

Early onset of menopause linked to reduced work capacity and increased risk of disability pension, finds Finnish study

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A recent study conducted by the University of Oulu, Finland, has revealed that early onset of menopause is associated with reduced work

capacity among women at the age of 46. The research further indicates that experiencing menopause at an earlier age increases the risk of disability and unemployment days, as well as transitioning to disability pension.

In Finland, the average age for menopause among women is approximately 51 years. Menopause refers to the period when ovarian function declines, eventually leading to the cessation of menstruation. About 80% of women experience symptoms related to the decline in estrogen levels, such as hot flashes and sleep disturbances. Additionally, the risk of heart and cardiovascular diseases tends to rise during menopause. Menopause is considered early if it occurs before the age of 45.

In a 46-year survey of women born in 1966 in northern Finland, 13% of women were classified as having reached menopause. Data on hormone replacement medication purchases, as well as disability and unemployment days, were collected from the registers of the Social Insurance Institution of Finland (Kela) and the Finnish Center for Pensions. Nearly 2,700 women participated in the study.

Women who had entered menopause by the age of 46 reported a 40% higher likelihood of reduced work capacity compared to the reference group.

Over a two-year follow-up period, menopausal women experienced approximately 9% more disability days and 16% more unemployment days compared to the reference group. In a seven-year follow-up, 5.6% of menopausal women transitioned to disability pension, whereas the corresponding figure in the reference group was 3.3%, signifying a 1.7-fold risk increase.

"For the first time internationally, the study provides population-level

data on the association of early age at menopause with absenteeism from work. In general, very little research has been done on the role of early menopause in terms of labor force participation. Our findings on the risk of both unemployment and disability in these women are therefore significant," says Tiia Saarinen, Doctoral Researcher at the University of Oulu.

The most effective treatment for symptoms caused by estrogen deficiency is [hormone replacement therapy](#). In some countries, such as the United Kingdom, guidelines have been developed for workplaces to support the work capacity of [menopausal women](#) through simple measures.

These may include breaks during work, temperature regulation in workspaces, and adjustments related to work attire. Finland's government program also emphasizes the importance of recognizing [menopausal symptoms](#) and supporting the work capacity of women in this age group.

Provided by University of Oulu

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