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## Melt Your Muffin Top, Minimize Your Menopot/Manopot

For the uninitiated, you can learn what a Muffin Top is by squeezing into your current pair of breathing-is-optional jeans, zip up and look in the mirror. Yep, like the top of a muffin rising from its paper wrapper, your rolls of fat are spilling over the top of the pants. Oprah coined the term “Dunlap Syndrome” – “That’s when your stomach done lap over your jeans”. Where is this extra flab coming from?

Mistakenly, many people think they just have lax ab muscles and by nailing a thousand crunches a day, voila, a six pack ab will emerge. This is a delusion. Here’s the reality. The excess fat is the result of eating too much. Even athletes who exercise well but overeat relative to their needs will pack on belly weight. It boils down to keeping yourself in the right energy balance. You need both healthy eating and exercise. If you’re out of balance, you’ll bulge!

Muffin Tops can occur at any age. There’s a special type of Muffin Top that happens after the age of 40. I call it the Menopot and first described it in *Body for Life for Women*. In women, as their sex hormones begin to decrease, it’s easier to store fat in the belly, rather than the typical pre-menopausal hip, thigh and buttock locations. That’s because estrogen exerts a powerful control over fat distribution in the normal female, resulting in the pear or hourglass shape. During perimenopause, once estrogen decreases below a specific level, it loses that hold and ab fat appears. This fat tends to occur between the belly button and the pubis, increasing the size of what you normally called your “pooch”. This is the fat that is leaking out over your jeans. Consider this your over-forty Muffin Top. In men, as their testosterone decreases, they, too, will pile on more fat in their belly area. The difference is that men typically store excess fat there. After forty, it just gets bigger resulting in beaucoup belly hanging over the belt. Guys, this is what I call the Manopot!

Nobody likes to walk around with fat pouring out over their pants and a wall of flab jiggling around the midriff when you don a short top. The great news is that you *can* melt your Muffin Top at any age. You just need to stick to a winning plan. And here it is:

### Smart Eating

- **Cut the refined and processed carbs.** When you consume white sugars that are found in so many foods, you’ll raise your insulin levels which not only increase your appetite for more sugar but make it easier to store fat. It’s the perfect storm for creating and maintaining a Muffin Top. Cut these bad boys out of your diet now! Fill up on non-starchy veggies, controlled portions of fruits as well as whole grains. You also have to be mindful of the quality and the quantity of your carbs. Portion control please, people!
- **Prioritize healthy fats.** Don’t shy away from fat, so long as it’s the healthy kind. Extra virgin olive oil, avocados, nuts, low fat dairy and foods containing omega fat oils are terrific ways to maintain a healthy glow, stay satisfied with tasty food and help maintain healthy cells and immune function. Again, just watch the serving sizes. Read labels, people!

- **Control your appetite and hunger with protein.** Too many people out there under-eat protein. Unless you have a medical condition that prohibits it, please try to consume about 20-25% protein in your daily food. An average woman needs at least 60 grams of protein and men no less than 80 grams. A 4 oz fish filet has about 20 grams of protein so you don't have to eat a mountain of Muffin Top-making food. Protein is very satisfying and will kill carb cravings. It will help you rein in hunger and appetite. Spread it out throughout the day so that you are eating a balance of smart and high quality carbs, protein and fats.
- **Red alert about alcohol.** A sure fire way to grow a Muffin Top is to drink alcohol in excess. You don't need a glass of wine every night when you're trying to trim the Muffin Top. Also, when you do decide to have wine with a dinner once or twice per week, keep it to one glass and no more. Alcohol can disinhibit you and you lose your mindfulness about healthy food consumption. Also, alcohol is unique in that excessive alcohol consumption (2 or more glasses) will result in belly fat storage. There's a reason why they call it the "beer belly". Drink alcohol sparingly if at all.

### Move that Mountain of Muffin Top

- **Carve Your Muffin Top with Cardio:** It's imperative that you keep moving as much as you can every day if you want to cut that Muffin Top. You need to schedule some form of regular cardio at least 5 times per week (e.g. walk, bike, jog, swim, elliptical, row, martial arts, kick boxing, spinning, dance), as well as increasing your activities of daily living (e.g. cleaning out your closets, hauling junk out of your garage, washing the car, running after kids, climbing stairs). Try to make your cardio fun and sustainable. Change it up, use wild and crazy music, and add what I call Vitamin I (Intensity intervals). Sweat that Muffin Top off. Work it and you'll remove it. In the January 9th *New York Times*, US Surgeon General Dr. Regina Benjamin noted: "I want exercise to be fun..We went to a disco to have fun and enjoy ourselves...I love to dance. That exercise is medicine. It's better than most pills." Let's take our cue from my good friend Dr. Benjamin. Let's dance more anytime and anywhere we want to.
- **Strip Your Muffin Top with Strength.** You cannot spot reduce a Muffin Top. Instead, you need the magic combination of cardio and strength training to flatten out your tummy once and for all. There is no one magic Muffin Top busting exercise. Overall strength training is best. Twice a week make sure you have a program that includes upper and lower body strength training and always include core work as well. I highly encourage Pilates and yoga as adjuncts to your overall program. They really work the core, as well as strengthen and increase your flexibility. Here are a couple of my favorites that concentrate more on the core region to keep you mindful of your Muffin Top zone. Keep in mind that your goal is to be able to do the repetitions and sets. If you cannot do them today, keep practicing and use them as a goal to strive to achieve over time. Be patient, especially if you haven't done exercising for a long time. Get prior approval from your doctor if you have any medical condition or disability before attempting any new exercise program.
- **Have a (Medicine) Ball:**  
Sit with your legs bent and feet flat on the floor. Lean back slightly (do not do this exercise if you have back issues). Use your lower abdominal muscles to keep your body stable. Hold a 10-lb. medicine ball between your hands. Some have handles so just use those. Move your arms from one side to the other. Touch the floor near your waist each time you bring your arms over. Repeat 10 times. See if you can do 3 sets of 10 repetitions.
- **Bridge Your Belly:**  
Lay down with your back on the floor. Bend your knees so that your feet are flat on the floor. Slowly lift your hips off the floor, making sure that both your shoulders are firmly planted. Push that pelvis

up so that you're not sagging. You want your body to be in a straight line. Hold this position for about 5-10 seconds, and return to the starting position. Repeat 10 times for 3 sets of 10 repetitions.

- **Reach for the Muffin Top-less Sky:**

Lay flat on your back and bring both legs up and keep them straight. Tensing your abs, reach with both hands for your ankles. You don't have to touch them, just reach in that general direction. Hold this for 5-10 seconds and then release, returning to your flat back position, keeping legs up in the air. Repeat 10 times for 3 sets of 10 repetitions.

### **Muffin Top Makers: High Stress, Poor Posture, Tight Fit**

- **Control Your Cortisol.** As you may be aware, cortisol is stress hormone. When it's out of control and sky high, it's easier for the body to pack on fat especially deep in the abdomen, expanding your girth. Eating refined sugars only makes this worse, since high insulin and cortisol together make fat storage so easy. Yoga and meditation really help to calm your cortisol. Life is stressful and you need to learn how to adapt and adjust to life's stresses without self-destructive behaviors.
- **Assume the Powerful Posture.** Quick, look at your posture right now. Even Kate Moss would look like she had a hanging belly if she was all stooped over. Instead, take your shoulders and bring them up to your ears and then roll them back to a comfortable position. This is your correct posture. The taller you stand the less Muffin Top you show. And, to hold powerful posture means you need to engage your core muscles throughout the day. That's a terrific way to keep them in shape. Strength training, Yoga and Pilates are excellent modalities to keep you vertical and powerful.
- **Get Jeans that Fit.** For crying out loud, buy jeans that fit well. Don't keep squeezing yourself into a size or two smaller than you can comfortably fit. Low rise jeans are murder for the over forty folks, male and female. Buy a pair of jeans with a higher waistline that helps to smooth out your tummy. As you trim your tummy, you can experiment with more revealing clothes, but if you've got serious Muffin Top right now, let's not share it with the world. We'll just keep it between us.

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Courtesy of WebMD