



# MENOPAUSE, HEART AND DIABETES

## Are women at greater risk of heart disease after menopause?

Estrogen protects the heart and blood vessels and women usually have a lower risk of heart attack than men before menopause. After menopause, this protective effect is lost and the risk of heart disease increases rapidly, especially if there are other risk factors like hypertension, overweight, diabetes, high cholesterol, sedentary lifestyle, smoking, etc. The risk of heart disease is actually greater in women than men by the sixth decade.

## Does the risk of diabetes and hypertension increase after menopause?

Due to a decrease in metabolic rate, many women tend to gain weight after menopause. More importantly, there is redistribution of body fat with increased fat around the abdomen, which is particularly unhealthy. This increases the risk of diabetes and associated conditions like insulin resistance, hypertension, and high cholesterol. In fact, hypertension is more common in women than men after 60 years age.

## Should postmenopausal women undergo regular screening for these problems?

All postmenopausal women should be routinely screened for overweight or obesity, high blood pressure, diabetes and cholesterol abnormalities. This can be done through a simple clinic visit where history, physical examination and routine blood tests are performed. The screening should be repeated every 3-5 years and more detailed assessment done in case of abnormal findings.

## How can a woman reduce her metabolic risk after menopause?

A healthy active lifestyle, maintenance of a healthy body weight, avoiding smoking and stress reduction strategies can be very helpful. Early detection and prompt treatment of problems such as obesity, hypertension, diabetes, high cholesterol is very important and should not be ignored as it can significantly reduce a woman's risk of heart disease.

## Does hormone replacement therapy affect heart health in women after menopause?

When used in the early years after menopause, HRT has some metabolic benefits but it cannot be prescribed for the prevention of these problems. It is used only for the treatment of troublesome menopausal symptoms and maintenance of bone health. Rather, in older women (above 60 years age or >10 years after menopause), HRT may actually increase the risk of blood clots and heart disease.

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