Midlife women transitioning to menopause have a higher risk of metabolic syndrome

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Midlife women transitioning to menopause may be able to lower their risk of developing heart disease and type 2 diabetes, if they exercise more or eat a lower calorie diet, according to a new study published in the Endocrine Society's *Journal of Clinical Endocrinology & Metabolism*.

Metabolic syndrome describes a cluster of risk factors that increase the chances of developing heart disease, stroke, and diabetes. The exact cause of metabolic syndrome is not known but genetic factors, too much body fat, and lack of exercise can add to its development. According to recent data, one in five Americans has metabolic syndrome. These patients are diagnosed when they have three or more of these risk factors: large amount of abdominal body fat, low ("good") cholesterol, high levels of fat in the blood, high blood pressure, and high blood glucose.

"Previous studies have largely focused on cardiovascular disease and type 2 diabetes in postmenopausal women. This study is unique because it focuses on an earlier stage in women's lives, the menopausal transition in midlife, to potentially prevent such diseases from occurring," said lead study author Jennifer S. Lee, M.D., Ph.D., Associate Professor of Medicine, Stanford Medical Center and the Veteran Affairs Palo Alto Health Care System in Stanford, Calif. "Discovering which modifiable factors like physical activity and a lower calorie diet are more common in midlife women who recover from metabolic syndrome, in this study, could better inform what preventive strategies to consider in women earlier in their lives."

In the prospective, multi-ethnic cohort study, researchers studied 3,003 (1412 non-Hispanic White, 851 Black, 272 Japanese, 237 Hispanic, 231 Chinese) midlife women undergoing the transition to menopause. They identified patterns of cardiometabolic risk and found central obesity to be the most common factor for causing metabolic syndrome. They also found that lifestyle changes like more physical activity and a lower calorie diet could help patients recover from metabolic syndrome. Additionally, physically active women in the study were less likely to get incident metabolic syndrome than inactive women.

More information: The study, Patterns of Cardiometabolic Health as Midlife Women Transition to Menopause: A Prospective Multi-Ethnic Study," will be published online, ahead of print.

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