

Another menopause side effect: shortness of breath?

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(HealthDay)—As if hot flashes and night sweats weren't enough, a new

study suggests that a woman's lung function seems to decline during menopause.

As their periods stop, women could find themselves becoming short of breath, said study author Kai Triebner, a graduate student in epidemiology at the University of Bergen in Norway.

"Women are living longer and, therefore, many years beyond menopause," Triebner said. "Our study highlights the importance of maintaining [respiratory health](#) long after the menopausal transition."

The researchers found two aspects of [lung function](#) in particular that declined in menopausal and postmenopausal women.

These functions were: forced vital capacity—a measurement of lung size; and forced expiratory volume in one second (FEV1)—a measurement of how much air a person can forcefully blow out in one second. The reductions in performance, the study authors said, are beyond those that would be expected from aging.

The decline in forced vital capacity was equivalent to the damage caused by smoking 20 cigarettes a day for 10 years. The reduction in FEV1 was similar to what a pack-a-day smoker experiences over two years, the researchers said.

"The decline in lung function may cause an increase in shortness of breath, reduced work capacity and fatigue," Triebner said in a news release from the American Thoracic Society. "Symptoms depend upon how much [lung capacity](#) is reduced, and a few women may actually develop respiratory failure as a result of this decline."

The findings were based on an analysis of over 1,400 European women who were 25 to 48 years old when they joined the study. The researchers

tracked them for 20 years.

Not surprisingly, smokers showed a steeper rate of lung function decline, the study found.

"Women, and their physicians, should be aware that respiratory health might [decline](#) considerably during and after the menopausal transition," Triebner said. "This could mean that they experience shortness of breath already with low physical activity."

Hormonal changes related to menopause may play a role in [lung function decline](#) since they can lead to systemic inflammation and the bone-thinning disease osteoporosis. Osteoporosis can compress the height of the chest vertebrae, limiting air intake, the researchers said.

The researchers reported their findings in the Dec. 1 online edition of the *American Journal of Respiratory and Critical Care Medicine*.

More information: For more about menopause, see the [U.S. National Institute on Aging](#).

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