

Stronger than Sarcopenia



Sarcopenia and Menopause

Sarcopenia is a serious condition that causes the loss of muscle mass and strength with age. This may cause trouble with daily activities like standing from a chair, walking, twisting the lid off a jar, or carrying groceries. Over time, sarcopenia can lead to falls or other injuries, loss of independence, and even hospitalization. Chronic disease, poor nutrition, and lack of exercise can cause sarcopenia. Age-related changes are also common causes, including the hormonal changes that accompany menopause.

Starting as early as age 30, the body naturally starts to lose 3–5% of its muscle mass each decade, and this change begins to become noticeable around age sixty. The hormonal changes from menopause contribute to this natural decline but can also accelerate loss in people who have sarcopenia.

Sarcopenia and Hormonal Changes

Menopause is a significant event in the life of aging women. The hormone changes in the body's production of estrogen, progesterone, and testosterone affect muscle health and strength. Decreasing levels of these hormones affect how muscles use energy to perform daily activities, contribute to the increase of abdominal fat, and are associated with an increase in systemic inflammation and sarcopenia.

Screening During Annual Exams

Early recognition and treatment improve outcomes for those with sarcopenia. It is especially important for people who have diseases or conditions that could impact muscle health to be screened for sarcopenia. Screening patients to assess their physical function and activities of daily living should also be a routine part of health care visits for menopausal and post-menopausal women.

A common early screening tool used for research and clinical practice is the SARC-F. This screening tool is a questionnaire developed to assess ability when lifting objects, walking, rising from a chair, climbing stairs, and risk of experiencing falls.

Treatment and Management

A healthy lifestyle, including a well-balanced diet with key nutrients for muscle health, as well as physical activity, can help treat sarcopenia. It's also important to treat any underlying conditions or diseases, which may include hormone treatment during menopause.

Exercise for sarcopenia should focus on muscle health and include resistance and strength training. It is never too late to rebuild your strength. You can begin or restart physical activity at any time to help increase your muscle strength.

A well-balanced diet should include healthy proteins. Some people may need nutritional supplements to meet their dietary needs and to manage or prevent sarcopenia.

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