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**Contact:**

The Menopause Society

Ella Adams ([eadams@fallsandco.com](mailto:eadams@fallsandco.com))

Phone: (216) 696-0229

**Abdominal Obesity May Lead to More Severe Menopause Symptoms**

*New study based on data from the Study of Women's Health Across the Nation suggests abdominal obesity can lead to more severe forgetfulness, irritability, and night sweats*

CLEVELAND, Ohio (May 6, 2026)—Weight gain during menopause is common, with abdominal obesity being especially common and unhealthy. A new study based on data from the Study of Women's Health Across the Nation (SWAN) found that, in addition to its adverse physical health effects, abdominal obesity can increase the severity of multiple menopause symptoms, including forgetfulness, irritability, and night sweats. Results are published online today in *Menopause*, the journal of The Menopause Society.

Abdominal obesity, which is estimated to affect more than 60% of menopausal women, is especially unhealthy because it represents a buildup of visceral fat, which is deep, active fat surrounding internal organs. This fat releases inflammatory proteins and toxic fatty acids that cause insulin resistance, cardiovascular disease, high blood pressure, and increased risk for certain cancers. As estrogen levels drop during menopause, women tend to store more fat around the waist rather than the hips, even if their overall weight doesn't change.

Despite regional variations in both obesity patterns (eg, higher rates in the Americas vs Asia) and menopause symptom burden (eg, more severe hot flashes in African women), research on the effect of abdominal obesity on these symptoms remains scarce. Moreover, prior research has predominantly examined isolated symptoms, thereby overlooking complex interrelationships among symptoms (eg, the interconnections among hot flashes, anxiety, sleep disturbances, and depression).

Network analysis, which looks at how symptoms are interconnected, is gaining traction in the medical field. In this latest study involving data from more than 1,100 women who participated in SWAN, researchers applied network analysis to compare symptom network structures between women with and without abdominal obesity. They identified abdominal obesity based on waist-to-height ratios.

Based on the results, the researchers concluded that women with abdominal obesity exhibit both a higher prevalence and greater severity of a variety of symptoms, as well as a distinct symptom network structure.

The network of symptoms differed by abdominal obesity status. In particular, women with abdominal obesity reported a higher prevalence and severity of dizziness, hot flashes, and night sweats compared with women with nonabdominal obesity. Other symptoms such as sleep disturbances and palpitations were reported more frequently in women with abdominal obesity.

As a result of these observed differences, the researchers suggest that an assessment of abdominal obesity using waist-to-height ratios may help stratify women who are likely to benefit from targeted, network-based interventions over isolated symptom management.

Study results are published in the article “Menopausal symptom network differences between women with and without waist-to-height ratio-defined abdominal obesity.”

“Unintended weight gain during the menopause transition, especially in the midsection, is one of the most commonly reported complaints, with the most significant gains experienced in the years leading up to the final menstrual period and a couple of years after. This not only affects self-image but also imposes negative health risks and, as the study highlights, is associated with higher prevalence and severity of menopause symptoms. Educating women early about healthy lifestyle interventions to prevent midlife weight gain is key to improving mental and physical well-being during a tumultuous time frame,” says Dr. Monica Christmas, associate medical director for The Menopause Society.

For more information about menopause and healthy aging, visit [www.menopause.org](http://www.menopause.org).

*The Menopause Society is dedicated to empowering healthcare professionals and providing them with the tools and resources to improve the health of women during the menopause transition and beyond. As the leading authority on menopause since 1989, the nonprofit, multidisciplinary organization serves as the independent, evidence-based resource for healthcare professionals, researchers, the media, and the public and leads the conversation about improving women’s health and healthcare experiences. To learn more, visit [menopause.org](http://menopause.org).*