

MARGUERITE KEEL

THE MIDLIFE MUSCLE GUIDE

*What Women 35+ Need to Know to Stop Guessing
About Body Recomposition*

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Introduction

I'm 50 years old.

I've trained for decades. I've coached women in various forms of fitness for over twenty years. And I've watched something happen again and again.

Women reach their mid-30s and 40s... and the old strategies stop working, so they try to double down.

- They do more cardio (fast to learn/do, safe, and feels like work)
- They eat less
- They criticize themselves more

And their body still doesn't respond. It's frustrating. It's confusing. And it can feel defeating.

But here's the truth: After 35, your body isn't broken. It's just different.

Your hormones have changed (again). Muscle slowly decreases. Recovery takes longer. Stress affects you more. Protein becomes more important. Sleep matters more.

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The goal of this guide is simple: To help you stop guessing — and stop being misled by scattered, conflicting fitness advice.

This is not a crash plan.

It's not extreme.

It's not about cutting everything out of your life.

It's about understanding what actually works.

1

What Changes After 35

By the time most women reach their mid-30s, life is very busy.

You may be...

- Building a career
- Raising children
- Supporting a partner
- Helping aging parents
- Managing a home
- DOING ALL OF THESE THINGS AT THE SAME TIME

Somewhere in that process, your own body becomes secondary.

- Workouts get skipped
- Exercise becomes simplified and repetitive
- Meals become rushed

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- Sleep gets shorter
- Stress becomes constant

At the same time, your physiology is shifting.

- Muscle mass slowly decreases if it isn't trained
- Recovery takes longer
- Stress impacts fat storage more strongly
- Protein needs increase

The strategy that worked at 25 often stops working at 40. Things like...

- Walking more
- Switching to diet beverages
- Eating salads

After 35 your priorities need to change.

The focus includes:

- Protecting muscle
- Building strength
- Supporting recovery
- Reducing chronic inflammation
- Practical lifestyle adjustments

This isn't about trying harder.

It's about training smarter.

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Why Muscle Comes First

If there is one idea to understand, it's this: Muscle is your metabolic engine.

Muscle affects:

- How many calories you burn at rest
- How firm or soft your body looks
- Blood sugar stability
- Bone strength
- Long-term independence

When muscle decreases, everything becomes harder.

- Fat loss slows
- Back and shoulders round forward
- The belly protrudes
- A flappy thing below the chin appears (sigh)

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- Energy drops
- Risk for injuries like sprains and breaks increases

Many women try to lose weight by eating less and doing more cardio. But if the muscle is not protected, the body often loses muscle along with fat. The look might be more slender, but unfortunately, also flabby.

You don't look or feel stronger, because effectively, you are getting weaker due to unaddressed muscular imbalances and deficiencies.

Losing muscle can slow metabolism over time. Cardio supports heart health, but muscle impacts the shape of the body.

If body recomposition is the goal — less fat, more strength, more tone — muscle has to be the priority.

Increased muscle tone will not make you look less feminine.

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How to Know If It's Working

Strength training only works if it challenges you.

Ask yourself:

- Are you consistently performing resistance-based training?
- Are the last few reps in the set difficult?
- Are you able to gradually increase the resistance (weight) without reducing the reps?
- Are you getting stronger month to month?

If the weight feels easy or comfortable every week, your body has no reason to adapt.

You don't need to train every day. Adaptation happens in spurts, not steady conditions. The adaptation is triggered by heavy resistance exercises, and completed during rest and recovery!

You don't need long workouts. But you do need progressive challenge.

- Meaningful increases
- Small improvements
- Consistent effort

That's how muscle is built. And once built, maintaining it is easier because it takes less time to exercise, and you have the know-how.

Learning and executing resistance training is the most solid investment you could make in your long-term health, even if nothing else changes in lifestyle habits or medical conditions.

It's statistically proven to lengthen life more than...

- Quitting smoking
- Not drinking alcohol
- Avoiding fast food
- Cardio exercise alone

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A Simple 3-Day Strength Structure

Three days per week. That's enough.

Day 1 – Lower Body

- Squats or leg press
- Hip hinge (deadlift or hip bridge)
- Lunges or step-ups
- Calf work
- Core

Day 2 – Upper Body

- Row (machine or dumbbell)
- Chest press or push-ups
- Shoulder press
- Lat pulldown or assisted pull-up
- Arm work

Day 3 – Total Body

- One lower-body movement
- One upper push
- One upper pull
- One core movement
- Optional short conditioning finisher (5–10 minutes)

Sets and Effort

- 2–3 working sets per exercise.
- Rest 60–90 seconds between.
- Total time: 45–60 minutes.
- The last 2–3 reps should feel challenging.

What About Cardio?

Cardio training can be very helpful for heart health and endurance. But many women rely on cardio as their main fat-loss strategy. After 35, that approach often becomes less effective.

Cardio improves cardiovascular fitness. **Muscle training changes body composition.** If your goal is body recomposition — less fat and more tone — resistance training should be the priority.

If You Want to Improve Endurance

If your goal is better cardio-respiratory endurance for sports or performance, cardio can be useful when done with structure. Instead of long sessions of steady movement, consider **interval training**. Intervals simply alternate periods of effort with periods of recovery.

For example:

- 30–60 seconds of faster effort
- followed by
- 1–2 minutes of easy recovery

Repeat for several rounds. This type of training often improves endurance more efficiently than long, slow sessions.

How to Structure It

If endurance is your goal, consider these guidelines:

- Perform cardio training on **separate days from resistance training** when possible.
- Allow **2–3 days each week for true recovery** with no intense cardio or resistance work.
- Train in phases.

For example:

- Focus on cardio intervals for **2–3 weeks**
- Then shift focus back to **strength training for 6–8 weeks**

This approach allows your body to adapt without constantly competing demands.

The Big Picture

Cardio supports heart health and endurance. Strength training supports muscle, metabolism, and body composition. Both have value.

But if the goal is **fat reduction and body recomposition**, muscle development must come first.

The Protein Rule Most Women Miss

Most women under-eat protein.

Many average 40–60 grams per day. For muscle maintenance and growth, most women benefit from: **20–30 grams of protein, 3–4 times per day**.

This means 80–100 grams a day.

Examples of ~25 grams of protein:

- 4–5 oz chicken
- 1 cup Greek yogurt
- 1 scoop protein powder
- 3 eggs plus egg whites

Protein helps:

- Preserve muscle
- Improve fullness
- Support recovery
- Stabilize blood sugar

If you change nothing else, increase your protein.

This cannot be overstated and is overwhelmingly the most overlooked strategy for body recomposition.

Combine a minimum of 90 grams of protein a day with three days of resistance training per week, and your body will change.

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Why Fat Loss Sometimes Stalls

After 35, fat loss isn't just about calories. It's also about stress and inflammation.

When your body is under constant stress — from poor sleep, processed food, high alcohol intake, or emotional strain — it stays in a low-level inflammatory state.

Inflammation can:

- Increase fat storage
- Reduce insulin sensitivity
- Slow recovery
- Increase cravings

Your gut plays a role, too. Diet quality affects digestion and immune health. Diets low in fiber and high in ultra-processed foods can increase inflammation.

The solution is not a detox. Its consistency:

- Whole foods
- Vegetables and fiber
- Adequate protein
- Strength training
- Moderate alcohol
- 7–8 hours of sleep
- Hydration

Small improvements done consistently change the trajectory.

If you aren't sure where your body stands with inflammation, have a conversation with your medical provider.

Recovery Is Not Lazy

After 35, recovery matters more.

Going to bed earlier can make a real difference in body composition. Research shows that the **early stages of sleep** play an important role in recovery, hormone balance, and muscle repair.

When sleep is shortened or delayed, the body may burn less fat and break down more muscle. The goal should be **7–8 hours of sleep per night**. When possible, try to go to bed **before 10 PM or 11 PM**. Earlier sleep tends to support deeper recovery.

Sleeping in after a late night can help, but it does not always provide the same benefit as consistent sleep.

Over time, good sleep habits support:

- Muscle recovery

- Hormone balance
- Fat metabolism
- Energy and mood

It is one of the simplest ways to improve long-term health and body composition.

* * *

Rest days are not setbacks. They are part of the training process. Muscle does not grow during workouts. Muscle grows **while recovering from workouts**.

Three focused strength sessions per week, done well, are often more effective than six rushed sessions done poorly.

On rest days, allow your body to actually recover. Avoid turning the day into another intense physical effort such as:

- Heavy yard work
- Deep cleaning projects
- Highly active recreational activities

Light activity like walking, stretching, or normal daily movement is perfectly fine. If you enjoy recreational sports, try to schedule your gym workouts on the **same days as your sports activity** when possible. This allows you to have **true recovery days** in between.

Your body performs best when stress and recovery stay in balance.

Self-Assessment: No Guessing

Stop stepping on the scale and judging yourself.

If you'd like to drop 20 lbs, the scale is practically meaningless. Lean muscle is much denser than fat, meaning you can reduce your physical appearance by almost 20% and still WEIGH THE SAME.

Here's a more practical measure. For each statement, circle a number.

1 = Rarely

3 = Sometimes

5 = Consistently

Strength Training

I train with resistance at least 3 times per week.

1 2 3 4 5

My resistance-based sets feel challenging by the last few reps.

1 2 3 4 5

I am gradually increasing the resistance or difficulty of my exercises.

1 2 3 4 5

Protein

I eat 20–30 grams of protein at least 3 times per day (studies show four times a day is required to trigger muscle protein synthesis)

1 2 3 4 5

I include protein at breakfast.

1 2 3 4 5

Recovery

I sleep 7–8 hours most nights.

1 2 3 4 5

I execute structured exercise 3–4 times a week and fully rest on the other days.

1 2 3 4 5

Lifestyle

I eat vegetables and fiber daily.

1 2 3 4 5

My alcohol intake is moderate and intentional.

1 2 3 4 5

SELF-ASSESSMENT: NO GUESSING

I drink 12–16 cups of water a day.

1 2 3 4 5

I manage stress in healthy ways.

1 2 3 4 5

Add Your Total

43–53 You're doing many things right. Fine-tuning could elevate results.

28–42 You have a base, but gaps are slowing progress.

13–27 You're not broken. You're under-structured. Start small.

Start by Adding, Not Subtracting

Most fitness advice focuses on what to remove.

- Cut carbs
- Cut sugar
- Cut alcohol

But removal feels like loss. Radical changes in lifestyle can also impede healthy social interactions with others.

Body recomposition does not require removing everything you enjoy. It requires moderation, which can often occur naturally when you adjust other factors.

Instead of asking, “What do I need to cut?” Ask, “What can I add?” Can you add:

- 20 grams of protein at breakfast?
- One strength session per week?

START BY ADDING, NOT SUBTRACTING

- One extra hour of sleep?
- A daily walk?

When you add supportive habits, other aspects of life rebalance.

- Do not overhaul everything at once
- Choose one adjustment
- Stabilize it
- Then build

Consistency is built one adjustment at a time.

For all that you do, you deserve MORE and not LESS.

Conclusion

A Note on Research

The principles in this guide are supported by current research in resistance training, protein intake, muscle preservation, metabolic health, and inflammation.

Strength training, adequate protein intake, and recovery have consistently been shown to support lean muscle retention and long-term body composition improvements in women over 35.

This guide simplifies those findings into practical steps you can apply immediately.

If You Want Structure

If you would like help applying these principles specifically to your body, I'd be glad to help. Learn more at ConquestPersonalTrainer.com

What Women Say

“Marguerite has the ability to push your body to achieve greater limits without making you feel like you are compromising your health.”

“She is very knowledgeable about women’s bodies, and really cares about your goals. I felt like it really was personal.”

“Marguerite’s approach is what I would describe as wholistic; while working with her you will address the needs of your mind, body, and soul.”

“Marguerite’s training is uniquely engineered. She has a true passion for wellness which promoted a team approach with my training.”



About the Author

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