

# Appetite-stimulating hormone is first potential medical treatment for frailty in older women

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Older women suffering from clinical frailty stand to benefit from the first potential medical treatment for the condition, according to a study presented today by Penn Medicine researchers at ENDO, The Endocrine Society's 91st Annual Meeting. Ghrelin, a hormone that stimulates appetite, was administered to older women diagnosed with frailty, a common geriatric syndrome characterized by unintentional weight loss, weakness, exhaustion and low levels of anabolic hormones which increases risk of falls, hospitalizations, disability, and death. Those who received ghrelin infusions consumed 51 percent more calories than the placebo group, with an increase in carbohydrate and protein intake, not fat. Their growth hormone levels were also higher throughout the ghrelin infusion.

"As Americans are increasingly living into their 80s and 90s, we need to identify ways to prevent or treat common geriatric conditions, such as unexplained [weight loss](#) and frailty, which have serious health consequences," said senior author Anne Cappola, MD, ScM, Assistant Professor of Medicine in Endocrinology, Diabetes, and Metabolism at the University of Pennsylvania School of Medicine. "We're gaining a better understanding of the hormonal changes that occur as we get older and, with treatments like ghrelin, we can start intervening to prevent some of the common health problems that keep elderly people from living their most productive lives."

In the pilot study, funded by the National Institutes of Health and Penn's Institute on Aging, five frail women and five healthy women, all over the age of seventy, were randomized to receive an infusion of the hormone ghrelin or placebo. After a ghrelin transfusion, frail women in the study had a stronger, healthy appetite and increased anabolic hormone activity. The only side effect reported during the treatment was a transient sense of warmth that occurred in four [women](#) who received the ghrelin transfusion.

Now that safety and initial efficacy has been proven in this pilot study, larger follow-up studies will look at the potential therapeutic role of ghrelin or ghrelin mimetic agents in the frail population. At this time, these agents are only available for research use.

Source: University of Pennsylvania School of Medicine ([news](#) : [web](#))

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