

# Women live longer, but have a lower quality of life

March 11 2013

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To mark International Women's Day on 8th March 2013, the Institute of Gender Medicine at the MedUni Vienna has presented an alarming result obtained from gender-specific research. According to recent studies, women's quality of life is significantly worse than that of men in terms of health.

In Austria and Europe, women live on average around six years longer than men. This is a very positive result for women, one might think, especially in terms of their health. This popular assumption, however, is incorrect. According to Alexandra Kautzky-Willer, Head of the Gender

Medicine Unit at the MedUni Vienna, a closer look at the data indicates that women suffer more frequently than men from [chronic diseases](#) and functional restrictions and have a poorer quality of life in terms of their health.

Karin Gutierrez-Lobos, MedUni Vienna's Vice Rector for Teaching, Gender and Diversity and Austria's first Professor of Gender Medicine at the MedUni Vienna, adds: "These recent results confirm just how important gender medicine is. They clearly illustrate that women's equality of treatment status is a vital influencing factor on health. If their social status, quality of treatment index or career opportunities improve, for example, so too does their health-related quality of life."

## **Sex hormones, role models and social behaviour make the difference**

According to Kautzky-Willer, the more marked among women phases of life that are greatly influenced by changes in sex hormones, but also by their [role models](#), are also of tremendous importance.

From puberty, women are more affected than men by painful syndromes such as irritable bowel, fibromyalgia and migraine, but also by autoimmune diseases such as lupus, multiple sclerosis, [thyroid gland](#) abnormalities or asthma. [Menstrual cycle](#) anomalies, infertility or complications of pregnancy can provide vital indicators of an increased risk of illness later in life. After [gestational diabetes](#), for example, women have a seven times greater risk of developing diabetes and are at significantly increased risk of vascular problems. Lifestyle changes such as smoking, taking the contraceptive pill, stress and lack of exercise lead to an increase in mortality from heart attacks, especially in young women. From the menopause onwards, women are more troubled by fat metabolism problems, high blood pressure, cardiovascular disease and

osteoporosis. Elderly women are ultimately significantly more severely affected by Alzheimer's dementia, incontinence and immobility. And if all this wasn't enough, women are also two times more likely to suffer depression than men.

"There are a variety of reasons behind these clear differences. They include, for example, the many differences in biology and [sex hormones](#), but most importantly the different effects of environmental influences, differences in lifestyle, gender roles and differences in social behaviour," says Kautzky-Willer. Even the causes and effects of stress differ between men and women.

## **Recent study researches gender-specific differences in coping with autoimmune diseases**

An interdisciplinary study currently underway at the University Department of Internal Medicine III at the MedUni Vienna and the Gender Medicine Unit is investigating a series of autoimmune diseases from gender-specific perspectives. Preliminary results are already available for Crohn's disease, a common disease of the bowel. Says Kautzky-Willer: "If social support, job satisfaction and self-efficacy improve, the positive effect on the course of the illness is the same for both men and women. For [women](#), however, the activity of the disease but most importantly esteem and good resilience are important." These results may in future lead to new, gender-sensitive approaches to the treatment of [autoimmune diseases](#).

Provided by Medical University of Vienna

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