

Exercise and diet in menopause

Practical, evidence-based steps to help you stay strong, healthy and energised through menopause

Why does exercise matter?

As we get older, our risk of high blood pressure, cardiovascular disease, stroke and diabetes increases. After menopause, women lose muscle mass and bone density, and weight gain is common (on average about 1.5kg per year).

Aerobic exercise is good for the health of your heart and blood vessels. A combination of aerobic and resistance exercise helps you to avoid gaining fat, and to maintain muscle mass and strength. Stronger muscles keep you mobile. And if you have more muscle mass, you burn more calories even when you are resting, which can help to prevent weight gain. Resistance exercise also supports bone density to reduce risk of bone fracture.

Exercise can improve your sleep quality, reduce menopausal symptoms like flushes and sweats, and make you feel less tired. It improves mood, motivation and confidence.

Here is our prescription to get you started with exercise in menopause.

Taking your first steps to exercise

Small changes have a big impact

Get started! The greatest benefit happens when you go from doing **no** exercise to doing **some** exercise.

Do something that you enjoy

If you **like** the exercise you are doing, you are more likely to continue with it. Exercise doesn't have to mean going to the gym if this is something you don't enjoy.

Make it manageable

Exercise can be something that fits into your day. Choose something that works for YOU.

Set realistic goals

Start by trying to increase the amount of time each day that you are active.

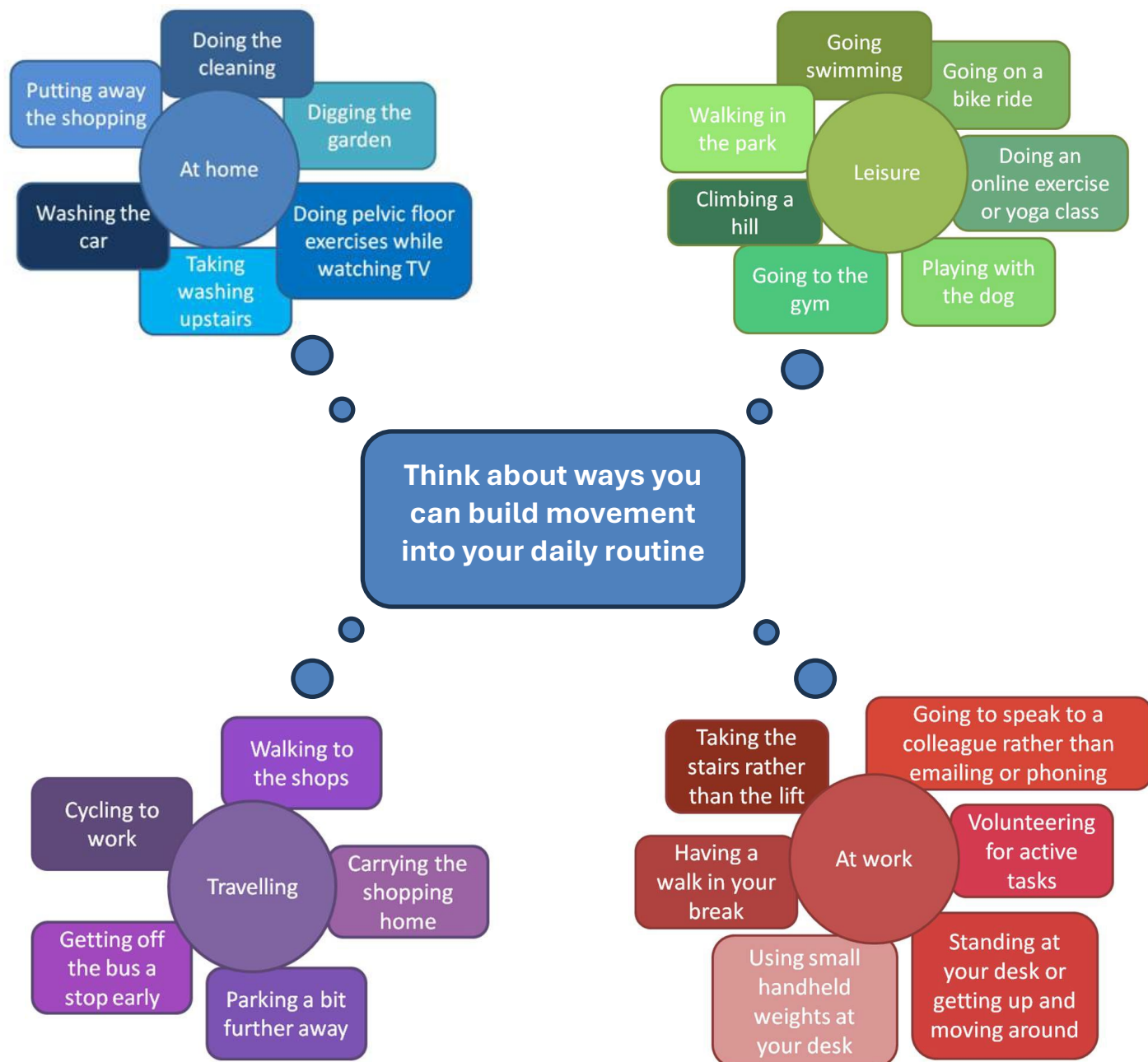
**Aim for PROGRESS,
not perfect!**



Aerobic exercise

Start with short, sharp and do-able

Less than one minute of vigorous exercise 3 times a week for 6 weeks has been shown to have big benefits for your health. One example is 20-30 seconds of stair climbing.



Once you are started with exercise and you feel more energised, it is easier to think about what other types of exercise you might enjoy so that you can build on the progress you have made. **This can be great for your mental health.**

Start slowly and build up gradually when trying new exercise.

Little changes you make every day add up to have a big impact.

Resistance exercise



You can build muscle strength (and support your bone density) by pulling, lifting or pushing against resistance. This can be done using your own bodyweight, free weights, kettle bells and resistance bands. All of these exercises can be done at home. If you enjoy the gym, machines are great for resistance exercise.

Have a look at the videos on the Royal Osteoporosis Society website:

<https://theros.org.uk/information-and-support/bone-health/exercise-for-bones/how-to-build-up-exercise-for-your-bone-strength/>



There are lots of different ways that can help you fit resistance exercise into your week.

“Exercise Snacks” are a good way to start. You could start with 2-10 minutes of exercise 5 to 7 times a week. Choose 2-5 exercises for each session. Repeat each exercise 6-12 times (the last few times should feel challenging).

Single-set sessions. Try 2 to 3 sessions per week, each lasting 20-30 minutes. 7-10 exercises, 1 set of each.

“Weekend Warrior”

One session per week, lasting 45-60 minutes. 6-10 exercises, 6-12 repetitions (the last few times should feel challenging), 1-3 sets of each.

Looking for exercise inspiration?

Why not have a look at some of the following videos on exercises you can try at home?

Menopause Matters Katie Morris fitness:

www.menopausematters.co.uk/fitness-katie-morris-apr2020.php



Lifestyle, diet and long-term success

Weight gain can be hard to avoid in menopause. Combining exercise with eating a balanced diet of whole foods (and restricting calories if you are trying to lose weight) can help you to avoid weight gain, lower body fat and preserve muscle. Getting to a healthy weight reduces risk of heart disease, stroke, type 2 diabetes, breast cancer, endometrial (womb lining) cancer and mental health problems. Even small amounts of weight loss can benefit health. Read on to find out more about a healthy diet in menopause.

Foods to keep bones strong

Foods rich in **calcium** help keep bones healthy in menopause. Try to aim for 2 to 3 servings of calcium-rich foods every day. This might include dairy products, tofu, seeds, oily fish and green vegetables.

See more at: www.menopausematters.co.uk/diet.php



And: <https://theros.org.uk/information-and-support/bone-health/nutrition-for-bones/>



Vitamin D is needed to keep bones strong. It can be difficult to get enough from food, so consider taking a vitamin D supplement (we suggest 1,000iU per day), especially during the winter months when we don't get enough vitamin D from sunshine.

Foods that could make menopausal symptoms worse

Caffeine, hot drinks, alcohol and spicy food can trigger hot flushes and sweats, so it can be helpful to avoid these in menopause. Alcohol is high in calories too.

Choosing foods to enjoy

Eating plenty of **fruit and vegetables** can lower risk of heart disease, stroke and some types of cancer. Fruit and vegetables provide a range of essential nutrients and fibre and are generally low in calories.



Carbohydrates ("carbs") are important as part of a healthy diet. If you increase exercise but don't eat enough carbohydrate you can lose muscle mass. Try to go for wholegrain and higher fibre foods like wholemeal bread, wholegrain rice, noodles and pasta, oats or potatoes with their skins on.



See more at:

www.nutrition.org.uk/media/zzbjkzoh/potatoes-bread-rice-pasta-and-other-starchy-carbohydrates.pdf



Protein is important for healthy muscles and bones. Try to eat a variety of different types of protein. Include plant-based sources of protein, such as beans, lentils or chickpeas, as these are higher in fibre, vitamins and minerals and naturally low in fat. Other protein sources include:-

- Plant-based protein sources like tofu, soya mince and mycoprotein
- Nuts and seeds (higher in fat, but usually the healthier unsaturated fat. Keep portion sizes small).
- Fish (oily fish contains vitamin D and omega-3 fatty acids that support heart health)
- Meat (also contains iron, zinc, vitamin B12).
- Eggs and dairy products



Eating a higher protein diet (1.3g of protein each day for every kg that you weigh) can help build muscle, but exercise is the thing that makes the big difference.

See more at: www.nutrition.org.uk/media/4qwnlmhy/beans_-1.pdf



Dietary **fat** contains the essential fatty acids that the body cannot make and helps us to absorb important vitamins. Saturated fat (in foods like butter, coconut oil, ghee and lard) can raise blood cholesterol levels and increase risk of heart disease and stroke. Try to choose unsaturated fats (in sunflower, rapeseed and olive oil and spreads) which are healthier - but as they are still high in calories, try to use less.

Dairy foods are a good source of calcium as well as protein, iodine and B vitamins. Keeping portion sizes small and choosing lower fat versions of milk, cheese or yoghurt can reduce saturated fat and calorie intake. If you use dairy alternatives such as soya or oat milk, think about using products fortified with calcium and vitamins.

Remember to think about how food is cooked or prepared: trim off visible fat, try alternatives to frying and check labels for fats, sugar and salt added to processed foods.

“Treat foods” like crisps, sweets, biscuits, cakes, chocolate and sugary drinks are high in saturated fat, salt and sugar and are not needed as part of a healthy diet. Try to limit how often you eat these and if you do, stick to small portions.

Mediterranean diet

There is no perfect diet for menopause, but menopausal women who stick to a mediterranean-based diet long term and combine this with exercise might benefit from:-

- Reduced cardiovascular risk
- Reduced fat around the organs and increased muscle mass
- Improved bone mineral density
- Reduced cognitive decline

Interested? Learn more about the Mediterranean diet here:
www.heartuk.org.uk/healthy-diets/the-mediterranean-diet



Other useful links

Eating well for the perimenopause and menopause
(British Dietetic Association):

www.bda.uk.com/resource/menopause-diet.html



The Eatwell Guide - NHS

www.nhs.uk/live-well/eat-well/food-guidelines-and-food-labels/the-eatwell-guide/

