

SUPPORTING WOMEN TO GET ACTIVE DURING MENOPAUSE



We are Women in Sport. Our vision is a society where women and men have equal opportunities. Women and girls are missing out on the lifelong benefits of sport. We want to change this, now, for every woman and girl in the UK.

This report summarises our recommendations for the health, sport and exercise sectors to support women to develop physical activity habits during menopause. The recommendations are based on research with menopause experts, a survey of 427 women across the UK and focus groups with 28 women, both active and inactive.

To read more about the research visit [womeninsport.org](https://www.womeninsport.org)

WHY MENOPAUSE?

Women going through the menopause are missing out on the benefits of being physically active. We want to help the health, sport and exercise sectors to better understand the issues women face at this key life stage. We believe menopause provides an opportunity to engage women in sport and physical activity.

1. Chronic disease usually begins around the age of 60, which makes the first 10 years after menopause an ideal period for physical activity intervention and prevention to improve women's long-term health.¹

Menopause is a biological life stage that all women experience when their periods stop and their ovaries lose their reproductive function. Natural menopause typically occurs between the ages of 45 and 55, with the average age being 51 in the UK.² The average female life expectancy in the UK is 83 years, which means women will spend a significant amount of their lifetime post menopause. This is accompanied by an increased risk of disease such as osteoporosis and cardiovascular disease.³

According to Sport England⁴ **38%** of women aged 45-54 do *not* meet the recommended levels of physical activity and **23%** are considered inactive.* We need to get these women benefiting from being active.

2. Menopause can be a time when women drop out of being active.

Menopause can be a complicated, confusing and deeply personal experience for women, which can result in them disengaging from sport and physical activity. **30%** of our respondents said they became **less active** during menopause. Menopause symbolized a loss of health, fertility, youth and femininity for some women. The social stigma associated with this loss, increased women's fear of judgement in sport and exercise environments where they felt more vulnerable. Some women became isolated and withdrawn, resulting in reduced social support from friends and family to be active. It is of great concern that a significant number of women are missing out on the physical, mental and social benefits of sport and physical activity at a time when they could benefit the most for both their short and long-term health and wellbeing.

* According to the Chief Medical Officer (CMO), adults aged 19-64 should participate in at least 150 minutes of moderate intensity activity per week. These adults are described as **active**. Those that complete less than 30 minutes per week are **inactive**.

3. Regular physical activity can help women to cope more effectively with their menopausal symptoms.

Every woman will experience menopause differently. Our survey found that **82%** of women experienced menopausal symptoms, often over a number of years, and **70%** said their symptoms had a moderate to severe impact on their quality of life. The active women in our research felt empowered to take control of their life, managing their symptoms and health through being active. Physical activity gave them much needed me-time to do something positive for themselves; it helped them to de-stress and cope better with menopause and life. We need to sell these benefits to inactive women.

4. The menopause is a natural time of reappraisal, when women are more open to change.

Menopause can be a liberating time for women to re-evaluate their lives and become more active. Women are looking for information about the menopause, how to manage their symptoms and ways to improve their health more generally. So for active women, it is an optimum time to support them in maintaining healthy habits. For less active women it's a time to re-engage them in physical activity by supporting them to feel that being active can be a new beginning and an opportunity to re-define themselves.



RECOMMENDATIONS

Menopause is an important time to engage women in regular sport and physical activity and an opportunity to embed positive long-term exercise habits into their lives as they get older. To support women to reap the benefits of sport and physical activity, we believe the health, sport and exercise sectors must work together to educate and empower women to take control of their menopause and health. Our recommendations are targeted at these professionals to help address the key issues for menopausal women.

RECOMMENDATIONS TO HEALTH PROFESSIONALS

- ▶ Offer training opportunities on menopause to physical activity providers so they can better understand and provide for women's needs.
- ▶ Provide more guidance to women on the benefits of physical activity for menopause.
- ▶ With sport and exercise providers, develop practical resources to inform and support women to engage in safe physical activity during menopause (e.g. posters, leaflets, websites, videos, social media, fitness apps).
- ▶ Offer exercise referral programmes for menopausal women through partnerships with local sport and exercise providers.
- ▶ GPs to engage women who present with menopause symptoms in physical activity conversations and refer women to exercise referral programmes where appropriate.

RECOMMENDATIONS TO SPORT AND EXERCISE PROVIDERS

- ▶ Develop partnerships with health services to provide tailored offers under exercise prescription programmes.
- ▶ Train staff to understand the menopause, its impact on women and their specific needs.
- ▶ Provide physical activity offers that are flexible, low-commitment, fun and encourage social support.
- ▶ Consult with women within this target group to understand their needs and consider adapting existing offers or create new offers to meet menopausal women's activity preferences.
- ▶ Work with health professionals to develop practical resources to inform and support women to engage in safe physical activity during menopause (e.g. posters, leaflets, websites, videos, social media, fitness apps).
- ▶ Champion an open, positive dialogue about menopause in sport and physical activity settings, organisations and within the workforce.
- ▶ Provide a safe space for women to talk about their experiences of menopause.
- ▶ Build women's confidence to be active through reassurance of the type and intensity of activity they can do to prevent injury.

REFERENCES

- ¹ Lobo, R.A., Davis, S.R., De Villiers, T.J., Gompel, A., Henderson, V.W., Hodis, H.N., Lumsden, M.A., Mack, W.J. Shapiro, S. and Baber, R.J. (2014) 'Prevention of Diseases After Menopause', *Climacteric*, vol. 17, no. 5, pp. 540-556.
- ² NHS Choices, 'Menopause' (www.nhs.uk/conditions/menopause)
- ³ British Menopause Society (2017) Vision for Menopause Care in the UK (thebms.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2017/12/BMS-Vision-02A.pdf)
- ⁴ Sport England (2017) Active Lives Online [Query Criteria: women; age 45-54, inactive, fairly active, active] (<https://activelives.sportengland.org>).



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