

Physical activity has greater impact on body composition in postmenopausal women

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Everyone knows that exercise is good for you, regardless of your age. But a new study coming out of the University of Massachusetts Amherst and presented earlier this month at the 2015 annual meeting of The North American Menopause Society (NAMS) shows that some types of physical activity have a greater impact on body composition in postmenopausal compared to premenopausal women.

That's the good news for [postmenopausal women](#). However, the study also found that postmenopausal women, on average, have a significantly higher [body mass index](#) (BMI), waist circumference and percentage of body fat. That's not new news since it is a generally accepted fact that women tend to gain weight as they go through menopause. The encouraging part of the study, however, is that postmenopausal women may have more control over their [body composition](#) than their premenopausal counterparts since their body composition is more impacted by light physical activity, such as casual walking or yard work, and by [sedentary behavior](#).

A total of 630 premenopausal and 274 postmenopausal women participated in the study. ActiGraph accelerometers were used to estimate the amount of time spent in various forms of physical activity and sedentary periods. Not surprisingly, postmenopausal women, on average, exhibited less total movement and more sedentary time than [premenopausal women](#). Also, as expected, higher total movement and physical activity, along with lower sedentary behavior, were associated with a lower BMI, waist circumference and percentage of body fat—but

not to the same extent in both groups.

"Across the board, for each measure of body composition, we found that light [physical activity](#) had a greater impact in postmenopausal compared with premenopausal women," says Dr. Lisa Troy, lead author from the University of Massachusetts. "We additionally found that sedentary behavior was more strongly associated with [waist circumference](#) in postmenopausal women. This is an important public health message because, as women go through menopause, physiological changes may decrease a woman's motivation to exercise. What we've found in our study suggests that doing even a little bit of exercise may make a big difference in body composition."

Dr. Wulf Utian, executive director of NAMS, points out that this study provides valuable insights for physicians counseling their middle-aged female patients on weight management. "Regular exercise has so many benefits for women of all ages—from providing more energy and greater mobility to helping to build bone density," says Dr. Utian. "This study suggests, though, for postmenopausal women, weight management may be improved with a variety of physical activities."

Provided by The North American Menopause Society

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