

Is Alzheimer's in women an estrogen problem?



Ever caught yourself having to stop in mid-sentence to find that “word” you want?

What happens next seems to be long, blank gap in time and space before it surfaces. Women who go on to develop dementia and Alzheimer's have a greater problem with word-finding than men.

Women in perimenopause may begin to experience word-finding difficulties, because of a drop in estrogen. Women who are fearful that this is a sign of aging leading to dementia and Alzheimer's often seek hormone replacement therapy.

Dr. Anita H. Clayton, professor of psychiatric medicine, University of Virginia, Charlottesville, advocates that **hormone replacement therapy has not been proven effective to address this type of memory problem.** According to Dr. Clayton,

“... many women who complain to their physician of memory problems do not have deficits in recent memory consistent with dementia, while patients with dementia usually do not perceive any problems with their own memory.”

In addition to its role in reproduction, estrogen helps to support memory and cognitive skills by moving nutrients and oxygen efficiently throughout the vascular system. It provides protection from heart disease and strokes. And, it acts to inhibit the growth of beta amyloid, which later appears as part of the plaque found in the neuron cells of those with Alzheimer's.

As estrogen loss occurs, problems arise in regulating blood flow within

tiny blood vessels causing cell deterioration in the brain.

However, the vascular network is a complex multi-tiered system. Doctors have observed that despite cell deterioration the vascular network naturally adjusts to a different means of maintenance over time. This has caused doctors to reconsider using estrogen based hormone replacement. Replacement may be interfering with the body's own natural mechanism to adjust and subsequently cause more harm than good.

There even has been a study suggesting an increase in the risk of dementia with hormone replacement therapy (unable to verify the source of this original study).

As yet, research is inconclusive as to the relationship between dementia/Alzheimer's and estrogen levels and whether estrogen-based hormone treatment is an effective option.

While men and women may differ in their symptoms, the decrease in estrogen in menopausal women is not sufficient to explain the higher incidence of dementia/Alzheimer's in women.

If you find yourself at that age where there's a gap in time and space for finding that right word, **relax.**

Know that your brain's tiny blood vessel will need some time to readjust, and know that there are other things you can do to keep your brain in good working order.