

# KEEPING ACTIVE

during Menopause

*REGULAR EXERCISE AND  
PHYSICAL ACTIVITY DURING  
MENOPAUSE IS IMPORTANT IN  
IMPROVING BODY COMPOSITION  
AND FUNCTIONAL CAPACITY*



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### EXERCISE FOR IMPROVED HEALTH DURING MENOPAUSE

- Try to make your lifestyle more active: walking during daily life, use of stairs, shifting towards more active recreational pursuits, and less reliance on automated and remote control devices
- Actively play with your children and grandchildren - you can be a great example of successful ageing and offer them a healthy start to life at the same time
- Resistance training is an important part of any exercise regime because of the beneficial effect on bone strength, muscle mass, strength and power, body fat and metabolism, depression, and insomnia
- The combination of aerobic exercise and resistance training offers different and complimentary benefits for health
- Physical activity combined with reduced energy intake is the best approach for reduced body fat.
- Maintaining good balance is an important part of maintaining function and mobility during menopause and aging.
- Exercising during menopause and continuing through aging is the best approach to reduce or prevent the loss of function and health that accompanies the ageing process and sedentary lifestyles.

### TIPS FOR SUCCESSFUL EXERCISE HABITS DURING MENOPAUSE

The first step towards dealing with menopause is to understand the changing hormonal status associated with menopause and the affect this may have on your physical, psychological and emotional state, and ability to be physically active. Women can learn self management by using some of the following ideas:

- Keep an exercise diary and detailed records of all physical and emotional symptoms experienced each day (positive and negative)
- Compare these symptoms with your exercise performance in an effort to understand how changing hormonal status can impact on your ability to exercise and function
- Keep records of menstrual pattern and any associated physical and emotional conditions for four months (with a minimum of three months) if you feel medical assistance is required. Speak to your doctor about how to do this
- Prepare relevant information such as full medical history, menstrual cycle history, body weight and sleep patterns which may be required by a medical practitioner
- Learn to recognise the symptoms which affect your ability to exercise or function in daily life and make adjustments to training or physical activity patterns to optimise your ability to stick to a regular routine
- If you are feeling fatigued check and adjust your lifestyle factors such as diet, lack of rest and sleep, and over-training.
- Fatigue is a common symptom of depression. If depression is severe and/or long-lasting talk to your doctor or a counsellor. Depression is a common and very treatable condition.

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## during Menopause

Exercise is important for good health and well being during all stages of life. Participation in regular physical activity is particularly important however for women as they transition into menopause because of the related changes in body composition and health status. This fact sheet is designed to provide an explanation of menopause and the changes that take place, why exercise is important and what types of exercise are most beneficial for middle-aged and older women.

### WHAT IS MENOPAUSE?

The three phases of a women's reproductive life are pre-, peri- and post - menopause. Menopause is said to have occurred when a woman has not menstruated naturally for 12 consecutive months; it usually occurs between the ages of 45 and 55 years.

Peri-menopause refers to the lead up (or transition) to the menopause. These days however peri-menopause is often used synonymously with menopause. For most women menopause occurs gradually over two to six years; it is in these years that symptoms of the menopause can occur due to fluctuating hormone levels. Eventually menopause is reached when the hormones fall to a level where menstruation will cease.

### SYMPTOMS WHICH MAY BE ENCOUNTERED DURING MENOPAUSE

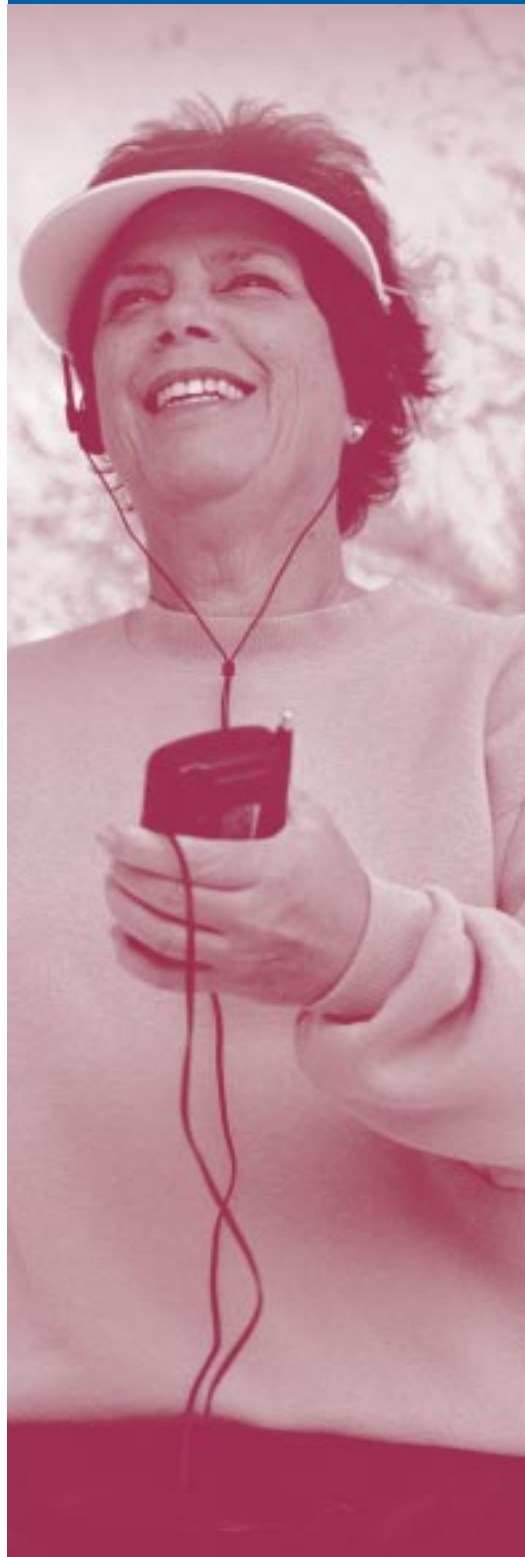
Menopausal symptoms may come and go in keeping with fluctuating hormone levels. The most common symptom is the hot flush; however there are many other possible symptoms such as:

- night sweats
- tiredness
- depression

- loss of libido
- mood changes
- irritability
- forgetfulness
- fatigue
- loss of muscle strength.

Every woman's experience of menopause will be different depending on how their body responds to fluctuating hormones and their current lifestyle. In the past many women had children in their twenties, which meant that menopause coincided with the major life changes associated with children leaving home and the 'empty nest' scenario. These days menopausal women range from professional women, new mothers, and mothers with adolescent children to grandmothers. Each will have different pressures placed on them during menopause. Some women have no overt symptoms during menopause at all, despite major shifts in hormones and metabolism that may affect body composition and health status. Therefore understanding and optimising the outcomes of these changes is important for all women (not just those who have menopausal symptoms).

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### CHANGES IN BODY COMPOSITION ASSOCIATED WITH MENOPAUSE AND AGING; IMPLICATIONS FOR HEALTH

Menopause and aging are associated with significant changes in body composition (the proportion of fat, muscle, and bone in the body) such as a decrease in muscle and bone mass, and a corresponding increase in fat mass. The increase in fat mass is generally associated with the accumulation of fat around the abdomen and organs and is associated with an increased risk of disease.

The extent to which these changes occur in an individual depend upon a combination of genetic, lifestyle, and disease related factors which are all interrelated. The prevention of excess body fat (particularly fat around the abdomen) is both protective and therapeutic for many common chronic diseases including; osteoarthritis, cardiovascular disease, gall bladder disease, type 2 diabetes, breast, colon and endometrial cancer, hypertension, and stroke.

### WHY IS IT IMPORTANT TO EXERCISE REGULARLY DURING MENOPAUSE

Regular exercise and physical activity during menopause is important because it may:

- Decrease body fat. This is most effective when exercise is combined with reduced energy intake in the diet.
- Minimise the physical changes associated with peri-menopause and typical aging and contribute to mental health and well-being;
- Increase longevity and decrease the risk of many common chronic diseases;
- Minimise decreases in exercise capacity that would otherwise occur with aging

### WHAT TYPE OF EXERCISE SHOULD I DO?

Traditionally, physical activity and exercise advice has been primarily directed towards “aerobic” or cardiovascular activities. For instance, Australia’s National Physical Activity Guidelines recommend that adults accumulate at least 30 minutes of moderate intensity activity (such as brisk walking) most days of the week. However there are other types of exercise (i.e. resistance and balance training) that are very important for improved health and function in menopausal and aging women.

The following highlights the importance of different types of exercise and how they benefit menopausal women.

### AEROBIC EXERCISE

Healthy older women adapt to moderate to high intensity aerobic exercise similarly to younger women and most health outcomes appear to be achievable with moderate levels of exercise (Moderate intensity activities include brisk walking, dancing and bike riding). Improvement in cardiovascular and metabolic risk factors is generally associated with higher volumes and/or intensities of aerobic exercise.

- Moderate intensity aerobic exercise combined with reduced energy intakes from the diet is an effective approach to reduce total body and visceral fat in women who are sedentary
- Aerobic exercise that involves jumping or hopping can maintain and in some cases increase bone density in middle-aged women
- Moderate to high intensity aerobic training has also been shown to be as effective as anti-depressants for older women with clinical depression
- Aerobic exercise does NOT improve muscle strength or power and does not enhance balance, and therefore this type of training should be supplemented by resistance and balance training

### RESISTANCE TRAINING

Improvement in muscle strength and power is only achievable to a significant degree when exercise loads are progressively increased.

Resistance training has been associated with:

- Improved bone health at the spine and hip
- Reduced loss of muscle mass, reduced body fat,
- Prevention of cardiovascular disease,
- Prevention of type 2 diabetes (in conjunction with diet and aerobic exercise)
- Prevention of functional dependency
- Prevention of falls (in conjunction with balance training).

Resistance training has also been shown to be as effective as drugs or aerobic exercise for the treatment of clinical depression in older adults.

There are several methods of resistance training available, these include;

- traditional style of training with weights, power training (fast speed lifting)
- pilates
- yoga
- Simple strengthening exercises can easily be incorporated into your daily life; for instance, squatting down (instead of bending) to take the washing from the basket, standing up from a chair without using your arms, using one arm instead of two to lift heavy objects, carrying rather than dragging objects.

### BALANCE TRAINING

Poor balance is associated with increased risk of falls and fractures. In menopause and beyond, balance begins to decline due to changes in muscle mass, strength, and coordination, nerve conduction, vision, and mental awareness. However, balance is one of the most trainable aspects of physical fitness. While resistance improves balance, even greater improvements are obtained with specific balance training exercises. For greatest benefits balance exercises should become progressively more difficult once an easier level has been mastered. The basic principles of balance training include:

- Reducing the base of support (e.g. standing on one leg while in a queue, putting a shoe on while standing)
- Removing cues (e.g. closing your eyes)
- Disturbing the equilibrium (e.g. moving body mass away from the centre of gravity such as leaning forward or sideways)
- Adding distractors (e.g. performing a mental task while balancing).

Tai Chi has also been shown to be effective at improving balance, reducing falls and fear of falling.