

# great shape



## Fat-Proof Your Life

Heard you're destined to gain at certain life stages (marriage, motherhood, meno)? Don't believe it. *By Maridel Reyes*

**IT'S TRUE THAT THERE ARE** certain times in your life (after getting married, post-kids, during perimenopause) when extra poundage seems to appear out of nowhere ... and settle on you. In fact, experts have honed in on the exact moments when you're most vulnerable to weight gain. "Life transitions, having a baby, and going through menopause cause

many women to pile on pounds," says Susan Albers, PsyD, author of *But I Deserve This Chocolate!: The 50 Most Common Diet-Derailing Excuses and How to Outwit Them*. "But with planning and prep, you *can* stay thin." We asked top experts for their strategies to help you ward off weight creep—and even shed pounds—at these tricky stages. Solutions ahead.



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**GETTING MARRIED**

Heavier ever after? It can be the flip side of wedded bliss: “Six out of 10 of my clients come back heavier after the honeymoon,” says celebrity fitness and wellness guru David Kirsch. Young newlyweds pack on an extra 6 to 9 pounds in the five years after getting hitched compared to singletons, according to research from the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill. And most of that gain happens in the first year of marriage. “Couples start to mirror each other’s eating habits,” explains Albers. “You might be matching him calorie for calorie without realizing it.”

**Newly wed? You might be matching him calorie for calorie.**

Keep the pounds down with some strategic single-girl thinking. **Be a portion teller.** Women tend to eat more when dining with their mate, says Albers. Back when you were only eating together a few times a week, that was no biggie, but once you have a dozen meals a week or more together, those extra calories add up. As a



general rule, have a serving each of carbs (fist-size), protein (palm-size), and healthy fat (around a tablespoon), and fill the rest of your plate with any non-starchy veggie, like broccoli, cauliflower, or green beans, says celebrity dietitian Ashley Koff, RD, co-author of *Mom Energy*. Yes, his hands are bigger—so he gets more.

**End dinner drama.** Just because he’s a steak-and-fries kind of guy doesn’t mean you have to give up your favorite healthy meals. “Alternate days to choose dinner,” says Dawn Jackson Blatner, RD, author of *The Flexitarian Diet*. “If you want sushi on your night, he can go along with it or fend for himself.”

**Leave the love nest.** Gym classes. Social obligations. Couple time. Once you’re hitched, it may feel like something

has to give. To make sure it isn’t your gym time, work out with your girlfriends, suggests Koff.

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**THE HOLIDAYS**

One extra pound—that’s how much the average person gains between fall and winter, according to a study in *The New England Journal of Medicine*. That may not sound like much, but most never shed those holiday pounds, and they add up year after year, notes Albers. Here, some keys to not getting ho-ho-hefty:

**Sweat more.** Kirsch has clients up the workout ante a few months before Halloween. “I bump up the intensity,” he says, with fat blasters like rope jumping and squat thrusts.

**Don’t doggie bag it.** Indulging on Thanksgiving, Christmas, and New Year’s Eve won’t

wreck your waistline, says Blatner. It’s all that grazing on leftovers for weeks that’ll do you in. Save treats for events: “Make it special and make it social,” she says. **Ditch the wine goblet.** “It’s not so much the calories from booze that are the problem,” says Blatner. “It’s that alcohol kills willpower.” You can still enjoy some dips into the bubbly; just stop at one a day.

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**HAVING A BABY**

Here’s a hefty fact: A married woman who has a baby gains an average of nearly 20 pounds over 10 years, found a study in the *American Journal of Preventive Medicine*. And women face an average of 7 percent increased risk of obesity over a lifetime per child born, according to research from Duke

Photo: Kristiane Vey/jumpfoto.com



University Medical Center. That means after three kids, you have a (yikes) 21 percent increased risk of developing obesity. Hormonal changes don't help: "Pregnancy increases insulin production and the accumulation of fat," says Lori Bastian, MD, associate professor of medicine at Duke University. Beat those stats with these rules.

**Eat, already.** "I was working with Josie Maran, and she told me her child was eating better than she was," says Koff. "Josie was forgetting to fuel herself. You need to eat every three hours." Otherwise, you're likely to get worn out or famished and binge.

**Eat your own food!** No grazing off your kids' plates, says Blatner. "Put the baby in a bouncy seat and grab a quick bite." Stock healthy foods with low prep time, like canned tuna and frozen veggies. **Keep burning.** Breast-feeding can burn an extra 300 calories per day—but that translates to just an extra half pound per week. You still need to exercise regularly and eat right to get your body back.

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**PERIMENOPAUSE/  
MENOPAUSE**

Welcome to arguably the toughest "fat patch" of all. We're due for an average gain of 12 pounds within eight years after menopause, researchers at

**If you eat every three hours, you won't end up bingeing.**

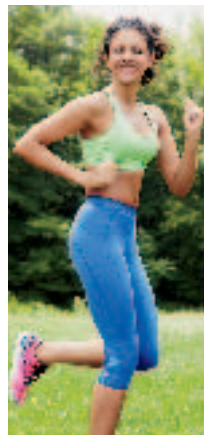
the University of Pittsburgh have shown. And fat burning plunges by 32 percent in post-menopausal women, possibly due to a drop in estrogen, reports a study in the *International Journal of Obesity*. "You burn on average around 150 to 250 calories fewer per day," says lead study author Jennifer Lovejoy, PhD. Fight back with these expert fixes.

**Cut cal.** To ward off the pounds, you may need to slash about 200 calories a day now. Make sure you're getting enough lean protein and fiber to keep full, but stick to a low-fat plan, since your body isn't as efficient at burning fat as it once was, Lovejoy says.

**Sleep on it.** Stress hormones like cortisol can creep up now thanks to hot flashes and other discomforts, making you crave sugary foods, which your body then turns into belly fat. The best way to metabolize stress hormones and reverse this trend: Get enough zzz's, says Christiane Northrup, MD, author of *Women's Bodies, Women's Wisdom*.

**Sculpt muscles.** Don't want to eat less? Lift more. Since muscle mass diminishes with age, if you don't do anything to replace it, your body will shift to more fat and less muscle—which slows down your metabolism even more, says Dr. Northrup. Aim for two 40-minute sessions of weight training a week to keep muscle and bones at pre-meno level. Other days, try for 30 minutes of cardio, like dancing or the elliptical. That simple formula—strength plus cardio—really can keep mid-life gain away. 🏋️

**The Best Workout for Every Age**



**In your 30s** Maybe you used to stay slim doing sporadic workouts, but now it's time to establish a regular routine to fend off loss of bone density and flexibility.

**In your 40s** Ramp up cardio to tackle

the creep of belly fat that starts this decade.

**In your 50s and beyond** It's important to add strength training to your cardio routine to fight the dreaded "flat butt" and keep muscles firm.

Want an exact workout plan? Go to [Health.com/fit-at-any-age](http://Health.com/fit-at-any-age).

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