

Dr Daisy's Blog at  
Menopause Matters. This time...

# Understanding Obesity and Menopause Part I



*Image by i.yunmai*

Obesity levels in the UK are rising at an alarming rate.

By 2020, Public Health specialists **predict** that 1 in 3 of the UK adults, will be not just overweight – but defined as clinically obese.

And yes, that's only next year – Can you believe it!?

We are on the threshold of a weight epidemic.

And by 2030, all this additional flab will have resulted in –

- 668,000 extra cases of diabetes
- 461,000 extra heart attacks and strokes
- 130,000 new cancer cases



... and at a cost to the country of around £2 Billion/year.

### **Why am I writing about weight and menopause?**

So I'm writing this for all the ladies who are going through the menopause – and that includes myself. Unfortunately, being female and middle-aged, this means we're a prime group.

However, each middle-aged woman has so much potential to improve their health. It's important to know the facts about female menopause, hormonal changes, and how these may or may not affect your weight throughout the menopausal transition and on into the post-menopausal period. This will help you make the best decisions for your future health and old age..

Knowledge is power. Power means change. Change is for the better ... please keep reading!

### **Women worry about weight gain at menopause**

Almost every female attending the menopause clinic complains that either the menopause or taking HRT, has caused them to put on weight. It's so common to see a female patient who is having dreadful menopausal symptoms, but is worried about either starting HRT, or continuing to take it, mostly because they are so concerned about how this might affect their weight. So I'm going to answer the following questions:

- What's the truth about menopause, HRT and weight gain?
- Why does obesity matter?
- Which other factors affect weight gain in middle age / around menopause?
- Could HRT in fact be beneficial for weight loss?
- Which HRT might be best if weight gain is a concern?
- Why is weight loss so important especially for women in midlife?
- What options are there to support weight loss for middle-aged women?

But first a few facts.

## Are you in denial about your own weight?

Data from [the House of Commons Obesity Statistics 2019](#) reveal that 28.7% of adults in England are obese. A further 35.6% are overweight but not obese.

Obesity is most common in women in the aged 45-65 years.

However, many women are in denial about their weight. When questioned, 31% of women who were overweight, and 8% of women who were obese, replied they were about the right weight.

Time to face reality! Take a look at the BMI calculator below.

## How overweight am I?

If you haven't worked out your BMI lately, why not do this by [clicking here?](#)

	BMI	Body Mass Index (BMI)
Underweight	< 18.5	This is the most widely accepted classification of obesity. It's calculated by dividing your weight by the square of your height (kg/m <sup>2</sup> ).
Normal weight	18.5-24.9	
Overweight	25-29.9	
Obese Class I	30-34.9	
Obese Class II	35-39.9	
Obese Class III	40+	





Your weight is sometimes also classified by waist measurements.

- Your health is at risk if your waist measurement is <31.5 ins (80cm).
- You are at very high risk if your waist measures > 34 ins (88cm).

### Why does obesity matter?

Being obese in mid-life is associated with a significant increase in many different health risks.

With a BMI of >30, your risk of cardiovascular disease is increased by a factor of 4.

You are also at increased risk of Type-2 Diabetes, raised cholesterol, high blood pressure, and a significantly increased risk of numerous cancers, including breast cancer and uterine cancer.

Being obese can also cause severe emotional harm, and contribute to poor psychological well-being, sexual dysfunction and relationship breakdown.

What's the truth about menopause, hormone replacement therapy (HRT) and weight gain? Research trials have demonstrated the following facts -

- Although the average age of the last menstrual period is aged 51, around 5 -10 years before this, your estrogen levels are falling and your FSH (Follicle Stimulating Hormone) levels are rising. This means women in their 40's already have a relative lack of estrogen, long before the exact time of menopause.
- There is then a sharp drop in estrogen levels, and a sharp rise in FSH levels, for 2 years before, and for 2 years after, the last menstrual period. Then levels stabilise. This period of time is called the peri-menopausal transition (PMT).
- These hormone changes may result in increased appetite, lowered energy levels, and reduced physical fitness. Hence there may be a biological reason for a small weight increase.
- However, whereas a small weight increase has been demonstrated at the PMT, this is in-line with the rate of weight increase associated with normal ageing.

During the PMT, women gain an average of 4.5lb (2.25kg) over 3 years ([Sternfeld 1999](#)). This is similar to 1.5lb (0.7 kg) /year, in their 5th and 6th decade, experienced by healthy post-menopausal women ([Wing 1991](#)).

- During the peri-menopause, there is a small, coincident reduction in lean body mass, due to loss of muscle. This means, that with a small increase in fat deposition, but a similar degree of muscle loss, the net overall weight increase due to menopause itself, is negligible.
- Fat is distributed in the body, both peripherally and inside the abdomen, where it forms a blanket around your organs known as visceral fat. This is dangerous fat where harmful inflammatory processes take place.

There is a natural change in the amount of visceral fat deposited before and after the peri-menopausal transition. In premenopausal women, visceral fat makes up 5-8% of total body fat, whereas after the menopause, this rises to 11-20%.

This is associated with a change in body shape, with women becoming more apple-shaped than pear-shaped.

It is the accumulation of all these changes which leads women erroneously to think the menopause has caused weight gain. Weight gain and redistribution of body fat is a normal part of the ageing process.

It's also sadly true, that obese women tend to have more troublesome peri-menopausal symptoms than non-obese women.

Which other factors are associated with weight gain?

Studies have shown the following factors are associated with obesity in mid/late life -

- Family history of obesity
- Being married young
- Increasing numbers of children
- Low levels of physical activity
- Shift work, and sleep deprivation
- Skipping meals, poor dietary habits, snacking, take-away's, eating away from home
- Low self-esteem
- Psychological distress, anxiety and depression
- **Certain drugs such as antidepressants e.g. serotonin reuptake inhibitors (SSRI's)**



## Could HRT be beneficial for weight loss?

Find out in Part II of my blog coming soon...

*Daisy Mae x*



### Get in Touch

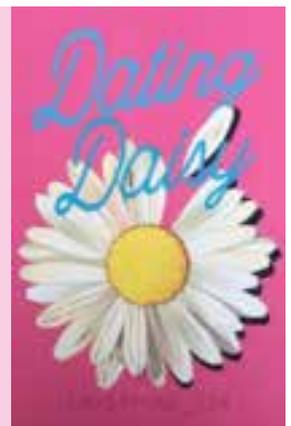
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