Exercise May Help Women Retain Muscle Mass During Menopause

Women who engage in physical activity are more likely to have higher muscle mass before and after menopause.

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Aging causes many hormonal changes for women. Middle-aged women transitioning from perimenopause (the period before menopause) to postmenopause lose muscle mass when their estrogen levels drop. But new findings published in the Journal of Clinical Medicine suggest that engaging in physical activity could help women keep some of their muscle mass, according to the University of Jyväskylä in Finland.

For the study, researchers measured muscle size in women during perimenopause and immediately postmenopause. On average, the study's participants were 51.5 years old at baseline and 53 years old at the time scientists took final measurements. (The average duration of menopausal transition was 1.5 years.)

During menopause, women saw their muscle mass decrease by 1% on average. Although it may not seem like much, the dip can occur quickly and can impact a woman's metabolism, according to Hanna-Kaarina Juppi, a doctoral student at the University of Jyväskylä.

But findings showed that women who engaged in physical activity could maintain their muscle mass while undergoing menopause. Researchers found that compared with women who were less active those who were more physically active had more muscle mass before and after menopause.

The conclusion? Physical activity can slow the loss of muscle mass women experience during menopause from the body's natural reduction in estrogen, which begins during early postmenopause.

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