# Middle-aged women could lose nearly 6% of their muscle mass, according to new research

**Thursday 23 July, 2026**

New data published in the Journal of Cachexia, Sarcopenia and Muscle, claims that women lose 5.7% of their lean muscle mass after the menopause, and 2.5% (almost half) of that happens during the perimenopause, compared with premenopausal women. Around the menopause, women experience an accelerated phase of muscle and strength loss that has no equivalent in men of the same age.

Natalie Rouse, registered nutritionist and Head of Nutrition at women's wellness brand Free Soul, has revealed what women of all ages should be doing to combat this and to reduce muscle loss later in life.

Natalie notes that while men lose muscle with age too, they start life with more to lose. Women also have less testosterone than men, and testosterone is one of the main hormones that helps build and maintain muscle, so women lose at an increased rate to begin with.

Further research from The University of Southampton's Hertfordshire Cohort Study supports this, revealing that 7.9% of older women have sarcopenia, the clinical loss of muscle mass and strength severe enough to affect daily function, against 4.6% of men.

Another factor to consider, is that after the menopause, women's bodies respond less efficiently to both protein and resistance exercise than men's. Researchers call this anabolic resistance, and it is consistently shown in muscle protein synthesis studies of older men and women, including foundational work led by Smith and colleagues at the University of Texas.

On top of all of this, muscle loss also reduces basal metabolic rate, which is the energy the body uses at rest. That’s why so many women find themselves gaining fat or weight in midlife, even when they haven't changed anything about how they eat or how much exercise they get.

Natalie does emphasise though, that while muscle loss is commonly seen, it isn't inevitable. What we see in midlife is usually a combination of factors. While that does include lower hormone levels and natural age-related decline, it also includes a more sedentary lifestyle and poor diet quality. The hormones are largely outside our control, but the rest can be worked on.

According to Natalie, there are three main areas that matter for women at every age, but become especially important from the early forties onwards.

The first is strength training. If you’ve never lifted before, start with nailing the movements before adding any weights. Exercises like squats, push-ups, and lunges are great to start off with, but Natalie stresses that the focus should be on form as opposed to heavy lifting in the early days. Once the movements feel secure, add light weights and build up gradually as it gets easier. Natalie adds that two sessions a week should be enough to build muscle whilst avoiding injury.

The second is protein intake. Aim for around 25 to 30 grams at breakfast, at lunch, and at dinner. Eggs, Greek yoghurt, tofu, fish, lentils, beans and chicken are all excellent sources to build from. Options like protein powder can also be helpful, particularly at breakfast where most women still fall short. Not only can it be used in shakes or yoghurt, but you can use it as a partial substitute for flour in baking, and make things like protein pancakes or muffins. After the menopause, the quality of the protein matters as much as the quantity, and the body needs more of it to do the same job, so Natalie advises being generous with portions.

The third is recovery, an area Natalie says women often forget about or don’t see as important as everything else. However, recovery is where the muscle actually gets built, which makes it arguably the most vital area to get right. When you lift, you create small amounts of damage in the muscle fibres, and the repair and rebuild happens afterwards, mostly during deep sleep when growth hormone is released and protein synthesis is at its highest. Muscles also need around 48 to 72 hours between sessions on the same muscle group to recover properly, which is why two or three sessions a week works well.

Commenting on the findings, Natalie said,

“Women rarely jump to the conclusion that they have lost muscle, but instead, start to experience an array of different symptoms. Their recovery becomes slower, their energy is flat, their body composition

## Media:



## Related Sectors:

Health :: Lifestyle & Relationships :: Medical & Pharmaceutical :: Women & Beauty ::

## Related Keywords:

Menopause Muscle Loss :: Muscle Loss After Menopause :: Perimenopause Muscle Loss :: Sarcopenia In Women :: Menopause And Strength Training ::

## Scan Me:

has changed, and they don’t really know why or how to change it.

“Oestrogen plays a huge role when it comes to muscle, which most women don’t realise. It supports the building of new muscle, slows the natural breakdown of muscle, keeps systemic inflammation low, and it also supports mitochondrial function inside the muscle cell, which is how the muscle actually works. So when oestrogen falls, all of those protective effects weaken at once, which is one of the reasons why we see such a decline of muscle mass during the menopause.

“I know the numbers seem scary, and they are, but the quicker women start building strength training and higher protein intake into their lives, the better chance they have to prevent the loss the data describes. For women who start in their forties, this kind of consistency can prevent most of the loss before it happens. For women starting later, it can rebuild a meaningful amount of what is already gone."

## Company Contact:

**Free Soul**

E. erin@oxfordcomma.digital
W. https://freesoul.com/

View Online

**Additional Assets:**

**Newsroom:** Visit our Newsroom for all the latest stories:
**https://www.freesoul.pressat.co.uk**