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Menopause weight gain: An expert explains everything you should know

Including the causes and ways to slim down

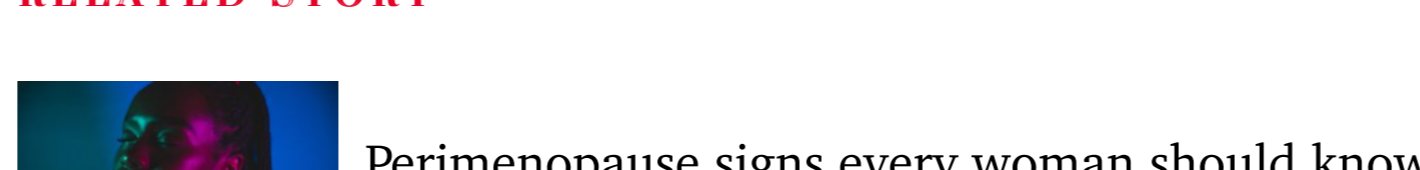
BY NATALIE CORNISH AND KATIE FROST | UPDATED: 13 APRIL 2023

Along with hair loss, brain fog and mood swings, weight gain is one of the more unwelcome symptoms of menopause. But it's also one of the most common – with hundreds of Google searches every month – which is why we went straight to a doctor to find out the facts around menopause weight gain.

Dr Naomi Potter is an experienced menopause doctor and the founder of Menopause Care, a clinic that helps women manage menopause through evidence-based treatments and holistic care. Petra Coveney is the creator of Menopause Yoga & Wellbeing – a holistic practice for supporting women through their menopause journey.

Here, Dr Naomi and Petra explain the biological and behavioural changes that can cause weight gain during perimenopause and menopause – and shares some suggestions for helping women feel themselves again.

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"Weight gain in midlife is not uncommon," says Dr Naomi. "Metabolic changes as women age, along with the hormonal shift in the menopause, can lead to weight gain, particularly in the middle part of the body. But this doesn't mean everyone will put weight on during the menopause."

Why do some women put on weight during menopause?

Ageing, hormonal changes and metabolism can all play a part in weight gain.

"It is partly to do with how we age, but it's also down to the hormonal impacts of menopause on metabolism," explains Dr Naomi. "Changes to the way women metabolise fats and sugars can have an impact, and the hormonal changes of menopause can make weight gain around the abdomen more likely."

"This symptoms of menopause, such as joint aches or fatigue, can affect energy levels and mood, which can then lead to a shift in diet and exercise habits."

The decline in oestrogen and testosterone during, and after, menopause can also lead to lethargy, which can contribute to these feelings of low mood and lower self esteem. As Petra explains, a slowing metabolism adds to this.

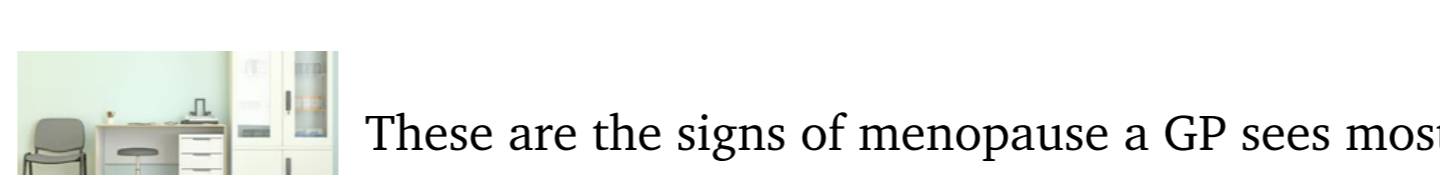
"As metabolism slows down, fewer calories from carbohydrates are needed and digestion becomes slower," Petra says. "This can make us feel sluggish or lethargic, bloated, constipated or uncomfortable. Exercising may not be what you feel like doing, and for some of us, we may feel self-conscious about our different body shape."

"The perimenopause transition is tiring in itself and when our mood is low, or we feel tired and fatigued, it is easy to reach for comfort food," Petra adds. "Low oestrogen can also make us crave sugary foods and carbohydrates. This is why women in their normal menstrual cycle have monthly cravings."

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What's the best way to prevent menopause weight gain?

Making positive lifestyle changes can make a big difference to how you feel throughout menopause. Two key areas to focus on are diet and exercise.

Diet

"When it comes to diet, try to have an awareness of what you're eating and aim to reduce the consumption of processed foods and products high in sugar," Dr Naomi advises.

"Eating wholegrain and unprocessed foods that provide fibre, vitamins and minerals can help to manage weight and are great for supporting overall health."

Being mindful of what you're eating can also help to ease menopause symptoms, explains Petra.

"Try to eat more proteins to boost your energy and build muscle and bone tissues," she says.

"Phytoestrogens (oestrogen-like compounds derived from plants) can help to ease some of the symptoms such as hot flushes, while mindfulness about what you eat and enjoying smaller meals that keep you fuller longer can be beneficial. Consider fasting in the mornings until 11am or midday if you are in post menopause to give your digestive juices the chance to wake up and do their job."

Exercise

Exercise is important at any time in our lives but particularly during perimenopause and menopause, when getting active can do wonders for mood and self-esteem.

"The decline in hormones such as oestrogen can leave women at a higher risk of health problems such as osteoporosis and cardiovascular disease, but it can also impact mood," Dr Naomi adds. "Staying active, whether that's a daily walk, yoga or running, can be brilliant for both mind and body."

And as Petra highlights, you don't need to take up a vigorous new exercise regime to see the benefits. "You can help to manage weight just by fast walking – you don't need to jog," she says. "Feeling and looking stronger can make you feel awesome and empowered. This can lift a low mood and boost confidence. The key is not to over do the active exercise. Balance it with yoga stretches and deep relaxation for the nervous system."

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