

EXERCISE AND MENOPAUSE

There was a time when the word was never spoken, not even between a mother and daughter. Menopause, still referred to as “the change” in some circles, is now no longer a taboo subject. Menopause is a natural transition in a woman’s life. And nowadays most women can expect to live one-third to one-half of their lives past menopause; these can be among the most satisfying years of life. The emergence of menopause as a hot health topic is likely the result of newer research that has shown that exercise plays a key role in easing the transition into menopause, enhancing a woman’s health, happiness and productivity.

What is menopause?

The medical definition of menopause is cessation of menses for 12 months. Menopause occurs when the ovaries stop making the hormones estrogen and progesterone. While the average age of menopause onset is about 51, some women may enter menopause as early as their 30s or as late as their 60s. Symptoms of menopause include: hot flashes, night sweats, vaginal dryness, insomnia, headache, lethargy/fatigue, irritability, anxiety, depression, a racing heart or skipped beats, and joint pain.

How does exercise help?

Heart disease and osteoporosis risk increase after menopause. The good news is that this risk can be decreased substantially with a regular physical-activity program emphasizing cardiovascular conditioning and weightbearing exercise, and high-impact activities (such as jumping rope) when tolerated. The mood-elevating, tension-relieving effects of aerobic exercise reduce depression and anxiety, which often accompany menopause. Aerobic exercise promotes the loss of abdominal fat—a common place for postmenopausal weight gain. Strength training stimulates bones to retain the minerals that keep them dense and strong,

thereby 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 that good nutrition and a physically active lifestyle go together. A diet low in saturated and trans fat and high in fiber and calcium is key in reaping the full benefits of exercise.

The Good News

If you have been exercising consistently before reaching menopause, you’ve already gained health benefits. Aerobic activity during childbearing years reduces the risk for breast cancer, which is more prevalent after menopause. You will also have gained a jumpstart 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 cardiovascular conditioning to reduce the risk of heart disease, strength training to decrease the risk of osteoporosis and flexibility to maintain range of motion is essential. Consistency is important. Strive to be moderately active for at least 30 minutes every day, or at least most days of the week, every week.

And if you find that you need a jumpstart on

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

getting your fitness program started or would simply like some help developing an exercise program, a local ACE-certified Fitness Professional can be found at www.acefitness.org/profreg/.

Additional Resources

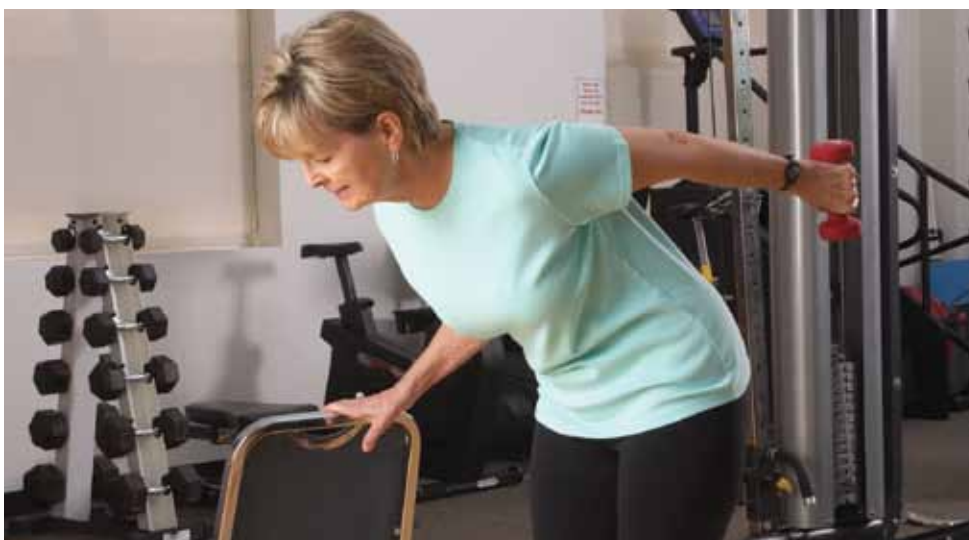
The North American Menopause Society:
www.menopause.org/default.htm

Mayo Clinic—Menopause: www.mayoclinic.com/health/menopause/

Medline Plus—Menopause: www.nlm.nih.gov/medlineplus/menopause.html

WebMD Menopause Center: www.webmd.com/menopause/default.htm.

If you are interested in information on other health and fitness topics, contact: American Council on Exercise, 4851 Paramount Drive, San Diego, CA 92123, 800-825-3636; or, go online at www.acefitness.org/GetFit and access the complete list of ACE Fit Facts!™



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