

Being Active During the Perimenopausal Years

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As you move through the menopause transition, you will experience a variety of changes that can affect your health and daily life. These changes can include a decrease in bone density, increased body fat, and increased risk of heart disease. You might also notice symptoms such as hot flashes, night sweats, musculoskeletal discomfort, and shifts in your mood or sleep. These changes are common, and while they can be challenging, understanding them is an important step toward maintaining your wellbeing.

Regular physical activity improves heart health, mood, and sleep, and may aid in reduction of hot flashes, suggesting that exercise may be a good alternative or companion to medication. Overall, research findings highlight that while menopause can be a challenging time, physical activity may mitigate detrimental changes to your quality of life.

It is recommended that you talk with your medical provider regarding a comprehensive personalized treatment plan for menopause, but being physically active is a great start toward improving symptoms experienced during the perimenopause and menopause years.



Start where you are. Use what you have. Do what you can.

Getting Started

Keep It Simple:

Sit less and move more! Take breaks from long periods of sitting. Walk to the mailbox. Walk the dog. Dance in the kitchen. Take the stairs. Overall, find more opportunities to move throughout the day because it all adds up!

Talk with your Provider:

Menopausal symptoms may be bothersome to you. If you have concerns, ask your health care provider to confirm that your symptoms are related to menopause, and if there are any special considerations before starting or increasing physical activity.

Build a plan:

Regular physical activity may improve symptoms associated with menopause and decrease your risk of heart disease. If you're not sure where to start, talk with your health care provider or a registered exercise professional.

Motivation:

What will help you stick with an activity plan? Would exercising with friends or family be helpful? Do you have a preferred time during the day? Would you be more consistent if you had someone to keep you on track in a supervised program or fitness center?

Tips and Cautions

If you are concerned about being too out of shape or getting tired easily, start with 10-15 minutes in the morning and evening. Gradually increase activity time as you feel comfortable. If you have pain that is limiting your activity and/or new symptoms other than previous menopausal symptoms, ask your health care provider for the appropriate next step.

Aerobic Activity

Aerobic exercise gets your heart pumping and offers numerous benefits during perimenopause. It helps manage weight (especially abdominal fat), may reduce hot flashes, boosts mood and energy levels, improves sleep quality, supports brain health, strengthens your heart, and lowers the risk of developing high blood pressure, type 2 diabetes, and cardiovascular disease.

What?

Activities that get your heart rate up and make you breathe faster, like brisk walking, jogging, cycling (stationary or outdoor), swimming, water aerobics, dancing, hiking, rowing, or cardio classes, including HIIT (high-intensity interval training), which can be effective to reduce losses in lean body mass.

How Often?

Aim for 3-5 days/week.

How Hard?

Aim for moderate/somewhat hard intensity – you should be able to talk but not sing during the activity. Start lighter if needed. Very high intensity/very hard activity (where you can only say a few words) also counts towards weekly goals.

How Much?

Start with 10-15 minutes at a time and gradually build. Aim for at least 150 minutes of moderate-intensity aerobic activity (or 75 minutes of very high-intensity activity) spread throughout the week.

Tips:

- Choose low-impact options like swimming or cycling if you have joint pain.
- Consider interval training (alternating higher and lower intensity bursts) for an efficient fitness boost.
- Consistency is more important than intensity initially.

Strength Training

Strength training is critically important during perimenopause and beyond! This helps counteract age-related muscle loss, boosts metabolism (helping with weight management), significantly strengthens bones (reducing osteoporosis and fracture risk), improves insulin sensitivity, enhances daily function, and builds confidence.

What?

You can use any sort of resistance to challenge your muscles. This includes lifting hand weights or dumbbells, using resistance bands or tubes, weight machines at a gym, or bodyweight exercises (e.g., squats, lunges, push-ups against a wall or floor, chair sit-to-stands).

How Often?

2-3 days per week, ensuring rest days for muscle groups worked.

How Hard?

Start with lighter weights/resistance where you can manage 10-15 repetitions with good form. Gradually progress to a somewhat hard-to-hard effort where the last few repetitions (aiming for 8-12) feel challenging but are still possible with proper technique.

How Much?

Aim for 1-3 sets of 8-12 repetitions for all major muscle groups (legs, hips, back, abdomen/core, chest, shoulders, arms).

Tips:

- Include exercises targeting the hips, core (abdominals and back), and spine to support posture, improve balance, and maximize bone density benefits.
- Focus on proper form to prevent injury – consider guidance from a qualified trainer or physical therapist if you're new to strength training.

Other Types of Physical Activity

Stretching and flexibility -

reduces stiffness and eases joint pain. Stretch 2–3 days/week after warm-ups or workouts

Balance work

reduces fall risk and supports stability. You can try single-leg stands, heel-to-toe walking, or yoga to start.

Mind-Body Practices (Yoga, Pilates, Tai Chi):

Can improve flexibility, core strength, balance, posture, mental clarity, and stress management.

Pelvic Floor Exercises (Kegels):

Can help with urinary control and contribute to core strength. Engage the muscles you would use to stop urination; hold briefly and release. Integrate into your routine as needed or advised by a healthcare provider.

Resources

- Physical Activity Guidelines for Americans: [Executive Summary: Physical Activity Guidelines for Americans, 2nd edition](#)
- The American College of Obstetricians and Gynecologists: [ACOG Explains: Managing Menopause Symptoms](#)
- [The Menopause Society: Perimenopause](#)

Go to <https://acsm.org/certification/professional-resources/profinder/> to find an ACSM certified exercise professional near you.

How will I get started this week? _____

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