

Severe menopause symptoms may take toll on brain health

August 14 2024



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With more than 24 million people globally living with dementia without

a cure in sight, there is a lot of focus on ways to prevent and delay cognitive impairment. A new study suggests that severe menopause symptoms such as hot flashes and depression can negatively affect cognitive function in postmenopausal women.

Study results are published in the article, "Severe menopausal symptoms linked to [cognitive impairment](#): an exploratory study," in *Menopause*.

In conjunction with our aging population, dementia diagnoses are on the rise. It is estimated that 4.6 million new cases are diagnosed every year, which translates into one person being diagnosed with dementia every seven seconds. That means dementia cases are expected to double every 20 years, reaching 81.1 million by 2040.

The good news is that medical experts estimate that 40% of cases of Alzheimer's disease, the most common form of dementia, can be prevented or, at minimum, delayed. Because of this fact, there is a lot of interest in identifying risk factors.

Recent research has focused on the importance of estradiol in female cognitive aging. Because the menopause transition is characterized by a decline in estrogen, [postmenopausal women](#) are at an increased risk of dementia.

A new study involving nearly 1,300 late-postmenopausal women from nine Latin American countries suggests that severe menopause symptoms such as hot flashes, sleep, and mood disturbances were linked with cognitive impairment. Whether effectively treating [hot flashes](#) with [hormone therapy](#) or other approved therapies can help improve cognition in the form of memory, attention, language, and executive function, is unknown.

Based on these results, the researchers concluded that there is intricate interplay between hormonal, lifestyle, and sociodemographic factors involved with cognitive health.

"This study showed a potential link between severe menopause symptoms and cognitive impairment in midlife women. The results also suggest a protective effect of lower body mass index, higher educational level, [physical exercise](#), hormone therapy use, and [sexual activity](#) on cognition, highlighting the potential for targeted interventions to protect and preserve cognitive function in menopausal women," says Dr. Stephanie Faubion, medical director for The Menopause Society.

More information: Severe menopausal symptoms linked to cognitive impairment: an exploratory study, *Menopause* (2024). [DOI: 10.1097/GME:000000000000422](#)

Provided by The North American Menopause Society

Citation: Severe menopause symptoms may take toll on brain health (2024, August 14) retrieved 14 August 2024 from <https://medicalxpress.com/news/2024-08-severe-menopause-symptoms-toll-brain.html>

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