Coach Leanne Fernandes
WOMEN'S HEALTH & WELLNESS COACH

Personal Trainer
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Losing Weight in Your 40's and 50's

Are you in your 40's or 50's and noticing that your clothes are fitting a bit more snug than they used to? Have you been told that your metabolism slows down after 50?

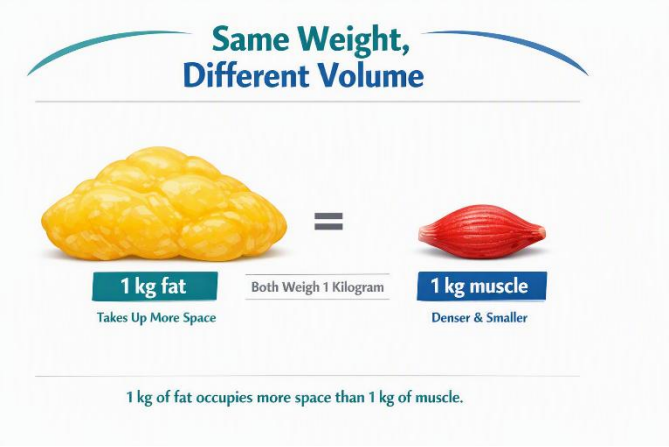
As much as we would like the blame to be that easy, there is a bigger picture at play.

Reality is, the "metabolism slows after 50" idea is a bit of an oversimplification. For many people, weight gain in midlife is more likely driven by changes in **muscle mass, daily activity, sleep, stress, food intake, and alcohol**, rather than a dramatic metabolic crash.

There is scientific evidence that metabolism **does** decline with age, but the strongest evidence suggests the major drop is **later in life**, after 60, and midlife weight gain is not mainly explained by a big metabolic slowdown.

Why is it so hard to lose weight?

We start to lose muscle mass in our 30s (1), but the biggest change doesn't happen until after the age of 50 (2) when we start to lose muscle mass at a rate of 1 to 2% per year (3). This reduction in muscle mass comes with an increase in fat mass, which explains why you might not actually put on weight. To further explain how this works, 1kg of fat takes up a lot space than 1kg of muscle.



But while the number on the scales may not change, your waistline can, with fat more likely to go straight to your waistline. It's this 'deep' fat (stored further under the skin than subcutaneous 'belly' fat) that's more closely associated with an increased risk of cardiovascular disease or diabetes. Over time, these changes can make weight loss harder.

Changes in hormone levels and lower muscle mass can reduce the amount of energy you use at rest, also known as your basal metabolic rate.

On top of this, as we get older, we tend to become more sedentary. Moving less means we burn less energy each day, but unfortunately we don't reduce the amount we eat to match the fewer kilojoules we burn. Over time, this imbalance not only makes weight loss harder, it can lead to unwanted weight gain.

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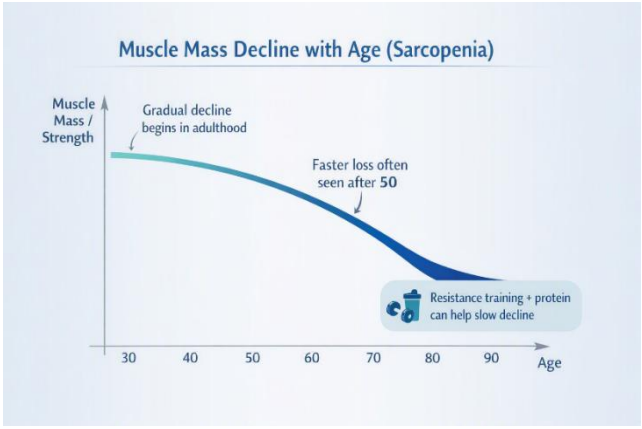
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Tips for losing weight after 50

Eat more protein



Ageing muscles become less receptive to protein, but you can counteract these age-related changes by boosting your daily protein and making sure each meal contains 20 to 30g of high-quality protein (proteins that contain all the essential amino acids the body doesn't manufacture itself). These essential amino acids do things like repair body tissue and break down food.

For example, you'll find 30g of protein in 110g of cooked red meat. This amount of protein will provide enough essential amino acids to help you maintain, and over time, increase muscle protein(4).

Non-meat eaters can get protein through foods like dairy, eggs, nuts, wheat, lentils, sunflower and sesame seeds, tofu, soy protein, spinach, turnip greens, broccoli, snow peas, kidney beans and watercress.



Do resistance training

If your exercise regimen doesn't include resistance training, it's time to start. As we lose muscle mass as we get older, doing weights becomes important to counter this muscle loss. Resistance training is the best way to increase and maintain muscle function (5). Ways to do this include free weights, weight machines, resistance bands and your body weight.

For the best results, train two to three times a week and make sure your program is designed to challenge you. That means increasing the resistance when it stops becoming hard. Known as progressive resistance training, increasing your exercise load will help you improve muscle mass as you age.

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Move more

The recommendations (6) for adults aged 18-64 years of age are:

- **Aerobic activity:** At least **150–300 minutes of moderate-intensity** or **75–150 minutes of vigorous-intensity** activity per week.
- **Muscle-strengthening:** Activities on **2 or more days per week**.
- **Functional activities:** Targeting mobility, balance, and coordination on **3 or more days per week**.
- **Light-intensity activity:** Several hours daily.
- **Sedentary behaviour:** Minimise prolonged sitting and break up long periods of inactivity.
- **Sleep:** 7–9 hours of good-quality sleep per night with consistent bed and wake times

This may sound like a lot of movement but some activities count for more than one recommendation, ie. Walking lunges can count for muscle strengthening and functional activity and depending on the intensity will also tick off either aerobic or light intensity activity.



Few of us realise the Australian exercise guidelines also say to sit less, because sitting for long periods of time (7) is associated with increased health risks like developing type 2 diabetes. Reduce the amount of time you spend being sedentary and break up long periods of sitting by finding opportunities to move about whenever you can.

References:

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