

Lifestyle Modifications for Post Menopausal Women

S. Sridevy*, Prasanna Baby**

Author Affiliation: *Assistant Professor, Mother Theresa Post Graduate & Research Institute Of Health Science, Puducherry, 605006. **Former Principal, Sri Ramachandra College of Nursing, Sri Ramachandra University ,Chennai, Tamil Nadu 600116

Abstract

Healthy living is about knowing your mind and your body and practicing a routine that is sustainable and energizing. We believe in balance. But in order to maintain any degree of work/life balance, you need to maintain your health. Nonetheless, a number of postmenopausal women suffer from unpleasant symptoms every day. Menopause is an important stage in a woman's life, and to better understand this transition, hence an attempt has been made in this article to create certain guidelines to the overcome the symptoms of menopause.

Keywords: Menopause; Hot flashes; Phytoestrogens and Isoflavones.

Health isn't a destination. It's a thrilling, infuriating, and totally worth-it journey.

Healthy living is about knowing your mind and your body and practicing a routine that is sustainable and energizing. We believe in balance. But in order to maintain any degree of work/life balance, you need to maintain your health. Nonetheless, a number of postmenopausal women suffer from unpleasant symptoms every day. Menopause is an important stage in a woman's life, and to better understand this transition, this article attempts to guide the postmenopausal women to the overcome the symptoms of menopause.

There are a number of steps women in postmenopause can take to stay healthy and feel better. It's as easy as remembering your ABCs, and D, E, and F.

- Avoid smoking, caffeine, alcohol, excess salt, and sugar.
- Balanced diet – Nutritionists recommend whole

grains, cold pressed oils, leafy vegetables, and nuts to help keep your body healthy and potentially help relieve hot flashes. Soy may also ease mild hot flashes.

- Calcium to help keep bones strong.
- Vitamin D also helps keep bones strong.
- Exercise – Weight bearing, daily, at least 30 minutes.
- Fat – Choose foods that are low in saturated fat and cholesterol.

When women reach menopause, they are at increased risk for heart disease. A heart-healthy diet and other lifestyle changes are important ways to control cholesterol and blood pressure levels.

Heart-Health Recommendations Include

- Quit smoking. If a woman smokes, she should quit. Smoking is linked to a decline in estrogen

Reprint Request: S. Sridevy, Assistant Professor, Mother Theresa Post Graduate & Research Institute Of Health Science, Puducherry, 605006.

E-mail: s.sridevy@rediffmail.com

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levels. Women who smoke reach menopause about 2 years earlier than nonsmokers. Smoking doubles a woman's odds of developing heart disease and is a major risk factor for osteoporosis.

- Balance calorie intake and physical activity to achieve or maintain a healthy body weight. (Controlling weight, quitting smoking, and exercising regularly are essential companions of any diet program. Try to get at least 30 minutes, and preferably 60 - 90 minutes, of daily exercise.)
- Consume a diet rich in a variety of vegetables and fruits. Vegetables and fruits that are deeply colored (spinach, carrots, peaches, berries) are especially recommended as they have the highest micronutrient content.
- Choose whole-grain, high-fiber foods. These include fruits, vegetables, and legumes (beans). Good whole grain choices include whole wheat, oats/oatmeal, rye, barley, brown rice, buckwheat, bulgur, millet, and quinoa.
- Eat fish, especially oily fish, at least twice a week (about 8 ounces/week). Oily fish such as salmon, mackerel, and sardines are rich in the omega-3 fatty acids eicosapentaenoic acid (EPA) and docosahexaenoic acid (DHA). Consumption of these fatty acids is linked to a reduced risk of sudden death and death from coronary artery disease. Women with heart disease may also consider taking a daily dietary supplement of 850 - 1,000 mg of EPA and DHA.
- Limit daily intake of saturated fat (found mostly in animal products) to less than 7% of total calories, trans fat (found in hydrogenated fats, commercially baked products, and many fast foods) to less than 1% of total calories, and cholesterol (found in eggs, dairy products, meat, poultry, fish, shellfish) to less than 300 mg per day. Choose lean meats and vegetable alternatives (such as soy). Select fat-free and low-fat dairy products. Grill, bake, or broil fish, meat, and skinless poultry.
- Use little or no salt in your foods. Reducing salt can lower blood pressure and decrease the risk of heart disease and heart failure.
- Cut down on beverages and foods that contain added sugars (corn syrups, sucrose, glucose, fructose, maltose, dextrose, concentrated fruit juice, honey).
- If you consume alcohol, do so in moderation. The American Heart Association (AHA) recommends limiting alcohol to no more than 1 drink per day for women.

- The AHA does not recommend antioxidant supplements (such as vitamin E, C, or beta carotene) or folic acid supplements for prevention of heart disease.
- For women ages 55 to 79 years who have never had a heart attack or stroke, but are at risk of heart disease, a daily low dose (75 - 81 mg) of aspirin may be helpful for primary prevention.

Hot flashes are probably the most common symptom of menopause. Here are tips for easing them:

- Avoid getting too warm by dressing in layers and sleeping in a cool room.
- Avoid eating hot and spicy foods.
- Avoid alcohol, as it can trigger hot flashes.
- Reduce stress.
- Eat several servings of soy a day, after first checking with your doctor. There is some evidence that soy may relieve mild hot flashes, although the effects may take several weeks to realize.

Vaginal Dryness can be Reduced by

- Vaginal lubricants and moisturizers available without a prescription can help lubricate the vagina and make sexual intercourse more comfortable during menopause and in postmenopause.
- If over-the-counter treatments don't work, ask your doctor about topical estrogen, available in creams, tablets, or in a vaginal ring. This type of estrogen will not improve other symptoms of menopause, such as hot flashes.

To Protect your Bones and Avoid Osteoporosis

- Get adequate calcium and vitamin D.
- Exercise.
- Ask your doctor if you need a test to check your bone strength.
- A combination of calcium and vitamin D is important for helping to prevent the bone loss associated with menopause.
- *Calcium.* Women should consume low-fat dairy products or calcium-enriched orange juice to get enough calcium and vitamin D in their diet. Calcium supplements may be another option for some women. For calcium supplements, calcium citrate (Citracal) is better absorbed than calcium carbonate (Tums, Os-Cal) and other types of calcium compounds.

- The standard recommended calcium dose for adults age 50 years and older is at least 1,200 mg per day, depending on risk factors. High doses (over 2,500 mg per day) of calcium supplements may increase the risk for kidney stones. (Because many commercial foods are now fortified with calcium, this upper limit may be easier to reach than people think.)
- There are differing views on the use of calcium and vitamin D. Some doctors recommend that women over age 60 should take calcium and vitamin D for bone health. Other doctors feel that due to the risks of kidney stones, supplements are beneficial only for women (especially those over age 70) who do not get enough calcium in their diets. Ask your doctor whether you should take calcium supplements.
- *Vitamin D.* Vitamin D is necessary for the absorption of calcium in the stomach and gastrointestinal tract and is the essential companion to calcium in maintaining strong bones.
- Vitamin D is manufactured in the skin using energy from the ultraviolet rays in sunlight. It can also be obtained from dietary supplements. As a person ages, vitamin D levels decline. Levels also fall during winter months and when people have inadequate sunlight.
- The recommended daily intake of vitamin D is 600 IU a day after age 50. Drinking milk fortified with vitamin D and sunlight exposure supply most people's need for vitamin D. (One cup of whole milk provides about 100 IU of vitamin D.) Oily fish (sardines especially, as well as salmon, fresh tuna, and mackerel) are also important dietary sources of vitamin D. Wild salmon has a much higher vitamin D content than farmed salmon.

Keeping a menstrual calendar can help women determine what's normal or abnormal. Women should consult a healthcare provider right away if signs of abnormal bleeding patterns occur.

Midlife weight gain in women seems to be mostly related to aging and lifestyle, but the years around menopause are associated with fat gain in the abdomen if women aren't attentive to diet and exercise.

Controlling Weight Gain

Many women need to increase physical activity and reduce caloric intake before and after menopause. Weight gain is common during these

years, and it can be sudden and distressing, particularly when habitual exercise and eating patterns are no longer effective in controlling weight. Gaining weight around the abdomen (the so-called apple shape) is a specific risk factor for heart disease, diabetes, and many other health problems.

Exercise

For protection against all aging diseases, women should pursue a lifestyle that includes a balanced aerobic and weight resistance exercise program appropriate to their age and medical conditions. Brisk walking, stair climbing, hiking, dancing, and tai chi are all helpful. Several studies report that exercise can help control hot flashes. A healthy diet plus regular, consistent exercise can also help ward off the weight gain associated with menopause. Weight-bearing exercises are specifically helpful for protecting against bone loss.

Women should get at least 30 minutes of exercise each day (for weight loss, 60 - 90 minutes is preferred). While more exercise is better, any amount of exercise is helpful.

Treatment of sleep disturbances should first focus on improving sleep routine with good sleep hygiene, including a regular sleep schedule, avoiding heavy evening meals, adjusting levels of light, noise, and temperature in the bedroom, and avoiding alcohol, caffeine, and nicotine.

Women at increased risk for hormonal headaches and migraines during perimenopause are those who have already had a history of headaches around menstrual periods or when taking oral contraceptives. Hormonal headaches typically stop when menopause is reached and hormone levels are consistently low.

Urinary incontinence, which is common during menopause and beyond, is often improved with pelvic floor muscle exercises (Kegel exercises). These involve repeated contraction and relaxation of the muscles that control urine flow, strengthening them so they can better support the bladder. The muscles are contracted to a count of three and then relaxed. Recommended frequency is 10 exercises, five times each day.

Skin - healthy habits at midlife include: avoiding smoking, stress, and overexposure to sunlight; adequate exercise and sleep; drinking plenty of water; and avoiding hot, soapy showers and baths (which dry out the skin).

Practicing good oral hygiene is extremely important. Brushing and flossing daily, regular

dental checkups, and professional dental cleaning twice yearly are all recommended. Gum disease increases risk for heart disease, and tooth loss can be a sign of underlying bone disease, including osteoporosis.

Women often try herbal or so-called natural remedies to treat menopausal symptoms.

Phytoestrogens and Isoflavones. Many studies have researched plant estrogens (phytoestrogens), which are generally categorized as isoflavones (found in soy and red clover) and lignans (found in whole wheat and flaxseed). Nevertheless, soy is a healthy food choice. Soy is rich in both soluble and insoluble fiber, omega-3 fatty acids, and provides essential protein. Soy proteins have more vitamins and minerals than meat or dairy proteins. They also contain polyunsaturated fats, which are healthier than the saturated fat found in meat. The best sources of soy protein are soy food products (tofu, soy milk, soybeans), not supplements.

Soy isoflavones contain genistein and daidzein, which are estrogen-like compounds. Some studies have suggested that high intakes of soy may increase the risk of estrogen-responsive cancers such as breast cancer. The American Cancer Society recommends that women with breast cancer eat only moderate amounts of soy food and avoid taking dietary supplements that contain high amounts of isoflavones.

There have been a number of reported cases of serious and even lethal side effects from herbal products. Patients should check with their doctors before using any herbal remedies or dietary supplements. Menopause is an ideal time to begin or reinforce healthy changes in your life. Remember, menopause may mark the end of one stage of your life, but it also introduces a new one.

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