

As menopause symptoms get worse, heart may pay a price

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(HealthDay)—There could be a link between the severity of a woman's

menopausal symptoms and her risk of heart disease, a new study suggests.

While the research couldn't prove cause-and-effect, it's "yet another important study which highlights gender-specific risk factors for [heart disease](#)," said Dr. Rachel Bond. She directs women's heart health at Lenox Hill Hospital in New York City.

Bond wasn't involved in the new research, but she said it should "encourage physicians to take a more thorough history of [menopausal] symptoms," to help prevent heart issues.

The study was led by Kerrie Moreau of the University of Colorado School of Medicine, in Aurora. Her team tracked outcomes for 138 menopausal women in order to compare mood, menopause symptoms and quality of life with key markers of "vascular aging"— the condition of aging [blood vessels](#).

In all stages of menopause, artery stiffening and dysfunction of blood vessels were each associated with more frequent and severe menopause symptoms among women, as well as a lower quality of life.

While prior studies found a strong link between "[hot flashes](#)" and increased risk of heart disease and death, this study found that the frequency, but not the severity, of hot flashes was specifically associated with greater arterial stiffening and blood vessel dysfunction.

Dr. Jill Rabin helps direct Women's Health Programs at Northwell Health in New Hyde Park, N.Y. Reading over the findings, she said that they weren't surprising, given the role of estrogen in [heart health](#).

The hormone "is a powerful antioxidant and mediator of vascular health through its effect on [another hormone] serotonin, which helps regulate

our temperature controls, nerves and cardiovascular system," Rabin explained.

She believes that declines in estrogen during menopause might account for the changes in heart risks. Therefore, "hot flashes may provide an actual mirror of women's vascular risk," Rabin reasoned.

But she stressed that heart disease isn't inevitable for anyone.

"A healthy lifestyle and exploring these issues with your physician can help reduce a woman's personal risk of [heart disease](#)," Rabin said.

Hormone replacement therapy is another option, Bond noted, but its links to certain cancers and even stroke mean it should be used judiciously.

"It would be a difficult clinical decision whether or not to treat these symptoms of menopause with [hormone replacement therapy](#), as these come with their own significant side effects and risks," Bond said.

The study was published online April 11 in *Menopause*, the journal of the North American Menopause Society.

More information: Rachel Bond, M.D., associate director, Women's Heart Health, Lenox Hill Hospital, New York City; Jill Rabin, M.D., co-chief, division of ambulatory care, Women's Health Programs-PCAP Services, Northwell Health, New Hyde Park, N.Y.; North American Menopause Society, news release, April 11, 2018

The U.S. National Institute on Aging has more about [menopause](#).

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