

Postmenopausal women's loss of sexual desire affects health, quality of life

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Women with low levels of sexual desire, often as a result of menopause, are more likely to be depressed and to suffer physical symptoms such as back pain and memory problems than women who report higher levels of desire, according to a new study by researchers at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill and Procter & Gamble Pharmaceuticals.

The study, published recently as an online early view article in *Value in Health*, the official journal of the International Society of Pharmacoeconomics and Outcomes Research, found that women with hypoactive sexual desire disorder (HSDD) reported poorer health status and worse health-related quality of life than women without the disorder. For example, those with the disorder were more than twice as likely to report health issues including back pain, fatigue and memory problems. Researchers say the study shows that women with the disorder have a degree of physical and mental impairment comparable to chronic conditions such as hypertension, diabetes, osteoarthritis and asthma.

"Our research shows that HSDD is a significant and clinically relevant problem, and not a normal or inevitable part of the aging process," said Andrea K. Biddle, Ph.D., associate professor of health policy and management at the UNC Gillings School of Global Public Health. "Women with the disorder experience health burdens similar to individuals with serious chronic conditions."

Hypoactive sexual desire disorder is defined as the persistent lack of sexual desire causing marked stress or interpersonal difficulties. Studies

have shown that between nine percent and 26 percent of women in the United States suffer from it, depending on the woman's current age and menopausal status.

The study was based on telephone interviews with 1,189 postmenopausal women. Using quality of life surveys, researchers asked women about their levels of sexual desire and feelings of physical and emotional well-being or distress. Results showed that women with the disorder were more likely to be depressed and to express dissatisfaction with their home lives and their sexual partners. Surgically menopausal women (women who underwent menopause by having their ovaries removed) were slightly more likely to have the disorder than women who underwent menopause naturally.

Study co-authors are: Suzanne West, Ph.D., formerly UNC associate professor of epidemiology in the public health school, now senior public health researcher at RTI International; Aimee D'Aloisio, Ph.D., former doctoral student in epidemiology; Stephanie B. Wheeler, doctoral student of health policy and management; Natalie Borisov, Ph.D., senior health economist with Procter & Gamble Pharmaceuticals; and John Thorp, M.D., professor of obstetrics and gynecology at the UNC School of Medicine and professor of maternal and child health at the UNC Gillings School of Global Public Health.

Source: University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill

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