

Brain's role in menopause to be studied

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The U.S. National Institute on Aging is funding a five-year, \$1.4 million research project to study how the brain might control the timing of menopause.

University of Texas at Austin College of Pharmacy researcher Andrea Gore will attempt to gain a deeper understanding of the brain's role in reproductive failure that might lead to the creation of new therapies.

"For too many years, the focus in menopause research has primarily been on the ovaries," Gore said. "Although there is no question that the ovaries are key to the menopausal process, it was puzzling that there was little interest in whether the brain may also have a role.

"After all," she added, "the brain drives reproductive function during the rest of the life cycle, including puberty and adulthood, and the brain is a target organ for the major ovarian hormone, estrogen."

She noted many menopausal complaints -- hot flashes, depression and memory issues -- that prompt women to seek treatment are neurological in origin.

Gore said her research will have clinical implications for postmenopausal hormone replacement therapy and for identifying non-hormonal approaches to treating menopausal symptoms. There also are clinical implications for potentially expanding the reproductive lifespan.

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