

Postmenopausal hormone therapy associated with higher risk of hearing loss

May 10 2017

Hearing loss afflicts approximately 48 million Americans and the number is expected to increase as the population ages. Some previous studies suggested that menopause may increase the risk for hearing loss, presumably due to the reduction in circulating estrogen levels, and that postmenopausal hormone therapy might slow hearing decline by 'replacing' estrogen. To investigate the role of menopause and postmenopausal hormone therapy as risk factors for hearing loss, researchers at Brigham and Women's Hospital prospectively examined the independent links between menopausal status, oral hormone therapy, and risk of self-reported hearing loss in 80,972 women in the Nurses' Health Study II followed from 1991-2013. The findings are published online May 10, 2017 in *Menopause, The Journal of the North American Menopause Society*.

During the study period, 23 percent of the participants developed [hearing loss](#). Researchers found no significant overall association between menopausal status and risk of hearing loss, although higher risk was associated with [older age](#) at natural menopause. Use of postmenopausal hormone therapy was associated with higher risk of hearing loss, and the risk tended to increase with longer duration of use.

"Many factors contribute to acquired hearing loss, including age, genetics, noise, medical conditions, diet and lifestyle factors," stated Sharon Curhan, MD, ScM, lead author of the paper and a researcher at the Channing Division of Network Medicine at Brigham and Women's Hospital. "Our research focuses on identifying preventable contributors

to hearing loss. Although the role of sex hormones in hearing is complex and incompletely understood, these findings suggest that women who undergo natural menopause at an older age may have a higher risk. In addition, longer duration of postmenopausal hormone therapy use is associated with higher risk. These findings suggest that [hearing](#) health may be a consideration for women when evaluating the risks and benefits of hormone therapy," Curhan said.

More information: Sharon G. Curhan, MD, ScM, et al. "Menopause and postmenopausal hormone therapy and risk of hearing loss," *Menopause*, Vol. 24, No. 9, 2017.

Provided by Brigham and Women's Hospital

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