



*This article is anecdotal in nature. If you are having any symptoms that concern you contact your physician.

***NO NEED TO 'PAUSE' DURING MENOPAUSE!
Menopause Divas just keep on Tri-ing!***

By: Sara Gilman, M.S., GOTRIBal member

My 50th birthday was fast approaching; 4 months to go and somehow I got this urge to do something different, anything, a new challenge. Why this urge? Perhaps to counter the underlying fear that I could not slow down this aging clock and “50” sounded like I better get moving or I might just stop altogether. Was I facing a mid-life crisis? Or was this more like a mid-life wake up call. Then, someone suggested I do a triathlon. This challenged some underlying belief I had about what women in their later years were able to do. I didn’t have any generational models so I didn’t know what was possible. Didn’t women in their 50’s get to slow down?

While pondering, “*you should do a Triathlon*” I thought, well, I cycle frequently, I ***use to*** know how to swim, and I ***use to*** run in my 20’s & 30’s. (When you are 50+ the “*use to’s*” really add up!) So, I embarked on a training program that was emailed to me each week. Very quickly I found out I had to work out twice a day. You ask why? Because, I had signed up for a half ironman, 70.3. OOPS...You mean I should have started with a Sprint distance? Too late, I’m registered!

Race day arrived. Throughout the race I looked at the ages marked on calves and was amazed at the ranges. My calf read ‘50’ and that was “up there” but there were others with calf’s that read 55, 60 and 73! Coming across the finish line after over 7 hours was an extraordinary and unforgettable feeling. It set off thoughts of “If I can do this at 50, what else might I be able to do while the aging clock is ticking?”

That was 4 years ago, at the beginning of my menopausal spectrum. At the time I wondered why I could train so much, eat so well, and not lose a pound. Or why I would heat up during a light jog and feel like I was going to throw up. Later I would understand why; I was in peri-menopause. Since then I have met many women moving through this phase while maintaining excellent physical, emotional, and mental well being. In this article I will share some highlights from other “older girls” that might help you in your journey called aging. Knowledge can be a powerful tool to help you stay healthy, reduce symptoms, and move through this ‘transition’ fully equipped and smiling.



Menopause is a normal & natural state of change

For women over 50, their body's energetic form is changing naturally. It is considered a stage of achieving wisdom, called the "Wisdom Holder." At this stage the body has less 'fire' and wants to be more sedentary. Dr. Wolford, a Naturopathic Physician in Encinitas and an accomplished athlete herself, recommends that we first acknowledge, accept, and respect where we are. This actually generates a more vital life force energy and a more efficient mind/body/spirit balance. When we resist the natural changes, put ourselves down for not being/performing where we **use to**, get upset that we may be slower or need more rest, or that we hold on to extra pounds, we set up an energy drain and become less efficient and more unhappy. This results in a vicious cycle in which it becomes even harder to accomplish what we want.

Dr. Wolford says, *"You can still challenge yourself athletically while holding the space for reflection and wisdom. Honor both sides of you and know that naturally your body needs more rest, cleaner nutrients, more water, herbs for hormone balancing (and I don't just mean your ovaries- I'm talking all your hormones!) and praise yourself for being in such an exalted place in your life. A place where you can really make a unique difference to those around you!"*

Menopause...A matter of the heart! GET MOVING AND KEEP MOVING!

In Dr. Christine Northrup's book "The Wisdom of Menopause," (2006) she reminds us of some facts;

- Heart disease actually begins in childhood but often doesn't manifest until around menopause.
- Heart disease (hypertension and stroke) is the most frequent cause of death in women over the *age of fifty*.
- Heart attack, though usually occurring later in life, is twice as deadly for women as in men.
- One in two women will eventually die of coronary artery disease or stroke.
- One woman in 25 will die of breast cancer.

We know that heart palpitations at menopause are related to changing hormones. Dr. Northrup says, "midlife brings on increasing sensitivity to those things that do not serve us." So when you are less tolerant of others, feel more emotional over movies or the news, react differently to caffeine, refined carbohydrates or alcohol, this is all a part of your heart giving you a wake up call that this is a time of change and we must listen or we will increase our suffering. While she strongly encourages



consistent exercise (5-6 days per week), she also warns us about over training and not listening to our bodies. Over training in midlife can actually deplete our adrenal functioning and break down our immune system, making us more susceptible to fatigue, illness, and slower to recover.

***Pay attention to more than your training schedule!
Symptoms to watch for include:***

- changes in frequency and flow of menstrual periods
- hot flashes and night sweats,
- emotional sensitivity and irritability,
- cognitive confusion or foginess,
- heart palpitations and headaches,
- breast tenderness,
- low libido and vaginal dryness,
- skin dryness,
- frequent urination,
- insomnia,
- bone loss, and
- appetite changes.

Now doesn't all that sound fun! Symptoms are just the body's way of signaling us that there is an imbalance and change is going on. When you look at these symptoms you can see that any or all of them will influence your hydration, metabolism and recovery.

You may see an impact on training before you realize you may be in menopause. Your training may be impacted by;

- dehydration,
- slower reaction times,
- slower recovery times,
- muscle cramps when you never got them before,
- inner frustration or putting yourself down when you can't do something like you could in the past or like someone else you are training with, (Note: they are probably A LOT younger than you are!)
- decreased motivation, and
- fatigue after a workout rather than improved energy. Your endorphins are not giving you a lift.



Since I was new to the sport at age 50, I looked around for other like-minded 'older' girls! The 50+ transition racks were not packed but there were plenty of fun women who were inspiring. I began to learn that well into our 50's new heights could be reached. Several women in particular stand out that represent what is possible at a competitive and a personal level.

KIM ROUSE (56) – article on [Kim R. here.](#)

In 2011, Kim took 3rd place in the World Ironman Championships (140.6 mile triathlon) and 1st woman in her age-group at the Ultraman World Championships (6.2 m swim, 261.4 m bike, 52.4 m run).

Kim reported finding herself not recovering from workouts well, suffering from hot flashes and insomnia. Changing up her training and hormone replacement helped her negotiate these changes in the midst of endurance training.

TAMMY TABEEK (51) – GOTRIBal member

IN 2011 Tammy took 1st place age group (50-54) Xterra Worlds in Maui. Tammy beat Beverly Enslo, 4 time world champ. Tammy was also the 2 time world champ in down hill Masters & Cross Country Nationals. She raced down hill until she was 44.

Her first indication that something was changing was that she wasn't recovering from tougher workouts like she use to and had to allow more recovery time in between. Her frustrations grew when training with the "20 & 30 something's" because she just couldn't seem to maintain the speeds they did. When working out with her age group she was reassured that she was doing fine! Tammy says that being an older athlete has its advantages. *"Due to my experience I am able to recognize what is a BIG deal and what isn't. I'm able to be more relaxed. I know I don't have to prove anything to anyone now, just to myself! This gives me freedom to follow my dreams and be around others who want to share in that."*

BOBBI SOLOMON (53) – GOTRIBal member

Bobbi started her triathlon journey at age 50. For health reasons she decided to train for a triathlon. She had significant weight to lose and a desire to lead a healthier life. She began to workout 6 days a week for nearly two years, then started to get really tired and irritable. She said, *"I didn't know whether I was already burning out as a triathlete or if there was something physically wrong with me."* She attended a triathlon workshop sponsored by GoTribal where she heard a doctor talk about hormone imbalances. She recognized all the symptoms. With great relief, she began a bio-identical hormone replacement regimen. *"The first thing I noticed was I could finally sleep. I wasn't as angry and irritable and the hot flashes started to*



subside. This allowed me a greater ability to pay attention to making sure my nutrition and training were correct for racing.” Bobbi has completed many races and decided to help others by becoming certified as a USAT Level I Coach at the age of 53. Bobbi’s desire to give back and share her knowledge is consistent with the natural unfolding of this stage in life. As older adults we find purpose and joy in our lives by sharing our experience and knowledge with others. This brings deeper meaning to our everyday life.

Karen Martin (65) A runner most of her life, at 65, Karen just completed the Carlsbad half marathon. She tells us to *“Just keep training. Pick something you like and stick to it. Cross training will help balance things out. When it comes to races, pick one you can finish! Crossing the finish line will be the best medicine ever!”*

Tips to train smarter not harder from the “Wisdom Holders”

- **Stretch** more and stretch gently before, during, and after workouts. Aging brings on less flexibility so STRETCH! More yoga, fewer hill repeats?
- If hot flashes or insomnia have kept you up at night, adjust your training or add “power naps!”
- **Give more time** in between heavy workouts to recover adequately. This can prevent injuries and burnout. Pay attention to how much rest your body needs in between longer workouts and at night.
- **Warm up!** Tammy’s secret is to use warming creams on her leg muscles!
- **When hot flashes have got you too hot...Sara’s solution = SWIM!** The beauty of triathlons is the cross training. When your symptoms are taking their toll you can switch to another type of work out that may suit you better at the moment.
- **Set reasonable goals:** Bobbi’s example; *“I am trying to do my best and better my time for each repeated race. This **proves to me and others that you get better with age not worse!**”*
- **Eat clean** – healthy proteins, veggies, reduce or eliminate sugar, caffeine, alcohol especially during peak training periods and pre-race. Respect that your body is simply more sensitive to changes/imbbalances at this stage.
- **Consider supplements** to support your efforts. Kim Rouse found recovery drinks helpful. Sara uses glutamine for recovery purposes.
- **Find support!** – Connect with others! Join a triathlon group to more easily grow and learn. Women are excellent ‘connectors’ and enjoy sharing their stories. There is a wealth of information when we get together!
- **Bring inspiration, encouragement & support to others** – Giving back is a natural desire later in life. Tammy reminds us that we can lead by example when we are around others of any age.



- **Maintain a positive perspective** - Train with a variety of ages. Watch your internal self-talk. If you are putting yourself down when measuring yourself against others, either go train with people your own age and remind yourself what age you really are, or go hang out with friends who don't exercise. Need I say more? Give yourself credit for where you are and what YOU are accomplishing!

Tammy Tabeek says, *"Whether you're a recreational or competitive athlete, doing a sport will enable you to grow on many levels and without a doubt you will change. It will empower you as an individual beyond your wildest dreams!!! Focus on your dreams not your age!"*

Listen to the "Wisdom Holders." Keep smiling and exercising through your 50's and beyond!

From my heart to yours,
Sara

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