



# Great Ways to Get Physical During the Menopause

Every woman experiences the menopause differently. For some, the symptoms are mild and pass quickly. For others, it's an explosion of hot flushes and mood swings. The good news is that you can adopt lifestyle changes to help you cope with the changes occurring in your body.

Though frequent workouts haven't been proven as a means of reducing menopausal symptoms, they can ease the transition by helping to relieve stress and enhance your overall quality of life.

Regular exercise is also an excellent way to stave off weight gain and loss of muscle mass, which are two frequent consequences of the menopause. In addition to this, regular physical activity is crucial to keep your cardiovascular system 'healthy' preventing the development of chronic illnesses like diabetes and atherosclerosis.

## WHAT ARE THE BEST PHYSICAL ACTIVITIES?

Firstly, remember there is no set menu for you, as each person and their level of fitness and strength is different. Secondly, if you are not enjoying an exercise activity there is no way you are going to stick to it! Being physically active into your older age needs to become a habit to get maximum benefit for your health.

Experts recommend moderate aerobic activity for at least 150 minutes a week or vigorous aerobic activity for at least 75 minutes a week. In addition to this, and especially relevant to menopausal women, strength training exercises are recommended at least twice a week. You can spread out your exercising throughout your week or even break up the time into smaller chunks through the day.

The exercise options mentioned above include:

- **Aerobic activity.** Aerobic activity can help you shed excess kilos and maintain a healthy weight. Try brisk walking, jogging, cycling, swimming or water aerobics. If you're a beginner, start with 10 minutes a day and gradually increase the intensity and duration.
- **Strength training.** Regular strength training can help you reduce body fat, increase muscle mass, strengthen your muscles and burn calories more efficiently. Try weight machines, hand-held weights or resistance tubing. If this is foreign to you, try following an online programme, join an exercise group or class, or get help from your physical therapist. Choose a weight or resistance level heavy enough to tire your muscles after about 12 repetitions. Gradually increase the weight or resistance level as you get stronger.
- **Stretching.** Stretching can help improve flexibility and is a great way to relieve stress and tension. Set aside time to stretch after each workout, when your muscles are warm and receptive to stretching. Or dedicate a specific time in the day or week for a class such as yoga or even Pilates which combines flexibility and strength exercises.
- **Stability and balance.** Balance exercises improve stability and can help prevent falls, which is very important as you age and your bones become more fragile after the menopause. Try simple exercises, such as standing on one leg while brushing your teeth. Activities such as tai chi also can be helpful.



### 1 Cardio

Aerobic activity that makes use of your large muscle groups while keeping your heart rate up is a good thing. Options

for cardio are vast. Almost any activity counts, for example:

- walking
- jogging
- biking
- swimming.

If this is new to you start with just 10 minutes a day and slowly increase the time and intensity.



### 2 Strength Training

Following the menopause your risk of developing osteoporosis skyrockets! Strength training is especially important now as it can stimulate new bone formation, it helps burn more body fat, increases muscle mass and revs up your metabolism. At home, you can use your own body weight, or purchase some dumb-bells or elastic resistance bands/tubing. In the gym, you could choose from weight machines or free weights. Select a level that is heavy enough to tax your muscles in 12 repetitions and progress from there. If this is new for you join a class for instruction, speak to your physical therapist or follow an online programme – it can be very daunting if you have never lifted weights before.



### 3 Yoga and Meditation

As no two women experience the menopause in the same way, your unique symptoms will tailor your approach to getting relief from them and you may need to try a few things before finding something that speaks to you. Practise a relaxation technique that works for you – whether it's deep breathing, yoga, or meditation. It is great for your health and your mind.

Supported and restorative yoga poses may offer some relief. These poses may help calm your nerves by centring

your mind. They can also help alleviate symptoms such as:

- hot flushes
- irritability
- fatigue.

#### 4 Dancing

Exercise shouldn't be entirely hard work – dancing is a great way to pack a calorie-burning cardio session into your routine which is fun and good for your body (and soul).

If running on a treadmill isn't your thing, consider a dance class, or even an online dance class at home where you really can dance like no one is watching you! Dance can help to build muscle and keep you flexible, whether its jazz, ballet, hip-hop, ballroom or salsa.

#### 5 Elliptical, Stair-Master, Rowing Machine

These machines found at gyms (or available to purchase for home) count as cardio workouts, and often offer some resistance to build strength at the same time. They are great alternatives to pounding your knees on a treadmill.

#### 6 Zumba

Zumba is a popular dance programme that is great fun done in a class/group setting, whether this is in a gym or an outdoor venue. Incorporating salsa, merengue, and other Latin-inspired music, Zumba works for people of all ages. Burn calories and work your muscles, all while moving to uplifting Latin beats – that may help with your mood!

#### 7 Vigorous Housework or Gardening

Half-hearted dusting doesn't exactly count, but vigorous housework or gardening that elevates your heart rate (even a little) does. This form of aerobic

activity will serve you well. If you're a beginner, start with 10 minutes of light activity, slowly boosting physical intensity as it becomes easier.

#### 8 Be Realistic

Set yourself some goals and a schedule. Writing down a plan is often a good way to commit to doing the work. This may simply be a weekly chart of, for example, Pilates class on Monday, 30-minute walk with my friend 'Betty' on Tuesday ... etc. Set goals so you can see your improvement and avoid frustration. Make sure your goals are:

- realistic
- attainable
- specific.

Don't simply declare, "I'm going to exercise more." Tell yourself, for example:

- I'll walk for 30 minutes at lunch three days a week.
- I'll take a group cycling class.
- I'll play tennis with a friend once a week.

Recruit a friend or your partner as a workout buddy to help keep you motivated and accountable.

#### 9 Get Creative

Yep, physical activity is essential, but don't forget to exercise your creativity!

Take a painting class or join a knitting/craft group to engage in a creative new activity that will give you a sense of

achievement and satisfaction. A creative outlet will also help take your mind off annoying symptoms.

Maybe there is a local nature or gardening club that gets you outdoors. Remember Vitamin D from the sun is critical for calcium uptake in your bones, which will ensure you have strong bones less likely to fracture!

Being physically active is the objective – it doesn't have to be a formal workout every day of the week but a mindset that considers taking the stairs instead of the elevator, walking to buy milk instead of driving, or choosing a parking bay at the back of the carpark instead of at the entrance.

#### 10 Stay Motivated

A woman's risk for numerous medical conditions, including breast cancer, type 2 diabetes, and heart disease rises during and after the menopause. Working out regularly and maintaining a healthy weight can help offset these risks.

Set realistic, achievable goals. Frequently update your goals as you achieve greater levels of fitness and strength. Teaming up with someone – such as a partner, friend or neighbour – can make a difference, too.

Remember, you don't have to go to the gym to exercise. Many activities, such as dancing and gardening, following an online programme, can all improve your health. Keeping it fun and interesting will help you stick to it.

**The menopause can sometimes be a challenging time as you learn to adjust to your body's many changes. At times, it may feel like your body is working against you, but you can take back control. Regular exercise can be as simple as walking through the park or as ambitious as training for a marathon.**

**Whatever works for you, remember that moving can contribute to your physical and mental health. Everything takes a little effort at the start, but it's never too late to take care of yourself.**

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