



Q&A with Elite Cyclist Susan Lynch: How to Exercise, Eat and Sleep During Menopause



Contributor: [Susan Lynch](#)

Susan Lynch is a three-time USA Cycling Cross Country champion and has finished first in her age group three times in the "Leadville 100," a grueling 100-mile mountain biking race throu...

This article is part of a series on the extraordinary women who make up [Team Brigham Health](#), a four person team of age 60+ women who completed the [Race Across America](#) on June 25, 2017. Header Image Photo Credit: Race Across America.

What is your athletic background?

[Susan Lynch](#): I've competed in triathlons, duathlons and many cycling events. I've been the *USA Cycling Cross Country Mountain Bike* champion three times. I've finished first in

my age group three times in the *Leadville 100*. I've competed in the *Vermont 50* and won in my age group eleven times. I also teach spinning and mountain biking classes.



Susan Lynch, a three-time USA Cycling Cross Country champion.

How were you affected by menopause?

I had horrible menopause symptoms for 20 years. I used to have two dozen hot flashes a day. It was awful. They would happen during bike rides and while competing. I also had terrible night sweats. I used to wake up in a puddle of water and would have to change my clothes in the middle of the night. My training was constantly derailed by sleep deprivation. It helped to go to bed earlier. I still go to bed around 9:30 PM and wake up around 5:00 AM. That's just my clock.

Were you able to reduce the number of hot flashes?

During a hot flash, I envision myself standing under a cold waterfall. It actually lowers my body temperature. It helped me eliminate hot flashes in the daytime. I tried supplements, such as black cohosh and bee pollen, but they didn't work for me.

“ During a hot flash, I envision myself standing under a cold waterfall. It helped me eliminate hot flashes in the daytime. ”

Did you try hormone replacement therapy?

Doctors recommended hormone replacement therapy, but I decided against it. I followed the advice of my mother-in-law who advised me to let my body change naturally.

“Menopause happens to every woman,” she told me. “Just get through it.” She was in great shape until she passed away recently. She lived to be 90-years-old. She was my idol, so I took her advice.

How did you handle nutrition during menopause?

My philosophy with nutrition is based on common sense. I eat a lot of fruits, vegetables and beans. I try to get enough fiber. I don't always eat healthy, of course. I might have a bag of Oreos sometimes, but I try to do the little things right, such as eating whole-wheat bread instead of white bread and avoiding processed foods.

“ My rule is to never gain more than five pounds. If I gain five pounds, I lose it. ”

How did you maintain your weight through menopause?

After 20 years of menopause, my weight hasn't changed. My rule is to never gain more than five pounds. If I gain five pounds, I lose it. Also, every five years, I set a goal to weigh the same as I did in the previous five years. I've stuck to this since my first child was born. So far it's worked! I still weigh the same as I did when I was 30, and I plan to weigh the same at 60. I also don't drink alcohol. I've seen people drink more alcohol during menopause and it's led to weight gain.





Susan took up cycling after doctors told she couldn't run because of knee osteoarthritis.

How did exercise help you manage menopausal symptoms?

Maintaining an exercise regime is vital. I take Pilates and hot yoga classes. I lift weights at the gym. I jog and ride my bike constantly. I also teach spinning and mountain biking classes. Sometimes when I walk my dog I carry hand weights and do arm exercises. If I

don't have weights, I might pick up rocks to work my biceps. If my dog stops to smell something, I might do five push-ups.

How do you find the time to exercise?

I jogged during lunch when I was working full-time. If nothing else, I recommend people walk around lunchtime. I also take advantage of downtime. For example, I might balance on one leg as I'm brushing my teeth. While I'm waiting for water to boil as I cook, I might do push-ups against the counter, or do dips on a chair to strengthen my triceps.

“ I wish someone had told me when I was 25-years-old that most problems work themselves out. Many things I've worried about have turned out to be insignificant. ”

How did you manage stress during menopause?

Yoga has been incredible for lowering stress. My favorite type of yoga is hot vinyassa flow, which is a huge stress-reliever. There's also a calmer form of yoga called restorative yoga that provides blankets and props and encourages deep breathing and relaxation. Going to the gym has always been a stress-reliever, not just because of the workouts, but because it's also a social outlet. Many of my friends take the same exercise classes. Many are mothers, so we talk about family and other things we have in common. During especially stressful periods in my life, I used a trick where I would have conversations with myself during a ride or run. Instead of listening to music, I would talk to myself and examine issues that were bothering me. I'd think about various scenarios and practice conversations.

What's the most important lesson you've learned over the years?

I wish someone had told me when I was 25-years-old that most problems work themselves out. Many things I've worried about have turned out to be insignificant. Over the years, I've gotten better at rolling with the punches. Before my mother-in-law passed away, I spent time with her in the hospital. We talked about life and death. She said, "Don't worry so much. Things have a way of just working out. There are bumps in life, but you'll drive yourself crazy if you're always worried about little things." So, that's my biggest lesson: Things work out if you let things flow. You will be so much happier.

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