



THE NEW SCIENCE & WISDOM OF
MENOPAUSE
ONLINE CONFERENCE / SUMMIT

10 Unexpected Medical Consequences of Perimenopause & Menopause


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Author's Note

From Hollywood stars to social media, people are finally talking about menopause. It's not that the time has come, it's actually way past due. My mom, Annetta "Bunny" Sarna, suffered. I watched and had no idea what it was. I think she had some understanding but it was not thorough and she was not empowered. If only she knew what we know now. This special event The Science and Wisdom of Menopause is dedicated to her memory and your future. My mantra for this summit is "Arrive curious, leave empowered."

Let's go!



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Introduction



Menopause is a natural and inevitable part of life, but it brings with it more than just the common symptoms like hot flashes and mood swings. As research evolves, we're learning about many surprising, lesser-known effects that aren't often discussed but can significantly impact your health.

Understanding these changes helps you prepare for them and make proactive choices that support your well-being.

I want to share topics that your doctor isn't talking about.


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Because even if you have a gynecologist and an obstetrician, you probably don't have a menopause provider to walk you through all these changes!

In this guide, I'll share 10 unexpected medical ramifications of menopause that aren't readily found in popular media. Prepare yourself! These research-based insights shed light on the complex ways menopause can affect your body, and knowing about them is a step toward empowering yourself through this transformative phase. Whether you're currently in menopause or supporting someone who is, this information will help deepen your understanding of what's happening on a physical and emotional level.



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1. Shoulder Pain: A Surprising Menopausal Symptom

Shoulder pain might not be the first thing that comes to mind when thinking about menopause, but it's a common complaint among women going through this transition. A recent study found that menopausal women are more likely to experience shoulder pain – specifically arthralgia or synovitis, even when there's no injury or obvious cause.¹

Hormonal fluctuations, particularly the decline in estrogen, may lead to inflammation in the joints and tendons, causing pain and stiffness. This is part of a broader pattern known as “frozen shoulder,” which tends to affect women during midlife.

Understanding this link can help you take steps to manage shoulder pain effectively. Regular stretching, physical therapy, or gentle yoga can help keep the joints flexible and reduce discomfort. If shoulder pain persists, it's worth consulting a healthcare provider who understands the role menopause plays in musculoskeletal health.



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2. Fibromyalgia Flare-ups

For women who already have fibromyalgia, menopause can make managing the condition even more challenging. One of the less talked about aspects of menopause is how it affects chronic pain conditions like fibromyalgia. Research suggests that estrogen helps regulate pain sensitivity.² When estrogen levels drop, pain can become more intense and widespread. Women often report that fibromyalgia symptoms, including muscle pain and tenderness, become more pronounced during menopause.

The unpredictable nature of fibromyalgia pain, which can move from one part of the body to another, adds another layer of complexity. Working with a provider who understands both menopause and fibromyalgia is key to developing a personalized plan.



To manage these flare-ups, a combination of hormone support, anti-inflammatory diets, and stress-reduction techniques like meditation and gentle exercise can be beneficial.

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3. Declining Vitamin D Levels

(If you learn nothing else, hear me on this.)

Vitamin D is crucial for bone health, immune function, and overall wellness, but during menopause, your body's ability to absorb it diminishes. Estrogen plays a role in the synthesis and activation of vitamin D, so as estrogen levels decline, so do your vitamin D levels.

This is why women in menopause are at a greater risk for vitamin D deficiency, which can lead to bone density loss, osteoporosis, and increased risk of fractures.³

Maintaining adequate vitamin D levels is essential for bone health, especially since post-menopausal women are already at higher risk for osteoporosis. Sunlight exposure, fortified foods, and supplements are key strategies to ensure you're getting enough vitamin D. Regular bone density screenings and working with a healthcare provider to monitor your levels can prevent bone loss and help maintain your overall strength.

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4. Loss of Hearing - Say what?

Are you missing words or full sentences when people talk to you? It could be yet another surprising sign of menopause. Menopause may contribute to hearing loss in ways that aren't fully understood yet (sometimes affected by diabetes mellitus, poor glycemic control, and HbA1c levels)⁴, but studies have suggested that lower estrogen levels can impact the health of the inner ear, leading to reduced hearing. Some women also experience tinnitus (ringing in the ears) during menopause. The exact cause is unclear, but hormonal shifts are believed to play a role in how the brain processes sounds and maintains hearing.

- ✓ If you're noticing changes in your hearing, it's worth discussing with an audiologist who can assess whether menopause is contributing to the issue. In some cases, hormone replacement therapy (HRT) may help alleviate hearing-related symptoms.
- ✓ Ask your menopause provider (if you are lucky enough to have one!) or your PCP of ear nose and throat doctor for more information.



If someone says they feel like your hearing is suffering, don't assume they are wrong. Observers often have a more active awareness of hearing loss in their loved ones than the individual themselves.

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One of the more concerning and often overlooked consequences of menopause is the impact it has on cholesterol levels – and in fact, the entire metabolic profile.⁵ Research shows that as estrogen levels decline, LDL (bad) cholesterol levels tend to rise, while HDL (good) cholesterol levels drop. This shift can increase the risk of heart disease, which is already the leading cause of death for women. Estrogen has a protective effect on the cardiovascular system, so losing that protection can lead to heightened cholesterol levels and greater vulnerability to heart-related issues. It's important to monitor your cholesterol levels more closely during and after menopause.

5. Rising Cholesterol Levels

Regular blood tests, dietary changes, and, if necessary, medications can help manage your cholesterol. Eating a heart-healthy diet rich in fiber, healthy fats, and antioxidants, along with regular physical activity, are critical steps to reduce your risk of cardiovascular issues during menopause.



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6. Dry Eyes:


Menopause's Effect on Vision

Menopause doesn't just affect your skin—it can also impact your eyes. The decrease in estrogen production can lead to dry eye syndrome, where your body produces fewer tears, leaving your eyes dry, itchy, and irritated. This can cause discomfort, blurry vision, and make it difficult to wear contact lenses. Dry eyes might seem like a minor issue, but if left untreated, they can lead to more serious eye problems such as infections or damage to the cornea.

For menopausal women, Dry Eye Disease can be common due to changes in sex hormones like estrogens and androgens, which affect tear film.⁶

If you're experiencing dry eyes, artificial tears, and lubricating eye drops can provide relief. Omega-3s, found in foods like walnuts, are also known to support eye health and reduce inflammation. Staying hydrated and using a humidifier in dry environments can further help alleviate symptoms. An eye exam can determine if you're dealing with dry eye syndrome and whether additional treatments like prescription drops or special contact lenses are needed.



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7. Thinning Hair and Changes in Hair Texture

Hair thinning is a distressing but common side effect of menopause – both density and growth are often affected.⁷ Estrogen and progesterone help keep hair healthy and promote growth, so when these hormones decrease, hair tends to thin out, become brittle, and even change in texture. Many women notice that their hair becomes more dry, coarse, or thinner during menopause, particularly around the crown of the head.

To combat hair loss, it's important to nourish your body from the inside out. A balanced diet rich in proteins, vitamins, and minerals like biotin, zinc, and iron can help support hair health. Additionally, there are over-the-counter treatments, like minoxidil, that can stimulate hair growth. (Use the 5% that is marketed to men!)

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8. Increased Risk of Gum Disease

I bet you didn't think you'd be talking to your dentist about hormonal changes! Your oral health can also take a hit during menopause, which is another surprising warning sign to watch for. Research shows that women are more likely to develop gum disease during and after menopause due to reduced estrogen levels⁸. Estrogen helps maintain healthy blood flow to the gums and supports the overall health of the oral cavity. When estrogen declines, gums may become inflamed, bleed more easily, and be more susceptible to infections and gum disease. Left untreated, gum disease can lead to tooth loss and other serious health issues.

Maintaining excellent oral hygiene is critical during this time (check out one of my favorite biological dentists and tooth care products: Gerry Curatola and his Revitin toothpaste). Regular brushing, flossing, and routine dental checkups can help keep gum disease at bay.



If you notice any signs of gum inflammation, it's important to address them early with your dentist. Adding calcium-rich foods and vitamin D to your diet can also help support oral health.

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9. Balance Problems


As hormones shift during menopause, many women experience changes in balance and an increased risk of dizziness. These balance issues may be caused by changes in the inner ear or the vestibular system, both of which are sensitive to estrogen levels. Loss of balance can increase the risk of falls and injuries, making it critical to stay mindful of your body's changing needs during this time.

Incorporating balance exercises into your routine can help maintain your stability. Activities like yoga, Pilates, or Tai Chi strengthen your core muscles and improve balance, reducing your risk of falls.

- ✓ Harvard Medical School even recommends tai chi during menopause (stating there's an added 20-40% reduction in falls with people who practice regularly).¹⁰
- ✓ Staying physically active and engaging in weight-bearing exercises are also great ways to keep your bones and muscles strong, which contributes to overall stability.



Weightlifting into middle age can be a wonderful way to combat balance issues and maintain a healthy body!

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10. Dysregulated Gut Microbiome

Recent research from the REIMAGINE (Revealing the Entire Intestinal Microbiota and its Associations with the Genetic, Immunologic, and Neuroendocrine Ecosystem) study has provided new insights into how menopause affects the gut microbiome, particularly in the small intestine. Unlike previous studies that focused on fecal samples, REIMAGINE examined the duodenal microbiome in postmenopausal women, revealing significant shifts in microbial populations that may impact metabolism, inflammation, and overall health.

So your gut health is just as important as you age! This study highlights the need for a more comprehensive understanding of how menopause influences gut health, beyond the limitations of stool samples, to better support women during this life stage.¹¹



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I want to be clear – Menopause is a natural and inevitable stage of life, and it's one that I'd like to celebrate.

It's a sign that we're aging—and we should celebrate that because, as they say, aging beats the alternative! For many, menopause brings symptoms like hot flashes and mood swings, but this isn't the story for everyone. Be on the lookout for these surprising signs you could be approaching menopause. Whether or not you experience these changes, someone you know—be it a mother, sister, or friend—is going through or will go through menopause.


The symptoms can be depressing and even scary, but we are learning about this to turn the despair into hope. We are giving real scientific solutions. If you're interested in learning more, tune into the Science and Wisdom of Menopause Summit.



Let's get educated.

Let's get empowered!

Let's shift our perspective and knowledge about this natural process. The more we understand, the better equipped we are to support both ourselves and those we love. The journey through menopause doesn't mean you need to be "rescued." You're not sending up a flare—this isn't an emergency. You're stepping into a new phase, rich with wisdom that only comes with time.

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