



EMPOWERING WOMEN THROUGH MENOPAUSE: A FITNESS PROFESSIONAL'S GUIDE

MISH WRIGHT

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Mish Wright is an unapologetic champion for women's health education, speaking to hearts worldwide. Her mission? To arm women with the knowledge they need to approach exercise with unshakeable confidence, regardless of age or stage.

Her online course on Training Menopausal and Peri-Menopausal Women has struck a chord, with Fitness Professionals from Australia, New Zealand, Asia, the UK, the USA and Canada making it a best-seller.

Mish created EVEolution™ an online program to help women navigate exercise, no matter what age or stage they are at. Mish doesn't shy away from issues women may face while exercising, including prolapse and pelvic floor weakness, periods, and perimenopause.

For over 12 years Mish has been writing, presenting, educating, and mentoring fitness professionals in business, women's health, and training older adults. Mish created the Women's Health and Fitness Summit (2014-2019) that brought together Fit Pro's and Allied Health professionals to start relationships and conversations that are still resonating today.

Mish currently writes online education for Central Queensland University, Fitness Education Online (Australia), EAT fitness (New Zealand), FITM (Malaysia) and Fit Asia (Singapore). She has also re-written all the instructor education for the COTA (Council On The Ageing) for their Living Longer Living Stronger program and the women's health education for Curves Australia and New Zealand.

In 2021, Mish was awarded the AUSactive (formerly Fitness Australia) Educator of the Year award.

WHEN'S THE RIGHT TIME TO BRING UP THE MENOPAUSE TOPIC WITH MY CLIENTS?

Bringing up the menopause conversation with your clients is all about finding the right balance. While age can be a factor, it's not the sole indicator. Start weaving menopause into your discussions when your clients are in their mid-30s to early 40s. This is when changes might begin, and it's good to prep them for what's ahead.

However, remember that everyone's journey is unique. Some might hit menopause earlier or later. Your clients might mention symptoms like irregular periods and mood fluctuations but not necessarily connect these symptoms to peri-menopause. These can be cues that your client is ready to dive into this topic.

Create an open and safe space for dialogue. Ask if they've noticed any shifts and encourage them to share concerns. By proactively addressing menopause, you show your commitment to their well-being, building a stronger trainer-client relationship.

Remember you don't need to have the answers - but creating a safe space for clients to share and encouraging them to document their symptoms will better enable them to seek answers from menopause specialists.

CAN A BLOOD TEST DETERMINE IF SOMEONE IS IN PERI-MENOPAUSE?

There is no blood test to ascertain if someone is in peri-menopause. Instead, a menopause specialist will ask about symptoms, like:

- Changes in the menstrual cycle – periods might become irregular or last shorter or longer than usual.
- Mood can change – peri-menopause may increase feelings of depression or anxiety.
- Hot flashes, which may also impact sleeping. Poor sleep, in turn, may affect fatigue levels and brain fog.
- Skin changes like acne or dryness can be due to these hormonal shifts. Hair might also change – thinning out or sprouting up in unexpected places.
- And that stubborn belly fat? Yep, that can become more noticeable, too. I will address that more below.

This is not an exhaustive list, so encourage your clients to jot down these changes. Or use an app like Wild.ai to help track changes.

HOW SHOULD I ADJUST MY CLIENTS' TRAINING ROUTINES TO ALIGN WITH THEIR BODIES' CHANGES DURING MENOPAUSE?

- Crafting training programs that sync with your clients' changing bodies during menopause requires a thoughtful approach.
- Embrace flexibility. Recognise that energy levels might fluctuate, so allow room for modifications on low-energy days.
- Incorporate strength training to counter muscle loss that can occur due to the loss of oestrogen.
- Focus on weight-bearing exercises to support bone health, addressing the increased risk of osteoporosis that affects women in the post-menopause phase.



- Cardio is still a friend but consider intervals to accommodate changing metabolism—Emphasise activities your clients love to keep them engaged.
- Listen closely. Communicate openly about comfort levels and any discomfort. High-impact exercises might need adjustment due to joint sensitivities.
- Recovery is non-negotiable. Oestrogen is an anti-inflammatory, so the reduction of oestrogen during peri-menopause time may make their DOMS more pronounced. Encourage ample rest and introduce practices like yoga or stretching to enhance flexibility.

Remember, every woman's journey is distinct. Individualise plans, be patient, and celebrate progress, even the small victories.



MANY WOMEN ARE CONCERNED ABOUT BELLY FAT AND WEIGHT GAIN DURING MENOPAUSE. WHAT GUIDANCE SHOULD I OFFER TO HELP THEM MANAGE THIS CHALLENGE?

Essentially, what used to work like a charm for weight management in younger years might not cut it during menopause. It's not just about cutting calories and ramping up cardio anymore. We're diving into a new playbook that's centred around holistic well-being.

When discussing belly fat and weight gain during menopause, shift the conversation. Acknowledge that traditional methods might not yield the same results. It's about more than just eating less; it's about nourishing smartly.

Begin with a foundation built on a wholesome diet. Prioritise nutrient-dense foods and hydration. But that's not all – sleep and stress management become pillars of your strategy.

Addressing sleep is crucial. Poor sleep can sabotage even the best efforts. Encourage a consistent sleep routine and the creation of a restful environment.

Stress, often overlooked, can take a toll on weight. Guide women toward stress reduction techniques like meditation, mindfulness, or engaging in activities that bring joy.

Highlight that this journey is unique and that focusing solely on a number on the scale isn't the answer. Empower women to embrace their bodies, nurture well-being, and set sustainable goals.

NAVIGATING HORMONE REPLACEMENT THERAPY (HRT) CONCERNS

Many women find relief from debilitating menopause symptoms when they start to use Menopause Hormone Treatment (MHT) or Hormone Replacement Therapy (HRT). While it's not in your scope of practice to promote or dismiss hormone therapy, you can encourage that seeking help is a sign of strength, not weakness.



But let's address the elephant in the room: the link between HRT and breast cancer. While sensationalised, this risk is nuanced. A single imperfect study in 2002 created a media storm by correlating the risk between breast cancer and HRT. Although it's essential to understand your risks in reality there is only a modest increase in risk, that needs to be contextualised. For example, there are far more significant cancer risks if your clients smoke or drink alcohol. If your client's menopause symptoms are stopping them from sleeping well, or giving them anxiety or affecting their mood – these are all foundations of good health.

Remember, their regular GP is probably uneducated about menopause, and they will need to seek out a doctor who has specialised and there are many options of hormone therapy that can be individualised for each woman.

Remember, you are the bridge between information and action, helping women confidently navigate this transformative phase.

From sparking the menopause conversation to tailoring training programs, from identifying peri-menopause signs to demystifying HRT concerns, you're now armed with nuanced knowledge to make a significant impact.

As you guide your clients, foster an environment of understanding and empowerment. Recognise that each woman's journey is unique – a symphony of challenges, triumphs, and changes. Embrace holistic well-being, advocate for self-care, and encourage open conversations.

Menopause does not have to be all doom and gloom – and the more you understand, the better you can support your clients.

TOP TIP TO PASS TO OUR EXERCISE PROFESSIONALS

From personal experience after all these years working with menopausal clients, these are my TOP tips that I can pass to you:

1. **Timing and Tact:** Initiate the menopause conversation with clients in their mid-30s to early 40s. Approach it with sensitivity, creating an open space for dialogue.
2. **Spotting Signs:** Educate clients on common peri-menopause symptoms – irregular periods, mood swings, hot flashes, skin changes, and energy fluctuations. Please encourage them to track changes for better insight.
3. **Personalised Programs:** Tailor training routines for menopausal clients by embracing flexibility, incorporating strength training to counter muscle loss, and integrating cardio with intervals. Prioritise recovery and adapt plans to individual needs.
4. **Holistic Weight Management:** Shift the focus from conventional methods to holistic well-being. Nutrient-dense diets, hydration, stress reduction, and quality sleep are essential components to manage weight and overall health.
5. **HRT Insight:** Offer a balanced perspective on Hormone Replacement Therapy (HRT). Highlight its potential benefits for managing menopause symptoms but stress the importance of individualised decisions, considering both benefits and risks.

Learn more about Mish Wright and her mission
www.mishwright.com



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