

Research allows doctors to predict menopause symptoms

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(Medical Xpress) -- Doctors could soon be able to predict the type and duration of menopausal symptoms an individual woman is likely to experience thanks to new findings from The University of Queensland (UQ).

Working in collaboration with the UK Medical Research Council, the UQ research team expects the discoveries will allow doctors to give patients more details on the symptoms they experience leading up to menopause, as well as an idea of their likely duration after menopause.

The research team, led by Professor Gita Mishra from UQ's School of [Population Health](#), found that the severity and range of health symptoms experienced through midlife formed into groups and distinct patterns, but only some of these, such as vasomotor symptoms (hot flushes and cold or night sweats) were related to the timing of the menopause.

"Women who experienced only minimal symptoms before their last period were unlikely to develop severe symptoms later, while for others the timing of symptoms relative to menopause was key to understanding the likely duration of their symptoms," Professor Mishra said.

The UK study used annual surveys from more than 600 women with natural menopause to identify four groups of symptoms: psychological (eg. anxiety and depression), somatic (eg. headaches and joint pain), vasomotor (eg. [hot flushes](#) and night sweats), and sexual discomfort. Women who had undergone hormone treatment or hysterectomies were excluded from the study.

Researchers found that by examining the timing and severity of symptoms, they were able to classify women according to different profiles for each group of symptoms. For instance, with some women the severity of vasomotor symptoms increased leading up to [menopause](#) and then

tended to decline, while for others whose vasomotor symptoms started and peaked later, symptoms were likely to last four years or more into postmenopause.

The UK study also found that women with higher education levels and social class were less likely to experience [vasomotor symptoms](#) than other women.

The UQ study was based on multiple surveys of mid-age women from the Australian Longitudinal Study on Women's Health. Professor Mishra said that she was reassured that, in spite of differences in the surveys used, both studies had identified similar groups and profiles for the severity of symptoms experienced through the menopausal transition.

"While we would still like to see findings from other studies, we do think that symptom profiles are part of a move towards a more tailored approach - where health professionals can make a clearer assessment of what [women](#) can expect based on their history of [symptoms](#) - and this may be worthwhile not only in terms of reassurance but in selecting treatment options."

More information: The UK study is published in the *BMJ* (GD Mishra, Kuh D. 'Health symptoms during midlife in relation to menopausal transition: British prospective cohort study. 344:e402).

The UQ study is published in *Menopause* (Mishra GD, Dobson AJ 'Using longitudinal profiles to characterize women's symptoms through midlife: results from a large prospective study.' PMID: 22198658).

Provided by University of Queensland

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