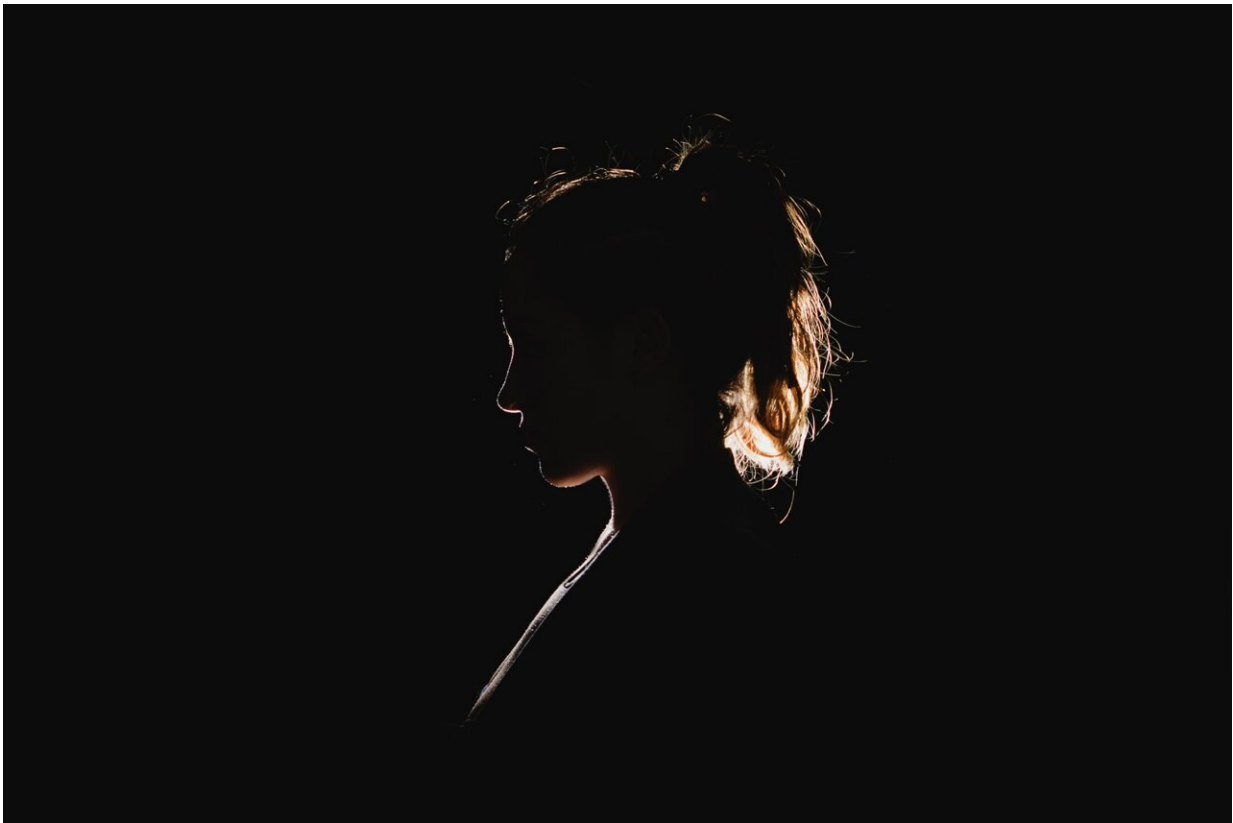


# Study identifies factors at midlife associated with decline in women's health years later

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Imagine going to the doctor's office at age 55 and, after measuring a set of health variables, the physician predicted your health trajectory for 10 years into the future. Investigators from Brigham and Women's Hospital

studied easily obtained variables among women at midlife, variables included health status measures, lab measurements and imaging assessments, to determine which factors were associated with clinically important declines in physical health later in life. In a study published in *JAMA Network Open*, the team identified factors that could potentially be used to determine who may be at increased risk of physical health decline later in life.

"Age 55 to 65 may be a critical decade," said corresponding author Daniel H. Solomon, MD, MPH, of the Division of Rheumatology, Inflammation, and Immunity. "A person's [health](#) and factors during this period may set them on a path for their later adult years. The good news is that a large proportion of women at midlife are very stable and will not go on to experience declines. But, being able to identify women at higher risk could help lead to interventions targeted to them."

Solomon and colleagues conducted their [cohort study](#) using data from the Study of Women's Health Across the Nation (SWAN), a multicenter, multiethnic and multiracial longitudinal study that followed women from 1996 through 2016. The main outcome the researchers assessed was a decline in participants' physical component summary score (PCS), a composite measure of a person's physical health. The team looked for clinically important changes in PCS, comparing women's scores at age 55 to their score 10 years later.

The researchers found that about 20 percent of the women they studied experienced clinically important declines in their physical health. At age 55, some of the factors significantly associated with these declines include:

- Baseline [physical health](#) and function (women with higher PCS at age 55 were less likely to experience a decline)
- Higher body mass index

- Lower educational attainment
- Current smoking
- Co-morbidities (diabetes, hypertension, cardiovascular disease, osteoarthritis and osteoporosis were associated with declines in PCS)
- Clinically significant depressive symptoms

While the study cohort was diverse and representative, the study's size—1,091 [women](#)—was relatively small and the findings will require validation. The researchers are working to determine how to apply their results in [clinical practice](#), including the development of a risk score that clinicians and patients could use to determine the likelihood of future declines in health status.

"As a clinician and epidemiologist, I often think about the window of opportunity at midlife, when people are vital, engaged and resilient," said Solomon. "If we can identify risk factors and determine who is at risk, we may be able to find interventions that can stave off health declines and help put people on a better health trajectory."

**More information:** Solomon DH et al. "Factors Associated with 10-Year Declines in Physical Health Among Women During Midlife" *JAMA Network Open* DOI: [10.1001/jamanetworkopen.2021.42773](https://doi.org/10.1001/jamanetworkopen.2021.42773)

Provided by Brigham and Women's Hospital

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