# Dangers of early menopause highlighted

September 11 2007

University of Adelaide research into the problems caused by the early onset of menopause will be among the highlights of the 11th Australasian Menopause Society (AMS) Congress, being held in Adelaide this weekend.

Titled "Never too Young", the Congress will emphasise the significant and negative impact on quality of life caused by the early onset of menopause if it goes unrecognised and untreated.

The Congress will include a public women's health seminar aimed at providing more information to the general community.

About 2% of Australian women have a spontaneous menopause or surgical menopause (removal of the ovaries) before the age of 40, and 15% experience early or premature menopause before the age of 45. The average age of normal menopause is 52.

"Women who experience early menopause are more at risk of depression, low self esteem, negative body image and poor quality of life, including reduced libido," says the President of the AMS, and University of Adelaide Clinical Senior Lecturer in Gynaecology, Dr Alice MacLennan.

"They are also particularly at increased risk of premature heart disease, premature osteoporosis and premature dementia."

Dr MacLennan says modern medicine is now able to offer much help to

women at menopause, especially premature menopause. The main therapy is oestrogen therapy, and new research shows that there are few risks from long-term oestrogen therapy in these age groups and when started soon after menopause under age 60.

"The risks of the non-treatment of premature menopause are much greater than the prescribed therapy," Dr MacLennan says.

Women are more liable to have a premature menopause if they smoke, have ovarian surgery, have a family history of premature menopause or if they have chemotherapy.

Women who have been treated for early breast cancer may suffer severe menopausal symptoms.

"One of the biggest issues is the amount of time a GP is able to spend with a patient undergoing menopause," Dr MacLennan says.

"A great deal of time and care is often needed to ensure that women have the opportunity to ask their doctor questions and talk about issues they may be experiencing. They cannot afford to go untreated."

Source: University of Adelaide

Citation: Dangers of early menopause highlighted (2007, September 11) retrieved 23 April 2024 from https://medicalxpress.com/news/2007-09-dangers-early-menopause-highlighted.html

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