

Fit Facts™

FROM THE AMERICAN COUNCIL ON EXERCISE®

Exercise and Menopause

THERE WAS A TIME WHEN THE word was never spoken, even between a mother and daughter. Menopause, still referred to as “the change” in some circles, has now come out in to the open. It’s about time. After all, a woman can expect to live one-third to one-half of her life past menopause, and these can be among the most satisfying years of her life. Part of the reason for its emergence as a hot health topic is likely due to the increasing body of information on how to manage it. Exercise plays a key role in making the transition through menopause easier and in enhancing health, happiness and productivity during the second half of life.

What Is Menopause?

The medical definition of menopause is cessation of menses for 12 months, when the ovaries stop making the hormones estrogen, progesterone and testosterone. For most women, menopause simply marks the end of their reproductive years. While the average age of menopause is about 51, some women may experience it as early as their thirties or as late as their sixties. Symptoms of menopause include: hot flashes, night sweats, bladder and reproductive tract changes, insomnia, headache, lethargy/fatigue, irritability, anxiety, depression, heart palpitations and joint pain.

How Does Exercise Help?

The good news is that a regular program of physical activity can help manage many of the uncomfortable symptoms of menopause as well as the related health concerns, such as heart disease and osteoporosis.

The mood-elevating, tension-relieving effects of aerobic exercise help reduce the depression and anxiety that often accompanies menopause. Aerobic exercise also promotes the loss of abdominal fat — the place most women more readily gain weight during menopause. In addition,



Menopause And Beyond: Exercise Helps...

- ✓ **Reduce and prevent symptoms:**
 - Hot flashes
 - Vaginal and bladder atrophy
 - Joint pain
 - Anxiety, irritability, depression
 - Sleep disturbances, insomnia
- ✓ **Reduce risk of:**
 - Heart disease
 - Osteoporosis
 - Weight gain
- ✓ **Improve and increase:**
 - Strength, stamina, flexibility, energy
 - Function of vital organs
 - Condition of heart, lungs and muscles

tion, some research studies have shown that the increased estrogen levels that follow a woman’s exercise session coincide with an overall

decrease in the severity of hot flashes. Strength training also helps. It stimulates bones to retain the minerals that keep them dense and strong, thus preventing the onset and progression of osteoporosis. These effects of exercise, along with improved cholesterol levels and physical fitness, work together to help prevent heart disease. Keep in mind, though, that good nutrition works hand in hand with a physically active lifestyle. A low-fat, high-fiber diet and adequate calcium intake are vital to realize the full benefits of exercise.

The Good News

If you have been a consistent exerciser during the years leading to menopause, you already have an advantage. Aerobic activity during childbearing years reduces the risk of breast cancer, a disease that becomes more prevalent after menopause. You also will have a jump on your bone health since your strength-training exercises may have increased the density and strength of your bones.

To reap the benefits of exercise, a balanced program of weight-bearing aerobic activity (walking is great), strength training (with weights, resistance bands, yoga or even gardening), and flexibility is essential. Consistency is key so strive for some moderate activity daily, or at least most days of the week, every week.

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