

A Rationale for Implementing a Nutrition Education Program for Women in Menopause.

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An estimated 60% of Americans have at least one lifestyle-related chronic disease (cardiovascular disease (CVD), some cancers, diabetes, obesity, and hypertension), as defined by the US Department of Health and Human Services (CDC, 2024). That is 129 million people, enough to fill over 2.5 million yoga studios. Many of these diseases disproportionately affect postmenopausal women. For example, before age 50, men have a higher prevalence of hypertension than women (37.2% compared with 29.4%, respectively), but by age 60, women surpass men (66.8% in women compared to 58.5% in men) (CDC, 2017). Due in part to estrogen losses, menopause is associated with an increased prevalence of obesity, metabolic syndrome, cardiovascular diseases, hypertension, dementia, depression/anxiety, and osteoporosis (Erdélyi et al., 2023). The overall health and well-being of postmenopausal women have become a major national public health concern, with CVD alone accounting for 45% of older women's deaths and costing \$120 billion annually, pointing to a dire need for proper nutrition and lifestyle guidance to enhance their health status (Erdélyi et al., 2023).

In Dupage County, IL, CVD is the leading cause of death (IDPH, 2022). Many of the yoga students at CorePower Yoga (CPY) are approaching menopause and facing its related symptoms and health setbacks, like rising blood glucose, high cholesterol, depression/anxiety, and high blood pressure, despite having a regular yoga practice. According to our surveys, CPY students are eager to achieve their health goals holistically. Studies align with our findings; yoga practitioners ages 45–64 are likelier to practice yoga to restore overall health (Rao et al., 2023). Having already adopted a yoga practice, 80% of those we surveyed felt confident they could adhere to other health-promoting habits if they "knew" them to be healthy. However, they expressed a need for trusted nutrition information and sound strategies for overcoming barriers to eating healthy, like knowledge, cost, motivation, cravings, and time.

The global problem of rising postmenopausal chronic disease risk is mirrored in the Dupage County yoga community. Of the CPY students and teachers we surveyed, all felt they were at high risk for more than one chronic health condition, including high blood pressure, obesity, depression, diabetes, arthritis, and dementia. An active lifestyle and a healthy, well-

balanced diet significantly reduce a woman's risk of these life-threatening conditions (Erdélyi et al., 2023). Although staying active, the women we surveyed reported eating less than the RDAs for whole grains, fruit, and vegetables and attributed over 50% of their diet to high-processed foods. Furthermore, few could correctly identify a Mediterranean diet, and many experiment with fad diets that exclude essential food disease nutrients (Tahreem et al., 2022). This problem, a lack of nutrition knowledge and adherence to essential RDAs, could be effectively addressed by providing nutrition education for menopausal women in the Dupage County yoga community.

The combined effect of yoga and a healthy diet could be the key to holistically relieving menopausal symptoms and health risks in women. Recent studies found that a short six-month diet and yoga regimen led to significant drops in blood pressure, fasting glucose, cholesterol, and triglycerides among females ages 40-59 (Rao et al., 2023; Saboo et al., 2024). A missed opportunity exists to bring these two health-enhancing, menopause-combatting strategies together.

Pause Well provides a solution by addressing the unique nutritional needs of women approaching midlife within a yoga studio setting to keep women thriving on and off their mats. The program is open to all peri- and postmenopausal women, both healthy and with existing chronic conditions. It offers a holistic, comprehensive, sequential series of four group classes in nutrition education and practical lifestyle change strategies. Pause Well focuses on transitioning women to an anti-inflammatory whole food diet that includes protective nutrients for menopause, such as omega 3, vitamins D and B, calcium, fiber, and protein (Erdélyi et al., 2023). The series will be presented in the yoga studio and requires minimal reimbursement for equipment: giant sticky notes, handouts, and vision board materials. The body-positive lessons will include short lectures with accompanying take-home handouts, interactive science-based proven motivational and adherence activities, individualized guidance and goal setting, and guided meditations to create strong intention and help participants embrace their transforming bodies and nutritional needs. The 90-minute lessons are designed to be given once per month for four months, giving participants plenty of time to begin implementing new health habits and receive follow-up

support. Participants will be assigned a "PW buddy" for support between lessons as they gradually implement dietary changes. During and after the program, participants will have access to a private Facebook page to ask the program leaders questions and receive peer support. The page will also feature recipes and cooking demos.

How does offering a program for menopausal health benefit the yoga studio? In addition to improved class attendance due to better health among clients, the program could be promoted in local healthcare clinics, raising the yoga studio's visibility and increasing membership. Approximately 1/4 of the US population are menopausal women, and 85% of those women report seeing healthcare providers for adverse symptoms and conditions associated with decreases in estrogen (Ernst & Posadzki, 2020). That translates to almost 92,500 women in Dupage County. If even 10% of those women receive a flyer about our program from their healthcare provider, that would be 925 prospective new yoga studio members.

Pause Well will be successful because it utilizes evidence-based diet and behavior interventions that are shown to improve women's healthy eating knowledge, attitudes, self-efficacy, self-regulation, and eating habits (Rathnayake et al., 2019). Interventions that include social support and a spiritual aspect, such as yoga, only enhance these outcomes (Saboo et al., 2024). Moreover, yoga students will respond to its spiritual aspects and holistic approach. Program leaders will evaluate attendance, perceived effectiveness, and program satisfaction using participant Likert rating scale surveys and report all outcomes to studio managers and healthcare providers.

Quality midlife nutrition education is not just necessary but empowering. The Pause Well program will help women reclaim control of their bodies, achieve their fitness goals, and reduce the prevalence of long-term disease risk among women while growing a vibrant yoga community.

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