



# Women and body weight during the transition to menopause

## Using research to take action

### What is menopause?<sup>1</sup>

- The natural point in women's lives when they stop having menstrual periods.
- The transition to menopause has three stages and women may go through these stages at different rates. The stages are:
  - Irregular menstrual cycles. Cycles may become longer or shorter by 7 or more days.
  - Skipping or missing menstrual periods. Women may have 60 days or more between cycles.
  - Menstrual periods stop.
- During the transition to menopause, some women describe having hot flashes, night sweats, and other signs. These may last 5 years or longer after their last menstrual period.
- Menstrual periods may stop abruptly or change in their pattern due to surgery, medicines, or intrauterine devices (IUDs).

### What body weight changes occur?

- During transition, women often gain about 2 ½ kg (5 lbs), may notice their waist line expand,<sup>2</sup> and the distribution of their body fat changing.<sup>3</sup>
- Reasons for weight gain are being less active, eating more, and aging.<sup>4,5</sup>
- Change in hormones during the transition to menopause does not seem to cause weight change. However they cause a change in body fat distribution, especially an increase of fat in the abdomen.<sup>5</sup> More research is needed to confirm this.

### What can women do to reduce weight changes?

Research is being done to learn more about what woman can do to lessen weight changes and changes in the distribution of body fat (abdominal fat).<sup>6</sup> For example, one large study followed women for 5 years as they transitioned to menopause.<sup>2</sup> Compared to women weighed once a year, women who followed a strict meal and exercise program were twice as likely to be at or below baseline weight and had a smaller increase in abdominal fat.<sup>\*\*\*</sup> In this study, women had to:

- set goals
- eat balanced, low-fat, calorie reduced meals (1300 kcal per day, with 25% from total fat, 7% from saturated fat)
- exercise to burn 1000–1500 kcal per week (e.g. brisk walking 16-24 km [10-15 miles]/week; 20,000-30,000 steps/week)
- keep active in daily activities (e.g. walking to work, taking the stairs, working in the garden)
- keep a log of foods eaten and exercise done
- connect with others to exercise and learn how to prepare healthy meals

If women gained weight in this study, they were given advice from behaviour specialists.

Other studies of men and women, show greater weight loss with exercise and healthy eating compared to healthy eating or exercise alone.<sup>7,8</sup>

**More information available on websites from:** the Canadian Obesity Network, Society of Obstetricians and Gynaecologists of Canada, and North American Menopause Society.

Study quality using the GRADE system:

\*\*\*\***High** quality = further research is **very unlikely to change** the findings. \*\*\***Moderate** quality = further research **may change** the findings. \*\***Low** quality = further research is **likely to change** the findings. \***Very low** quality = further research is **very likely to change** the findings.

### References

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# Women and body weight during the transition to menopause

## 1. What have you done to manage your body weight?

Check  all things that you did in the past week

	Week 1	Week 2	Week 3	Week 4
I exercised (list what you did):	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

Week 1 \_\_\_\_\_ Week 2 \_\_\_\_\_

Week 3 \_\_\_\_\_ Week 4 \_\_\_\_\_

- |  |                          |                          |                          |                          |
|--|--------------------------|--------------------------|--------------------------|--------------------------|
| I ate balanced low-fat, calorie-reduced meals                    | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| I set goals for things I can do to help manage my weight         | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| I kept a log of my weight, food intake, and/or physical activity | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| I worked together with others to keep me on track                | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| I _____ (add your own approach)                                  | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| I did nothing to manage my body weight                           | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |

## 2. How often during the past week?

Indicate how many days (0-7) you did these activities in the past week

- |   | Week 1 | Week 2 | Week 3 | Week 4 |
|---|--------|--------|--------|--------|
| I exercised for 20 minutes or more                      | _____  | _____  | _____  | _____  |
| I ate low-fat, calorie reduced meals                    | _____  | _____  | _____  | _____  |
| I kept a log  | _____  | _____  | _____  | _____  |
| I worked together with someone else to keep me on track | _____  | _____  | _____  | _____  |
| I _____ (add your own approach)                         | _____  | _____  | _____  | _____  |

## 3. What have you been doing to make sure you exercise as planned?<sup>9</sup>

Check  all things that you did in the past week

	Week 1	Week 2	Week 3	Week 4
I made it part of my daily/weekly routine	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
I focused on positive feelings I get from regular exercise	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
I focused on the health benefits of regular exercise	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
I avoided letting other things get in the way	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
I exercised with someone else (or discussed my plan with him/her)	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
I tried doing different types of exercise	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
I _____ (add your own approach)	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>



## 4. Do you want to make a change?<sup>10,11</sup>

Check  one

	Week 1	Week 2	Week 3	Week 4
4.1 I prefer to make no change from what I am doing now.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

-----OR-----

I prefer to make a change; what change:

	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
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o Week 1 \_\_\_\_\_ Week 2 \_\_\_\_\_

o Week 3 \_\_\_\_\_ Week 4 \_\_\_\_\_

Indicate Yes, No, Not Sure, or N/A if you are not making a change

4.2 Are you motivated to make this change? \_\_\_\_\_

4.3 Are you confident that you can make this change? \_\_\_\_\_

4.4 What may get in the way of making this change?

o Week 1 \_\_\_\_\_ Week 2 \_\_\_\_\_

o Week 3 \_\_\_\_\_ Week 4 \_\_\_\_\_

4.5 What may help or support you make this change?

o Week 1 \_\_\_\_\_ Week 2 \_\_\_\_\_

o Week 3 \_\_\_\_\_ Week 4 \_\_\_\_\_

**You may have a health condition that limits your choice of foods or type of physical activity. This information is not intended to replace the advice of a health care provider.** This information sheet was developed at the University of Ottawa and Ottawa Hospital Research Institute by D Stacey, S Beach, J Jull, J Kryworuchko, D McArthur and reviewed by KB Adamo, J Beaulac, M Brochu, A Dumas, I Strychar, D Prud'homme. There are no conflicts of interest to declare. Funded by the Canadian Institutes of Health Research (grant #183416). Published Jan 2013. Revised July 2014.

