The Female Patient®
and
NAMS
The North American Menopause Society

PATIENT HANDOUT

What You Should Know About

Weight & Menopause

Not an Easy Mix

Women frequently become overweight or obese during the menopause transition years. Over 65% of women aged 45 to 55 years and 70% of women aged 55 to 75 years are overweight. Using body mass index classification, 40% of these women are considered obese.

What exactly is body mass index?

Body mass index (BMI) is a number calculated from a person's weight and height that is a reliable indicator of body size for most people. BMI is used to assess your weight and your risk of such health problems as diabetes and heart disease. Although BMI is not an exact measurement of body fat, it is usually a good guide.

How do I know if I'm obese or just overweight?

The definition of "overweight" is a BMI of 24 to 29. This BMI is often seen in the midlife and menopausal population of women who become overweight or obese during the menopause transition.

Obesity is a BMI of 30 or more, a calculation based on body weight and height. For example, a woman is considered "obese" when she is 5'4" and weighs 174 lb or more—or when she is 5'8" and weighs 197 lb or more. A BMI calculator can be found at www.nhlbisupport.com/bmi.

Why am I gaining weight as I age and what's the harm?

During the menopause transition, women often gain an average of approximately 5 pounds.

- Decline in estrogen during menopause may cause an increase in body fat and a decrease in muscle.
- Osteoarthritis can make physical exercise difficult with joint pain, swelling, stiffness, and loss of range of motion.
- Lack of sleep during peri- and postmenopause has been linked to increased appetite.
- Obesity can increase the risk of cardiovascular and metabolic disorders, arthritis, respiratory problems, urinary incontinence, and some types of cancer.

How can I lose these midlife pounds?

Restrict your calories. Try a healthy eating plan like the Mediterranean Diet that is low in fats and high in nutrition. Find an ideal weight for yourself and achieve it.

Get regular exercise. Find a gym or sport that works for you and work it. The good news is that lifestyle activities like gardening, walking, and even vacuuming help, too. Exercise with friends or family for more enjoyment.

Find support groups. Support from friends and family and weight-loss groups, such as Weight Watchers and Overeaters Anonymous, have been proven to help you stay on a diet.

Don't mix eating with other activities. Don't eat while you're watching television, listening to music, using a computer, or driving. Being distracted at mealtimes takes your mind off watching your calories and nutrients.

Where can I learn more about losing weight?

See the website of The North American Menopause Society at www.menopause.org and the US Department of Agriculture at www.choosemyplate.gov.

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A downloadable version of this patient handout is also available at: **www.femalepatient.com** and **www.menopause.org**.