



# MENOPAUSE AND WEIGHT GAIN

## Why do women gain weight after menopause?

Weight gain can occur due to decreased metabolic rate, increased calorie consumption, decreased activity, stress and inadequate sleep. However, menopause itself does not contribute to weight gain significantly.

## Are there specific changes in body composition after menopause?

Body fat is usually greater around the hips and buttocks (gynoid pattern) in women before menopause, while in men, it is more around the abdomen (android pattern). After menopause, falling estrogen levels promote android fat distribution and loss of bone and muscle mass. These changes predispose women to type 2 diabetes, heart disease, osteoporosis and fractures, fatty liver, sleep apnea and certain cancers.

## Can weight gain be prevented?

A healthy lifestyle can minimize weight gain. For women who have overweight or obesity, calorie restriction is required to promote weight reduction and maintain a healthy body weight. A calorie deficit of 500 kcal/day usually leads to reduction in body weight of 0.5 kg per week and weight loss of >5% body weight translates into significant health benefits. In addition, women should also focus on increased physical activity, adequate sleep, avoiding alcohol and smoking, and stress management.

## Are there any specific dietary modifications to maintain healthy weight?

A balanced diet with intake of whole grains, protein, fruits, nuts and vegetables is the key. Calorie requirements decrease with aging; however, it is important to ensure adequate intake of fiber, proteins (legumes, pulses, egg, lean meat, fish and low-fat dairy) and micronutrients (vitamins, minerals, antioxidants, etc.). The intake of unhealthy fats (saturated and trans-fat), processed foods, salt, refined sugars and alcohol should be limited.

## What is the role of exercise?

Exercise offers several health benefits and is important in the maintenance of body weight. Exercise should include aerobic activities like walking, running, cycling, dancing or swimming for at least 150 minutes per week and resistance exercises for 2-3 sessions per week. It is never too late to start exercising!

## When should a woman consult a doctor for weight gain?

Routine annual health check-ups with a doctor can ensure monitoring of health issues and discussion about appropriate lifestyle measures and treatment. Women should also seek help if there is rapid weight gain, difficulty in losing weight, diabetes, hypertension, heart disease, osteoporosis or mood and eating disorders.

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