

World Menopause Day

2022



Brain Fog and Memory Difficulties in Menopause



What is Menopausal Brain Fog?

Menopause brain fog is a group of symptoms that happens around the time of the menopause, including difficulty remembering words and numbers, disruptions in daily life (misplacing items like keys), trouble concentrating (absent mindedness, losing a train of thought, being more easily distracted), difficulty switching between tasks, forgetting the reason for doing something (like why you came into a room), and forgetting appointments and events.¹

Research studies find that women's memory does in fact change at menopause, so these complaints are real – it's not in your imagination. Brain fog is normal and common at midlife.^{2,3} These bothersome problems can affect your quality of life. However, they are usually quite mild and will improve post menopause.⁴



WHAT CAUSES BRAIN FOG?

These memory complaints may be caused by rising and falling hormones levels, especially estrogen⁵, and by some menopause symptoms, like the hot flashes, sleep disturbances and mood changes. If you have moderate to severe hot flashes, especially at night, you may find your memory is affected.^{6,7}



Will brain fog and problems lead to dementia in later life?

Women are often concerned that these memory issues are an early symptom of Alzheimer's disease or dementia. However, these issues are very common in midlife women and typically improve with time. All women go through menopause, but most women will not develop dementia. Dementia at midlife is very rare unless you have a family history of early-onset Alzheimer's disease.^{8,9}

What role does menopausal hormone therapy play in my brain health?

Menopausal hormone therapy (MHT) is the most effective way to treat menopausal symptoms.¹⁰ Treating menopausal symptoms with MHT may improve your brain fog. You may be concerned that if you are using MHT to help alleviate hot flashes you may increase your risk for dementia. However, research has shown us that if you are healthy and start your MHT early in menopause it appears to be safe for cognition.¹¹ And, if you are using estrogen therapy alone it seems to be safe even in late menopause for cognitive function. MHT may help your memory problems but is not recommended at any age to treat memory difficulties or prevent cognitive decline or dementia.¹⁰ Treatment with estrogen therapy is advised if you have had an early menopause, or your ovaries have been removed causing a surgical menopause.¹² Discuss the risks and benefits with your healthcare practitioner.

Can I prevent or postpone dementia?

Here's the good news. If you have brain fog at menopause and are concerned about getting late-life dementia, you can postpone or even prevent dementia by staying healthy.^{13,14} We can't change some dementia risk factors - age, female gender and genetic history. On the next page you will find 12 ways to protect your brain.

Twelve ways to protect your brain.

- A healthy heart goes hand in hand with a healthy brain.
- Get regular check-ups - obesity, high blood pressure and diabetes are harmful for brain health.^{15,17}
- Watch your weight with a healthy BMI 18-25 and set a goal to your lower blood pressure to 120 mm Hg18.
- Cut down on starchy, fatty, sugary foods, and eat plenty of fruits and vegetables. A nutritious Mediterranean style diet is easy to follow.¹³
- Engage in regular physical activity - increased cardiovascular fitness decreases risk of dementia.¹⁹
- Break a sweat with a minimum of 150 minutes of moderate-intensity aerobic physical activity weekly.
- A healthy life style includes getting enough sleep, and minimizing stress.
- Stop smoking and drink in moderation.
- Protect your head from injury and try to avoid second-hand tobacco smoke and air pollution.¹⁴
- Challenge and exercise your brain by learning new skills, reading and volunteering.
- Stay connected – social engagement can boost your brain health.²⁰
- Find ways to be part of your local community and share quality time with family and friends.

“Dementia at midlife is very rare so women should be reassured that memory problems in perimenopause are very common and that they typically get better over time.”



Footnotes.

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