

The memory changes of menopause

September 2 2021, by Kelsie Smith Hayduk

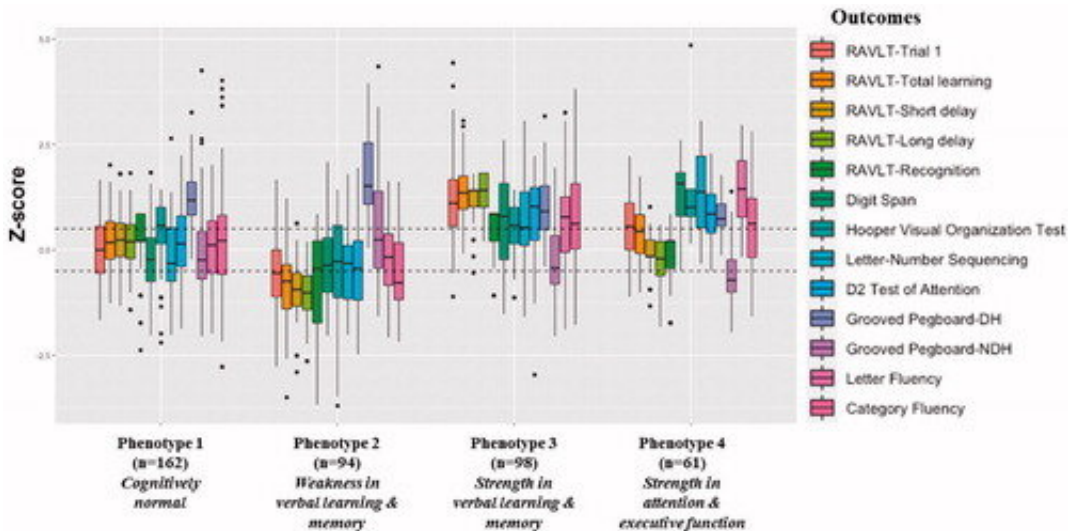


Figure 1. Multilevel latent profile analysis in perimenopausal women. DH, dominant hand; NDH, non-dominant hand; RAVLT, Rey Auditory Verbal Learning Test. Credit: DOI: 10.1080/13697137.2021.1892626

Menopause can mess with your memory, and a new study from the University of Rochester Medical Center has identified four profiles of cognitive function that may help researchers understand why memory declines for some women and not others. This adds to the mounting evidence of the memory changes that can happen when menopause approaches and could lead to better guidance and treatment for patients experiencing memory issues.

"If we understand what goes on cognitively for [women](#) during this time,

we can help normalize the experience," said Miriam Weber, Ph.D., associate professor of Neurology and Obstetrics and Gynecology who is the first author of the study published in the journal *Climacteric*.

Menopause symptoms can include memory issues

Researchers collected data from 85 [women ages](#) 40–60 who were approaching or at the beginning of menopause. Women self-reported [menopausal symptoms](#), had [hormone levels](#) measured, and took cognitive tests biannually for up to nine years. The data led investigators to identify four profiles of cognitive function a woman may experience: normal cognition, weakness in verbal learning and memory (the ability to learn new information and retain it over time), strength in verbal learning and memory, and strength in attention and executive function (the ability to multitask).

"This profile analysis could help identify populations that are at risk and enable us to perform prompt interventions," said Weber. "This may also give us insight into future diagnosis—for example, who may be more likely to develop Alzheimer's disease in the future. We know that women are most at risk for the disease, and knowing how cognition is impacted at this stage may help us identify who is at an increased risk of cognitive decline in later life."

Researchers found that women experiencing a strength profile (strength in either verbal learning and memory or attention and executive function) had fewer depressive symptoms and hot flashes, while those experiencing cognitive weakness reported more sleep disturbances and symptoms of depression.

Weber's previous work found that some women approaching [menopause](#) experienced declines in working [memory](#)—the ability to take in new information and manipulate it in their heads, and a woman's ability to

keep and focus attention on a challenging task. But these declines were not directly linked to hormones, according to Weber's studies.

"Rather than just saying what the normative experience is for everyone, we're sort of saying can we see these different profiles and then what are some of the things that are associated with each—either risk for worse cognitive performance or resilience. But some are doing better than we might expect during a time when many people experience declines."

More information: M. T. Weber et al, Cognitive profiles in perimenopause: hormonal and menopausal symptom correlates, *Climacteric* (2021). [DOI: 10.1080/13697137.2021.1892626](https://doi.org/10.1080/13697137.2021.1892626)

Provided by University of Rochester Medical Center

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