

A ROOTED FITNESS GUIDE

The Perimenopause Strength Quick-Start Guide

*The 5 biggest mistakes women 40+ make in the gym and at the table, and exactly
how to fix them.*

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20+ years coaching. Hundreds of women transformed.

Have faith and keep training.

THE OPENING

Your body isn't broken.

It's asking for a different kind of training, a different kind of fuel, and a different kind of grace.

If you've been told that fatigue, belly fat, mood swings, and lost strength are just part of the change, I'm here to tell you something different.

You're not falling apart. You're transitioning. And the way you trained at 30 is not the way you train at 50.

This guide is built around five mistakes I see almost every woman over 40 make in her first six months back in the gym after her body starts to change.

None of them are character flaws. All of them are fixable. And fixing them changes everything: how you feel in your clothes, how you sleep at night, how strong you feel carrying groceries up the stairs.

The advice that worked when you were 30 is the advice that broke you at 50.

Let's fix it.

AT A GLANCE

The five mistakes we'll fix.

1. Doing too much cardio (and not enough strength)
2. Not eating enough protein (and losing muscle instead of fat)
3. Training too hard on bad-sleep days (spiking cortisol)
4. Cutting calories instead of cycling them (slowing metabolism further)
5. Skipping rest days (and calling it discipline)

Each one has a section. Each section has three parts:

- ◆ Why it feels right
- ◆ Why it's making things worse
- ◆ Exactly what to do instead

You can read this guide in one sitting. Or one mistake per day for five days. Either way works.

The point isn't perfection. The point is changing one thing this week.

MISTAKE #1

You're doing too much cardio.

You joined a class. Or bought a treadmill. Or started running again because someone told you that's what women over 40 are supposed to do.

You do it most days. You sweat. You feel like you're working hard. And nothing changes.

The number on the scale doesn't move. The belly doesn't shrink. The strength doesn't come back.

So you add more cardio. And nothing still changes.

This is where most women get stuck for years.

Why this feels like the right thing to do.

For decades you've been told:

- ◆ Cardio burns fat
- ◆ More cardio burns more fat
- ◆ Sweating means it's working
- ◆ If you're not sore tomorrow, you didn't try hard enough

All four of those beliefs were true when you were 30. None of them are true now.

Here's what changed:

Around perimenopause, your estrogen drops. Your testosterone drops slowly but steadily. Your cortisol rises under stress and stays there longer than it used to.

In that hormonal environment:

- ◆ Long steady-state cardio spikes cortisol further
- ◆ Cortisol tells your body to STORE belly fat, not release it
- ◆ Muscle recovery slows down
- ◆ You feel tired but wired after every session

You're not lazy. You're doing exactly what your hormones told your body to do twenty years ago. Your body just stopped listening to that language around age 40-something.

MISTAKE #1 · THE FIX

What to do instead.

Strength train three times a week. Not five times. Not six times. Three times.

Each session should be:

- ◆ 30 to 45 minutes long
- ◆ Compound lifts first (squat pattern, hinge pattern, push pattern, pull pattern)
- ◆ Progressive overload over time (a little more weight or one more rep each week)
- ◆ Finished feeling like you could do more, not destroyed

Then walk two days a week outside for twenty minutes each day. Not run. Walk. Outside if possible; sunlight matters for sleep later that night.

That's it for movement this week: 3 strength sessions plus 2 walks equals your entire exercise prescription for seven days.

No daily hour-long cardio sessions. No “I have to earn my dinner” mentality. No punishing yourself into exhaustion and calling it discipline.

MISTAKE #1 · THE WEEK

Your week looks like this.

Day	What
Monday	Strength session #1
Tuesday	Walk outside, 20 min
Wednesday	Strength session #2
Thursday	Walk outside, 20 min
Friday	Strength session #3
Saturday	Rest or gentle walk
Sunday	Rest

That's five intentional movement days out of seven. Two full rest days where your body actually recovers and builds muscle back up.

If you've been doing daily cardio for months or years: this will feel like you're slacking off at first. That's normal. It passes by week two when you notice you're sleeping better and recovering faster between sessions.

MISTAKE #2

You're not eating enough protein.

You're losing muscle instead of fat.

You've been told to eat less to lose weight. So you've been eating less for months or years. And you've lost weight, but mostly muscle mass, not fat mass.

Here's what's happening.

When you undereat protein during perimenopause:

- ◆ Your body breaks down muscle tissue for fuel
- ◆ Your metabolism slows down because muscle burns calories at rest
- ◆ You look “softer” even when the scale moves down
- ◆ You feel weaker doing everyday things like carrying groceries or climbing stairs
- ◆ Cravings get louder because your body is starving for amino acids it can't get from carbs alone

This is why “eat less, move more” stops working around age forty-something. It's not because you're doing it wrong. It's because your body's protein needs went UP just as most women start eating LESS protein by default (smaller portions equal less total protein).

MISTAKE #2 · YOUR NUMBER

Your exact protein target.

For women over forty who are strength training three times a week:

0.8 grams of protein per pound of body weight per day.

Body weight	Daily protein target
140 lbs	~112 g / day
160 lbs	~128 g / day
180 lbs	~144 g / day
200 lbs	~160 g / day

That number will look high if you've been eating standard American portions where chicken is four ounces once a day and everything else is carbs and vegetables.

It will look normal if you've ever tracked macros before or eaten an athlete's diet even briefly.

This isn't an extreme target. This is what your muscles need right now to hold on through this transition AND build back what you've lost over the past few years of undereating protein by default.

What this looks like in a real day.

A day hitting about 135 g protein might look like:

- Breakfast: Greek yogurt plus cottage cheese plus berries (~30 g)
- Snack: 2 whole eggs plus cheese stick (~18 g)
- Lunch: Big salad with chicken or tuna (~35 g)
- Snack: Protein shake or Greek yogurt (~25 g)
- Dinner: Salmon or chicken thighs plus vegetables (~30 g)

Total: about 138 g protein across five meals spread through the day.

Notice what's NOT here:

- × Counting calories obsessively
- × Cutting out carbs entirely
- × Eating six small meals every two hours
- × Skipping the yolk. Eat the whole egg. The yolk is the healthiest, most protein-dense part.

Notice what IS here:

- ✓ Protein at every meal or snack
- ✓ Spreading intake across the day (about 25 to 35 g per meal hits muscle protein synthesis best)
- ✓ Eating real, whole food you'd actually want to eat long term
- ✓ Hitting roughly your target without obsessing over exact numbers daily

Aim for five out of seven days hitting target perfectly. Two imperfect days won't undo anything if five are solid.

Why hitting your protein target changes everything.

Within seven days of consistently hitting your number:

- ✓ You stop losing muscle mass during weight loss attempts
- ✓ Cravings drop noticeably by Day Three. Your brain finally has amino acids available.
- ✓ The afternoon energy crash softens because blood sugar stays steadier with adequate protein.
- ✓ Sleep improves within two weeks as cortisol comes back down from stable meals throughout the day.
- ✓ Recovery between workouts speeds up noticeably by Week Two.

This isn't theory. It's what hundreds of women I've coached over the past twenty years have reported consistently, often surprised that the change showed up before the scale moved at all.

The Protein Lever works because it's the substrate your body has been asking for. Give it what it's asking for, and the rest of the system starts to come back online.

MISTAKE #3

You're training too hard on bad-sleep days.

You slept four hours last night. You woke up at 2 a.m. and couldn't get back down. You dragged yourself out of bed at 6 a.m. and you're already behind.

And then you went to the gym. And pushed through a hard session because "discipline."

This is one of the most common mistakes I see. And one of the most damaging.

Here's why.

Why training hard on bad-sleep days makes things worse.

When you slept poorly:

- ◆ Cortisol is already elevated from the night
- ◆ Your nervous system is in a stress state
- ◆ Glycogen stores are partially depleted
- ◆ Reaction time and coordination are slightly off
- ◆ Recovery capacity is reduced for the next 24 to 48 hours

When you add a hard training session on top of that:

- ◆ Cortisol spikes further
- ◆ Cortisol tells your body to store belly fat and break down muscle
- ◆ You don't get the strength gains from that session anyway
- ◆ You're deeper in the hole the next day
- ◆ The cycle repeats

You're not building strength on bad-sleep days. You're digging a hole.

What to do on a bad-sleep day.

You have three options, ranked from best to “do this if you must”:

Option A. Rest. The strongest move. Take the day fully off. Sleep when you can. Walk for 20 minutes if you want to move. That’s it.

Option B. Walk only. Outside if possible. Twenty minutes. No headphones, no podcast, no audiobook. Let your nervous system actually downshift.

Option C. Reduce the session by 50 percent. If you really need to lift, do half the volume, half the weight, half the time. Not a normal session. A recovery session.

Option D. Reschedule the session. If you can shift the workout to tomorrow when you’ve slept, that’s often the smarter move.

What’s NOT in the options:

- × “Push through, it’s just one session”
- × “Discipline is doing the thing when you don’t want to”
- × “Earn your dinner”
- × “Rest is for the weak”

Rest is for the strong. Knowing when to back off is what twenty-year veterans know that ten-year coaches often miss.

MISTAKE #3 · THE TEST

How to tell a bad-sleep day from just feeling lazy.

Here's the test. Ask yourself three questions:

1. Did I sleep fewer than six hours last night?
2. Do I feel wired but tired right now?
3. Am I dreading the session more than usual?

If you answered yes to two or three: it's a bad-sleep day. Back off.

If you answered yes to one or none: it's a "feeling lazy" day. Go train. You'll feel better after.

Most women massively under-count bad-sleep days because they've been living with fragmented sleep so long they think it's normal.

Track it for one week. You might be surprised.

MISTAKE #4

You're cutting calories instead of cycling them.

You've been told to eat less to lose weight. So you've been eating less. For months. For years. Maybe since your late thirties.

And the scale went down at first. And then it stopped. And now eating less doesn't move the scale at all. And eating less still makes you feel terrible.

This is the most common pattern I see in women over forty.

And it's not your fault. It's biology.

Why chronic calorie cutting backfires after 40.

When you eat in a sustained deficit for months:

- ◆ Your metabolism adapts downward
- ◆ Your thyroid slows
- ◆ Leptin drops (the hormone that tells your brain you're full)
- ◆ Ghrelin rises (the hunger hormone)
- ◆ Cortisol stays elevated
- ◆ You lose muscle along with fat
- ◆ Your body becomes more efficient at storing fat when you DO eat

You end up:

- ◆ Eating less than you used to
- ◆ Weighing the same or more
- ◆ Feeling hungry all the time
- ◆ Wondering what's wrong with you

Nothing is wrong with you. Your body is doing exactly what it's supposed to do when food is scarce: hold on to what it has.

The fix isn't cutting more. The fix is cycling.

MISTAKE #4 · THE MATH

How to calculate your cycling numbers.

Step 1. Estimate maintenance. Multiply your body weight (in pounds) by 13. That number is roughly the calories you need on a normal day to hold your current weight.

Step 2. Set your deficit days. Subtract 250 to 400 calories from maintenance. These are your rest days and lighter days, the days you are asking the body to lean out a little.

Step 3. Set your higher days. Maintenance, or up to 200 to 400 calories above maintenance on hard training days. Feed the work. This is what keeps your metabolism from crashing.

Body weight	Maintenance	Deficit day	Higher day
140 lbs	~1,820	~1,500	~2,000 to 2,200
160 lbs	~2,080	~1,750	~2,300 to 2,500
180 lbs	~2,340	~2,000	~2,500 to 2,750

Don't track obsessively. Hit these ranges roughly. Five out of seven days in the right zone is plenty.

MISTAKE #5

You're skipping rest days, and calling it discipline.

You worked out Monday. Tuesday. Wednesday. Thursday. Friday. Saturday. Sunday.

You haven't taken a full rest day in months. Maybe longer.

And you're not getting the results you expected. You're sore all the time. You're exhausted. You're losing motivation. The scale isn't moving.

You think the answer is to add MORE.

The answer is the opposite.

Why rest days build results.

Muscle is built during recovery, not during training.

When you lift weights, you create tiny tears in the muscle fibers. When you rest and eat protein, your body repairs those tears and builds the muscle back slightly stronger.

If you don't rest:

- ◆ The tears don't repair fully
- ◆ You accumulate fatigue
- ◆ Cortisol stays elevated
- ◆ Strength gains stall
- ◆ Injury risk rises
- ◆ Mental burnout follows

Skipping rest days is like pulling a plant out of the soil every day to check if it's growing yet. You have to let the roots take hold. That happens when you're not touching it.

MISTAKE #5 · THE DOSE

How many rest days you actually need.

For women over forty who are strength training three times a week:

Minimum: two full rest days per week. Non-negotiable. Schedule them. Protect them.

What counts as a rest day:

- ✓ No structured exercise
- ✓ Light walking is fine
- ✓ Gentle stretching is fine
- ✓ Mobility work is fine
- ✓ Yoga at low intensity is fine

What doesn't count as a rest day:

- × A hard yoga class
- × A long hike
- × A bike ride over 45 minutes
- × A "recovery run"
- × Cleaning the entire house on your feet all day

A rest day is when your body has the bandwidth to fully repair. Most women I coach underestimate how much rest they actually need by 50 percent.

MISTAKE #5 · THE GUILT

How to handle the guilt of resting.

There's a voice in your head that says rest is lazy. That rest means you're losing ground. That if you're not sweating every day, you're failing.

That voice is wrong.

It's the voice of every diet culture message you've absorbed since your teens. It's the voice of the fitness industry that profits from your exhaustion. It's the voice of the old advice that broke you at 50.

The new voice, your voice, your real voice, says:

“I am building the body I’ll have at 70. Rest is part of the work. I do not have to earn my dinner. My worth is not measured in steps or calories burned.”

Say that to yourself on rest days. Out loud if you can. Especially on the days the old voice is loudest.

Your 7-day quick-start protocol.

DAY 1 • Monday

- Strength session #1 (30 to 45 min)
- Hit your protein target

DAY 2 • Tuesday

- Walk 20 min outside

DAY 3 • Wednesday

- Strength session #2

DAY 4 • Thursday

- Walk 20 min outside
- Sleep check. Did you get 7+ hours?

DAY 5 • Friday

- Strength session #3
- Higher-calorie day

DAY 6 • Saturday

- Full rest day

DAY 7 • Sunday

- Full rest day
- Reflect: how did your body feel this week?

That's the whole week. Five intentional days. Two protected rest days. Hit your protein target on five of seven days. Cycle your calories (higher on lift days, lower on rest days). Back off on bad-sleep days.

One week. Five things. You can do this.

THE NEXT STEP

You're not starting over. You're starting rooted.

You read the guide. You know the five mistakes. You have the protocol.

The next four weeks is where it becomes real. The Stronger After 40 Starter Challenge is the 4-week program built around exactly what you've read in this guide: strength training three times a week, hitting your protein, walking two days, cycling calories, taking real rest days.

When you join, you get:

- ◆ 12 workouts, delivered one week at a time
- ◆ 4 weekly teaching videos from me
- ◆ 4 weekly live Q&A calls with me
- ◆ A bound welcome kit shipped to your door
- ◆ A small Bloom, 25 women walking through the 4 weeks with you

Doors open Wednesday at 7 a.m. Pacific. Bloom 1 is limited to 25 women.

→ rootedfitnesslife.com/protein-lever

The free guide stays yours forever. The program is the next step, if and when you're ready.

You are not starting over. You are starting rooted.

— Louise

Have faith and keep training.