Menopause refers to the end of menstruation and is said to have occurred when a woman has not had a period for 12 months. At that point women are considered ‘postmenopausal’.

Most women reach menopause between 45 and 55 years of age. In Australia the average age of natural menopause is 51-52 years, but menopause can occur prematurely due to surgery, chemotherapy or radiation.

‘Peri-menopause’ refers to the time from the start of symptoms associated with menopause. These can include irregular periods, hot flushes, night sweats, mood changes, depression, anxiety, sleeplessness, vaginal dryness, headaches, incontinence, and muscle and joint aches, though women’s experiences of menopause vary considerably and some women experience little more than the cessation of menses.

Why it’s important to exercise

Midlife women need a range of different types of exercise. For example, while there is strong evidence for the benefit of aerobic exercise in supporting fat loss, reducing the risk of heart disease, and enhancing mental health, resistance exercise also helps fat loss and strengthens muscle and bone.

Balance and coordination activities help prevent falls, and pelvic floor strength requires specific use of the pelvic floor muscles. Flexibility exercises improve and maintain mobility, and in forms such as yoga can contribute to mental wellbeing.

Muscle strengthening activities are recommended on at least 2 days each week, and it is important to minimise the amount of time spent in prolonged sitting.

Things to remember

- Symptoms occur in conjunction with changing hormones, especially estrogen and progesterone. Ovarian estrogen levels fluctuate before eventually declining, and progesterone levels decline as ovulation occurs less.

- Health complications can also be linked with weight gain, and menopausal women typically complain of gaining weight, especially around their waist. Even women who don’t gain weight may experience an increase in abdominal fat.

- In addition to these conditions women may suffer urinary incontinence or sexual difficulty due to urogenital changes and weaker pelvic floor muscles. In relation to mental health, as well as depression and anxiety, some women feel more forgetful and that their cognitive function has declined.
Types of Exercises Recommended

In line with Australian physical activity recommendations, Exercise Right recommends 150 to 300 minutes (2 ½ to 5 hours) of moderate activity or 75 to 150 minutes (1 ¼ to 2 ½ hours) of vigorous intensity physical activity, or an equivalent combination of both moderate and vigorous activities, each week.

Aerobic activity that makes use of your large muscle groups while keeping up your heart rate – e.g. walking, jogging, biking, and swimming all count. Exercise Right recommends that beginners start with 10 minutes of light activity, slowly boosting exercise intensity as it becomes easier.

Strength training is especially vital as osteoporosis risk skyrockets following menopause (estrogen is needed to help lay down bone), strength. Strength training exercises will help to build bone and muscle strength, burn body fat, and rev your metabolism.

Right Professional

Accredited Exercise Physiologist (AEP)

Accredited Exercise Physiologists can support you going through menopause as they understand the physiological and hormonal changes occurring throughout this timeframe.

An individualised exercise program can be developed for you to prevent the onset of chronic and complex conditions. At this change in life you need practitioners who have the professional skill and experience to work with your specific range of circumstances.

Right Place

At home, outdoors or in the gym

Canadian researchers found postmenopausal women reaped more benefits from outdoor workouts and were significantly more likely to adhere to their training program than those who did their exercising indoors.

A Calming Environment

If you are experiencing hot flushes it is recommended to exercise in a relaxed environment that has a focus on deep relaxed breathing such as yoga, Tai chi or low impact classes that focus on slow controlled breathing with the movement.

Right Time

Exercise in the morning

If you are experiencing hot flushes it is recommended you exercise in the morning to avoid exercising during the hottest part of the day.

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