

Fit Facts

FROM THE AMERICAN COUNCIL ON EXERCISE

Exercise and Menopause

There was a time when the word was never spoken, even between a mother and daughter. Menopause, still referred to as "the change" in some circles, has now come out in to the open. **It's** about time. After all, a woman can expect to live one-third to one-half of her life past menopause, and these can be among the most satisfying years of her life. **Part** of the reason for its emergence as a hot health topic is likely due to the increasing body of information on how to manage it. Exercise plays a key role in making the transition through menopause easier and in enhancing health, happiness and productivity during the second half of life.

WHAT IS MENOPAUSE?

The medical definition of menopause is cessation of menses for 12 months, caused when the ovaries stop making the hormones **estrogen**, progesterone and testosterone. For most women, menopause simply marks the end of their reproductive years. While the average age of menopause is about 51, some women may experience it as early as their thirties or as late as their sixties. Symptoms of menopause include: hot flashes, night sweats, bladder and reproductive tract changes, insomnia, headache, lethargy/fatigue, irritability, anxiety, depression, heart palpitations and joint pain.

HOW DOES EXERCISE HELP?

The good news is that a regular program of physical activity can help manage the uncomfortable symptoms of menopause as well as the related health concerns, such as heart disease and

osteoporosis.

The mood-elevating, tension-relieving effects of aerobic exercise help reduce the depression and anxiety that often accompanies menopause. Aerobic exercise also promotes the loss of abdominal fat — the place most women more readily gain weight during menopause. In addition, some research studies have shown that the increased estrogen levels that follow a

Menopause And Beyond: Exercise Helps...

- Reduce and prevent symptoms
 - Hot flashes
 - Vaginal and bladder atrophy
 - Joint Pain
 - Anxiety, irritability, depression
 - Sleep disturbances, insomnia
- Reduce risk of:
 - Heart disease
 - Osteoporosis
 - Weight gain
- Improve and increase:
 - Strength, stamina, flexibility, energy
 - Function of vital organs
 - Condition of heart, lungs and muscles

woman's exercise session coincide with an overall decrease in the severity of hot flashes. Strength training also helps. It stimulates bones to retain the minerals that keep them dense and strong, thus preventing the onset and progression of osteoporosis. These effects of exercise, along with improved blood fats and physical

fitness, work together to help prevent heart disease. Keep in mind, though, that good nutrition works hand in hand with a physically active **lifestyle**. A low-fat, high-fiber diet and adequate calcium intake are vital in order to reap the full benefits of exercise.

THE GOOD NEWS

If you have been a consistent exerciser during the years leading to menopause, you already have an advantage. Aerobic activity during **childbearing** years reduces the risk of breast cancer, a disease that becomes more prevalent after menopause. You also will have a jump on your bone health since your strength-training exercises just may have increased the density and strength of your bones.

To reap the benefits of exercise, a balanced program of weight-bearing aerobic activity (walking is great), strength training (with weights, resistance bands, yoga or even gardening), and flexibility is essential. Consistency is key; strive for some moderate activity daily, or at least most days of the week, every week.

For more information, please call the Massachusetts Department of Public Health Physical Activity Hotline: **1-800-952-6637**

If you are interested in information on other health and fitness topics, contact:

American Council on Exercise, 5820 Oberlin Drive, Suite 102, San Diego, CA 92121, 800-529-8227