



Memory and menopause

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Often one of the most distressing and disruptive symptoms that women describe when experiencing the perimenopause and menopause is brain fog. This term is used to describe feelings of confusion, forgetfulness, and lack of mental clarity. Women can experience difficulties with concentration, memory, and overall cognitive function which can make life more challenging and lead to loss of confidence, at work and at home. This is thought to be caused by hormonal changes, particularly declining levels of oestrogen. Lack of sleep, sometimes due to hot flushes and sweats at night, and stress can make this even worse.

These symptoms are common and typically improve over time even without any specific treatment, but can be concerning and some women fear that they are developing dementia. This is very unlikely without a family history of early onset Alzheimer's disease and most women can be reassured that what they are experiencing is normal and transient.

HRT is an effective way to treat menopausal symptoms generally, and may also improve brain fog, although it is not recommended specifically to treat memory problems or prevent dementia, unless you have had a premature menopause. Suppressing hot flushes and sweats and improving sleep quality can help with cognitive function. There has been some concern about HRT increasing the risk of developing dementia, but research has shown us that if you are healthy and start HRT early in menopause it appears to be safe in this respect, and oestrogen only HRT (which is suitable for some women without a uterus) appears to be safe even in older women.

Risk factors for dementia that we cannot control include age, female gender and family history, but a healthy lifestyle with a good diet, exercise, maintenance of a healthy weight and avoiding smoking and excessive alcohol consumption can all help.

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