

- Menopause / Women—diseases

Women in 40s must watch their weight to deal with menopause-related body fat, say experts

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All women, who are in the 40s, should be counselled about the added risk of menopause-related weight gain and body fat redistribution. This has been recommended by a group of experts from all over the country in a first-of-its-kind standard operating procedure issued for management of obesity and overweight in midlife women.

The guidelines, which have been published in journal *Diabetes and Metabolic Syndrome: Clinical Research & Reviews*, are significant because firstly, these have been developed under a project funded by the department of science and technology and second, because plans are to disseminate these to all healthcare providers so that urgent action can be taken to tackle the crisis of obesity and overweight in midlife women or those aged between 40 and 55 years.

According to the researchers, obesity in midlife women is a clinical and public health challenge. “Midlife women experience several biological and hormonal changes that lead to weight gain, especially in the abdominal region. Further, this menopausal transition affects lifestyle-related behaviour such as eating, physical activity and sleep practices in a way that promotes weight gain. These women find it difficult to manage corrective eating and physical activity behaviour in their day-to-day life,” the researchers have said.

Dr Naval K Vikram, the corresponding author of the guidelines, who is a professor in the department of medicine at AIIMS, told TOI that obesity and overweight in middle-life women increase the risk of several

other illnesses, for example diabetes, hypertension, fatty liver and heart diseases. “Our aim is to increase the awareness and underscore the importance of timely identification, evaluation and management of the problem to prevent other illnesses,” he said.

Generally, midlife women with weight-related health issues are given generic lifestyle counselling at healthcare settings, like “eat healthy foods” and “exercise regularly”. The researchers say even highly motivated midlife women find it challenging to maintain corrective lifestyle-related behaviours when they encounter midlife-specific barriers and have poor weight loss outcomes in the long term.

“The new recommendations mention protocols for the management of overweight and obesity in midlife women across different healthcare settings. These call for intensive customised weight management counselling for women in the early 40s, when they are experiencing menopausal transition,” Dr Piyush Ranjan from AIIMS said.

According to the guidelines, emphasis should be on corrective lifestyle behaviours and handling health issues specific to menopausal transition like menopausal symptoms, sleep disturbances, psychological distress, bone and joint health and other comorbidities.