There is More to Perimenopause than Hot Flashes

A new study among U.S. women ages 35-plus explores awareness of and experiences with perimenopause

It’s time to bring the conversation about how women age out of the dark. In particular, more discussion is needed about the impact of hormonal changes that can result from aging. Women deserve a better understanding of the transition to menopause and to feel empowered to advocate for themselves by discussing it with their healthcare providers and others. By normalizing this topic, women will be more informed and better able to make healthcare decisions in their best interest. Together, increased knowledge and access to more products may help women live more freely and comfortably as they age.

Most women ages 35 and older might not know the range of conditions they may be experiencing are, in fact, associated with a decline in hormone levels as they age.

The stigma surrounding the transition to menopause, coupled with women not knowing enough about it and some health care providers being reluctant or unequipped to discuss the topic, often prevents open dialogue and leaves women feeling negatively towards and unprepared for this life stage. When presented with a list of 28 conditions that can result from a decline in hormones due to aging, roughly 1 in 6 women (16%) ages 35-plus did not know any of these.

Perimenopause is the transition to menopause and for some women it can last up to 8 years and start in their early to mid-30s.

On average, women ages 35-plus experience six symptoms often related to perimenopause.
conditions could be related to hormonal changes related to aging. While 84% knew at least one condition listed could be related to decline in hormones that can result from aging, only 7% of women ages 35-plus understood the potential link to hormones for all 28 conditions.

While most women ages 35-plus are aware of commonly known symptoms like hot flashes (63%), weight gain (62%), vaginal dryness (59%), nights sweats (59%), and reduced libido (56%), many other symptoms that can be associated with declining hormone levels go unrecognized as such.

For example, only one in eight (13%) recognize burning tongue and one in five (21%) recognize tingling extremities as possible symptoms of perimenopause. While these symptoms are less commonly experienced, women reaching this transitional stage should be able to turn to trustworthy resources and be able to discuss each symptom that can possibly be associated with their unique experience of perimenopause so they can address them properly.

Women want more information on and discussion about the effects of declining hormone levels.

More needs to be done to inform women about the impact of hormonal changes which come with aging as less than one in five (18%) women ages 35-plus currently feel very informed. Perhaps only those women who are experiencing perimenopausal symptoms are compelled to search for information or have discussions about it, but the wide knowledge gaps observed among all ages indicates an overarching lack of education and preparedness.
Nearly six in ten (57%) women ages 35-plus feel hormonal changes are not discussed enough. More conversation is desired about both physical (58%) and mental (61%) impacts. However, not all women are reaching out to others or even seeking information on their own. For example, many people may assume a woman’s mother (or mother figure) is the most common source of information about bodily changes. But, as it turns out, discussions with mothers (25%) come in last after doctors (45%), friends (41%), and other relatives (28%). Black women (35%) ages 35-plus are more likely than their white (24%) and Latina (23%) counterparts to speak with their mothers or mother figures about the impact of declining hormone levels on a woman’s body as she ages, although it is only roughly a third of them who do so. Regardless of the conversation partner, fewer than four in ten women have found the experience very helpful (38% doctor or other health care provider; 31% mother or mother figure; 25% relative other than mother; 23% friend). This highlights the need for encouraging more as well as deeper discussions.

Women experiencing changes due to hormonal level decline are under-resourced when it comes time to address these changes.

The most common response to addressing symptoms of perimenopause and menopause is to do nothing. In fact, nearly half (46%) of women ages 35-plus who have experienced changes in their body that may be symptoms of perimenopause or menopause have not taken any steps in response.

**Low Awareness**

Physical Changes due to Perimenopause by Age Group

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Women 35+</th>
<th>Women 35-49</th>
<th>Women 50+</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Burning Tongue</td>
<td>13%</td>
<td>21%</td>
<td>15%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tingling Extremities</td>
<td>25%</td>
<td>23%</td>
<td>26%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Itchy/Crawly Skin</td>
<td>29%</td>
<td>32%</td>
<td>27%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Heart Palpitations</td>
<td>31%</td>
<td>36%</td>
<td>27%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Acne</td>
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Nearly half of women ages 35-plus say they have done nothing in response to symptoms of perimenopause and/or menopause.

Typical comments when women are asked what they have done in response to changes in their body are:

*Nothing, I think it is normal (Age 35-39)*

*Nothing, just getting older (Age 40-49)*

*Nothing, I just figure it’s all part of menopause (Age 50-59)*

*Nothing, let nature take its course (Age 60-69)*

*Nothing, just think lots of things are due to getting older (Age 70+)*
However, some women do take action. Of those who have experienced conditions that are symptomatic of perimenopause or menopause, nearly a fifth (18%) have spoken with a doctor or other health care provider. Just over a fifth (21%) have made a lifestyle change such as increasing physical activity and/or improving their diet. Close to a quarter (23%) have taken medication, hormone replacements, vitamins or supplements, and/or applied external applications like creams, moisturizers, and patches.

### People With Whom Women Discuss Their Transition to Menopause by Age Group

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Age Group</th>
<th>Doctor or Other Health Care Provider</th>
<th>Friend</th>
<th>Other Relative</th>
<th>Mother</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Women 35+</td>
<td>45%</td>
<td>41%</td>
<td>28%</td>
<td>25%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Women 35-49</td>
<td>36%</td>
<td>35%</td>
<td>26%</td>
<td>31%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Women 50+</td>
<td>51%</td>
<td>45%</td>
<td>28%</td>
<td>22%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Implications

- Women need to have access to meaningful, relevant, and useful information about the transition to menopause.
- Not just women experiencing symptoms, but society as a whole, needs to have more awareness around what perimenopause is and what to expect in order for the conversation – and stigma – to change. With more knowledge and feeling more comfortable talking openly about it, misconceptions can be corrected, resources can be made available, products and services can be developed, and more support for women can be put in place.
- If menopause is brought out of the shadows, women may more boldly inquire and share information about their own experiences with aging and hormone decline, thus improving their quality of life.

### Methodology

A survey was fielded among 1,400 women ages 35-plus in the U.S. from September 24 to October 4, 2020 via Dynata, a non-probability online panel. Data were weighted by age, Census region, race/ethnicity, income, and marital status to be representative of women ages 35-plus in the U.S.