted by other factors associated with growing older. Older people are less likely to exercise due to decreased energy levels. As you age, you lose muscle mass. Muscle loss is associated with decreased resting metabolic rates. Lastly, your

body's ability to efficiently burn calories during exercise decreases. This means that you must exercise with increased intensity, frequency and duration to achieve the same results.

These factors lead to frustration, disappointment and stress - enemies of weight loss.

Diet Answers

Now, here's the good news. Recent studies have shown that there are diet patterns that yield good results. In the short-term, eating less sugar, less fried foods, eating out less often while eating more fish helped with weight loss and maintenance. Interestingly, eating less fried foods and eating less often at restaurants was not related to weight loss four years into the study.

Unsurprisingly, eating less sugar is linked to lower weight in both the short-term and long-term. The study showed that women that ate fewer desserts and drank fewer sugary beverages were more likely to lose weight and keep it off.

The study also found that increasing fruit and vegetable intake did not show a significant relationship to weight loss at six months. The result changes at the end of four years, though, as woman that ate more fruits and vegetables were better able to maintain lower weights. In fact, this was one of the best predictors of improved weight.

When it comes to weight loss, making choices based on long-term benefit are the best ones. Reducing sugary drinks, eating fewer desserts while eating more fruits and vegetables were the best predictors of desirable weight. Avoid solutions that are temporary or seem like a quick fix, these usually lead to weight loss that is unsustainable. Frequent weight changes lead to increased shame, guilt and disappointment. Be kind to yourself by making lifestyle diet changes that can be maintained.

Next page: exercise and mood answers.

Exercise Answers

You know that exercise is beneficial for you. Eating less and exercising more is not a surprising way to maintain a healthy weight. Aside from weight loss, the benefits of exercise are far reaching. They include:

- Lower risk of osteoporosis
- Lower risk of heart disease
- Improved joint and muscle functioning
- Improved digestion
- Improved mental health

Since risks of these increase during menopause, exercise is more valuable than ever. If you are looking to add to or modify your exercise program, consider these:

- Walking – This does not mean doing some shopping at the mall and factoring in the steps you took. During a good walking program, you are walking and only walking. You should walk at a brisk pace consistently for 20 – 30 minutes 3 – 4 times per week. Walking is readily available and most everyone can do it. Do not be deterred by wind, rain or cold. A nice warm jacket will give you all the protection you need. If walking is not for you, try swimming, cycling, aerobics, tennis or dance. Perhaps, a combination will work better for you than one individually. The physical and emotional benefits of low-impact aerobics is supported with years of research.
- Strength training – Lifting weights does not mean that you have to lift 450 lbs or even wear one of those funny weightlifting belts. Lifting light weights at high repetitions will help to recover some of your lost muscle mass and maintain bone density. As mentioned, increased muscle mass is linked to higher resting metabolic rates.

- Daily changes – Throughout each day, your are confronted with decisions that impact your physical health. Elevator or stairs? Car or walking? Watch a movie or head outside? Making the best choice is difficult sometimes but it feels so good afterwards. Consider a fitness tracker, pedometer or other activity monitoring device or app to help measure and increase your daily movement.

Mood Answers

You know that eating a healthy diet and exercising more regularly improves your mental health. You also know that feeling less depression and less anxiety helps you accomplish your health goals. Feeling let down and disappointed only worsens your motivation, energy and interest in exercise.

You know that maintaining a healthy body weight is important but don't sacrifice your mental health. Too often people assume that as weight goes down, mood will go up. Surely getting a positive response to your efforts will help boost your mood, but putting too much emphasis on weight will hurt your mental health over time. What good is high quantity of life if the quality is low?

Your body image is not the number on the scale. It is not the size of your jeans. Putting too much pressure on your efforts will add stress and anxiety. This path is self-defeating since you are already undergoing identity changes associated with menopause. Finding acceptance of your current state is one of the best things you can do.

Exercise and healthy diets should be part of your life but not all-encompassing. Spend time and energy enjoying and appreciating you and all life has to offer. Find things that you like when you look in the mirror rather than being overly harsh and critical. Treat yourself to a special treat in moderation. Being kind to yourself and making physical health a fun aspect of life will make it more likely that you maintain your positive behaviors and reach your goals. Make diet and exercise a social experience by involving friends and family.

Conclusion

Weight gain during menopause is common but it does not have to be an eventuality. The answers are simple. Consume less sugary foods and drinks. Eat more fruits and vegetables. Exercise in new and different ways. Protect and strengthen your mental health. Avoid making the problem too confusing or complex. Simplicity equals success.