

Setting the Record Straight: Menopause

Myth
and
Fact

Myth: Osteoporosis is inevitable

Fact: Weight-bearing and resistance exercises can slow osteoporosis progression. Exercises performed 2-4 times a week for 6-24 months improves bone density and reduces risk of fracture.

Weight-bearing exercises increase the stress placed on bones to help promote bone growth. Examples of weight-bearing exercises include walking, running, planks, stepping on/off steps of various heights, squatting and push-ups.

Resistance exercises cause muscle tendons to pull on bones which triggers bone growth. Examples of resistance exercises include lifting weights and using resistance bands. Improve the effectiveness of your workouts by alternating between weight-bearing and resistance activities, or combine the two!



Myth: Weight gain is unavoidable

Fact: Postmenopausal women are more likely to be inactive compared to women who have not experienced menopause. Walking over 6,000 steps a day brings significant health benefits for women between the ages of 40 and 70 years old. The benefits of regular physical activity includes a lower body mass index (BMI), less belly fat, lower risk of developing diabetes, better quality of life, improved memory and concentration.

The recommended amount of physical activity each week includes at least 150 minutes of moderate-intensity cardiac activity plus 2 muscle-building activities for major muscle groups. Mix it up! Avoid doing the same exercises in the same order for maximal results.

Good nutrition comes into play too! The number of calories a woman over age 50 should eat daily depends on how physically active she is. The more active you are, the more calories you can eat while maintaining a healthy weight.



Calorie suggestions based on Physical Activity:

1,600 Calories: if your activity level is low

1,800 Calories: if you are moderately active

2,000—2,200 Calories: if you are highly active

Fact: Cardiovascular disease is the #1 killer of women in the U.S.

Evidence:

Changes to your body during menopause can put you at greater risk of developing cardiovascular disease! The term cardiovascular disease encompasses a group of conditions which include heart disease, coronary artery disease, high blood pressure and stroke. You can lower your risk of developing cardiovascular disease by controlling your blood pressure, weight, and cholesterol. The best way to do this is exercise!

Multiple studies have shown exercise can improve blood pressure and cholesterol in menopausal women. Exercise combined with a healthy diet can also help you maintain a healthy weight and can lower your risk of developing diabetes, another risk factor for cardiovascular disease. Increase your stamina by performing aerobic exercise, the kind that gets your heart pumping faster, such as walking, running, swimming, tennis or bike riding.

Myth: Urinary incontinence is normal with aging

Fact:

No one thinks to train the muscles that support the pelvic organs. Leaking urine when sneezing, coughing or laughing, not being able to hold urine on the way to the bathroom, or difficulty emptying the bladder are common experiences, but NOT normal.

Pelvic floor exercises are effective and long lasting in stopping urinary incontinence. A simple pelvic floor exercise for urinary incontinence is to imagine you are stopping urine midstream and tighten those muscles. Once you activate the pelvic floor muscles, hold 5-10 seconds and repeat 10 times, do this 2-3 times a day. A pelvic floor training program can improve urinary incontinence in as little as one month. Incontinence is treatable—don't ignore or just live with it!

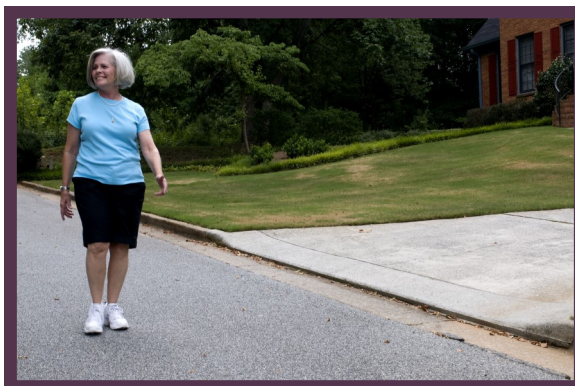


Myth: Lifestyle and mental health have no impact on hot flashes

Fact:

70-80% of American women report hot flashes during menopause. Some factors may influence how often hot flashes occur and their severity. One factor is emotional health. Those with a negative attitude on aging and menopause, as well as women feeling depressed, have more frequent and severe hot flashes.

Another major factor is physical fitness. Women who are overweight are more likely to experience hot flashes with symptoms lasting more than a year compared to women at a healthy weight. Although exercise during menopause has not been proven to directly reduce hot flashes, maintaining a healthy weight before entering menopause will decrease the severity and length of symptoms.



Fact: Physical therapists can help you manage menopausal symptoms

Evidence:

Physical therapists (PT) are musculoskeletal experts who can help you develop a plan to manage menopausal symptoms. A knowledgeable PT can design a custom exercise program for you, combining the right type and dosage of exercise to help reduce the risk of osteoporosis and cardiovascular disease, promote weight loss and reduce hot flashes during menopause.

Women's Health PTs treat pelvic floor dysfunctions and can help you manage urinary incontinence and other female pelvic health problems.



Website Resources:

Cardiac Disease: American Heart Association:
<http://www.heart.org>

Exercise: National Institute on Aging at NIH:
<https://go4life.nia.nih.gov>

Healthy Eating: U.S. Dept. of Agriculture:
<http://www.choosemyplate.gov>

Menopause: North American Menopause Society:
<http://www.menopause.org/for-women>

Osteoporosis: National Osteoporosis Foundation:
<http://nof.org>

Physical Therapy: APTA Section on Women's Health:
<http://www.womenshealthapta.org>

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