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Shorter Menstrual Cycles May Indicate Earlier Menopause and Worse Symptoms

New study finds that women with menstrual cycles of fewer than 25 days during their reproductive years had a higher frequency of total menopause symptoms and an earlier age of natural menopause

CLEVELAND, Ohio (August 24, 2022)—Since menopause symptoms can significantly affect a woman’s quality of life, much research has focused on identifying risk factors associated with menopause symptoms. A new study suggests that menstrual-cycle length may predict the severity of menopause symptoms, as well as the age at menopause. Study results are published online today in *Menopause*, the journal of The North American Menopause Society (NAMS).

The menopause transition is often accompanied by symptoms such as hot flashes, depression and anxiety, cognitive changes, and disturbances of sleep duration and quality. Traditional risk factors for menopause symptoms include demographic (age and ethnicity) and several modifiable lifestyle factors such as body mass index (BMI), smoking, and physical activity.

Emerging data suggest that reproductive traits and conditions during reproductive age may be associated with menopause symptoms, although study results are contradictory. For example, compared with postmenopausal women with regular menstrual-cycle lengths, a history of irregular cycles was associated with reduced late-life depressive symptoms in Chinese and higher severe depressive symptoms in French postmenopausal women.

Researchers in this new study involving more than 600 women sought to investigate the extent to which self-reported menstrual-cycle length during the reproductive years is associated with menopause symptoms in midlife women. Compared with women with normal menstrual-cycle length (26-34 days), those with short menstrual cycles (≤ 25 days) during their reproductive years had a higher frequency of total menopause symptoms as well as certain menopause symptoms at midlife and reached menopause earlier. Specifically, women with short menstrual cycles had higher odds of midlife sleep problems, heart discomfort, and depressive symptoms. In addition, these same women had higher prepregnancy BMI.

Because of the limited literature on this topic, the researchers suggest that further studies are warranted, especially studies that separately evaluate women with usual cycle lengths of fewer than 21 days.

Study results are published in the article “Self-reported menstrual cycle length during reproductive years in relation to menopausal symptoms at midlife in Project Viva.”

“The menstrual cycle is a biologic marker of overall health. This study finds that a shorter menstrual-cycle length during a woman’s reproductive years is a window into her future midlife health. It will be

important to validate these findings and understand the potential mechanism involved,” says Dr. Chrisandra Shufelt, NAMS president.

The authors of this study have prepared a video that can be viewed at <http://links.lww.com/MENO/B3>.

For more information about menopause and healthy aging, visit www.menopause.org.

Founded in 1989, The North American Menopause Society (NAMS) is North America’s leading nonprofit organization dedicated to promoting the health and quality of life of all women during midlife and beyond through an understanding of menopause and healthy aging. Its multidisciplinary membership of 2,000 leaders in the field—including clinical and basic science experts from medicine, nursing, sociology, psychology, nutrition, anthropology, epidemiology, pharmacy, and education—makes NAMS uniquely qualified to serve as the definitive resource for health professionals and the public for accurate, unbiased information about menopause and healthy aging. To learn more about NAMS, visit www.menopause.org.