

Many women gain weight during menopause. You may wonder if hormone changes or hormone therapy are to blame. First let's review some basic facts.

Menopause ...

- Is when you've had no period for one year. The lack of a period must not be due to illness, pregnancy, or breastfeeding. It must not be due to using medicines that prevent periods.
- Happens naturally when your ovaries stop making estrogen and progesterone. These hormones control your periods.
- Usually happens naturally between age 45 and 54. The process takes several years.
- Can also happen after surgery to remove the ovaries.
- Increases your risk for heart disease, stroke, and osteoporosis (weakening of the bones).
- Causes symptoms that may start several years before your last period, including:
 - Shorter, longer, lighter, or heavier periods, with more time or less time between them
 - Hot flashes and/or night sweats
 - Vaginal dryness
 - Trouble sleeping
 - Trouble focusing
 - Mood swings
 - Less hair on the head, more on the face

The symptoms and how long they last vary greatly from woman to woman.

Hormone therapy ...

- Can help with hot flashes, night sweats, and vaginal dryness. It can also help prevent osteoporosis due to menopause.
- May consist of estrogen alone or with progesterone.
- May cause side effects. Examples are bleeding, bloating, and breast tenderness or enlargement. It may also cause headaches, mood changes, and nausea.
- Increases your risk of serious health problems, when the hormones are estrogen plus progesterone and when used long-term. This form increases the risk of heart attack, stroke, blood clots, breast cancer, and dementia.

Your doctor can help you decide about hormone therapy. Each woman is different. Discuss your menopause symptoms, health and family history, and lifestyle habits.

If you choose hormone therapy, ask for the lowest dose for the shortest time span to reach your goals.



A healthier life is on the line for you!

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Weight gain during menopause

Hormones *do* play a role in weight gain during menopause. They influence where the added weight goes on your body. It most often forms around the belly instead of on the thighs or hips. But the *weight gain itself is most likely related to aging and lifestyle habits*. For example:

- Many women become less active as they age. They burn fewer calories.
- The amount of your body that is muscle decreases with age. The amount that is fat increases. Fat burns fewer calories than muscle.
- Many women eat the same amount as when they were younger. Or they eat more.
- Menopause is often a time of stress. Your children may have left home. You may be caring for aging parents. You may have gone through a divorce, death of a spouse, or job loss. You may have money problems. Menopause symptoms may add even more stress. Stress often leads to overeating and being inactive.
- Some women “let themselves go” during menopause. They don’t watch their health as much as before.

A healthy lifestyle during menopause

A healthy lifestyle can help with menopause symptoms. It can also help prevent health problems that come with aging. These include weight gain, heart disease, stroke, and osteoporosis.

- *Choose healthy foods.* Make half your plate fruits and vegetables, ¼ grains (whole grains are best), and ¼ cooked dried beans/split peas/lentils, seafood, poultry without skin, or lean meats. Drink 2-3 cups of nonfat or 1% milk per day.
- *Choose and prepare foods with less salt and sodium.*
- *Limit solid fats and added sugars.* They have calories but few or no nutrients. Choose small amounts of oils or tub margarine instead of butter or other solid fats. Drink water instead of sugary drinks. Switch to fat-free or 1% milk. Keep meat portions small and lean.
- *Reach and maintain a healthy weight.* Are you overweight or obese? Eat fewer calories and become more active. Avoid oversized portions.
- *Be active.* Build up to at least 150 minutes per week of moderate effort activity. Examples are brisk walking, swimming, and biking. Or do 75 minutes per week of vigorous effort activity. Examples are jogging, soccer, and tennis (singles). Note: Exercise has many, many benefits that are useful during menopause. It improves mood and sleep, helps manage weight, and strengthens bones.
- *Do muscle strengthening exercises on at least two days per week.* For example, lift hand weights. Use machines at a gym. Walk up stairs. Do push-ups and sit-ups.
- *If you smoke, stop.*
- *Manage stress in healthy ways.* Get plenty of exercise. Try deep breathing, meditation, or yoga. Get enough sleep. Limit caffeine and alcohol.

For more, visit Womenshealth.gov (<http://womenshealth.gov/menopause/>).



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