

# Menopause symptoms nearly double the risk of chronic pain

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In addition to the other health conditions affected by estrogen, it has also been shown to affect pain sensitivity. This finding was the basis of a study of more than 200,000 records from the Veterans Health Administration that demonstrated a link between menopause symptoms and chronic pain. Study results are published online today in *Menopause, the journal of The North American Menopause Society (NAMS)*.

Women are more likely than men to report common chronic pain conditions such as back pain, fibromyalgia, arthritis, and osteoarthritis. Women with these conditions additionally report greater pain severity and pain-related disability than their male counterparts. Although the causes of chronic pain risk are not well understood, it has been documented that the risk for common conditions that cause or exacerbate pain is highest in midlife women, when estrogen levels are fluctuating and women are entering perimenopause or postmenopause.

Common changes related to menopause and aging include [weight gain](#) and decreased physical activity, which can contribute to chronic pain morbidity, as can impaired sleep and negative mood, which are also known to affect symptom sensitivity and pain tolerance.

In this latest large-scale study of women veterans, researchers hypothesized that even after accounting for age and other known risk factors, menopause symptoms would be associated with increased odds of diagnosed chronic pain and chronic pain morbidity. What the study showed was that women with a higher menopause symptom burden may

be the most vulnerable for chronic pain. More specifically, women with [menopause symptoms](#) had nearly twice the chance of having chronic pain and multiple chronic pain diagnoses.

Study results appear in the article "Menopause symptoms and chronic pain in a national sample of midlife [women](#) veterans."

"Changing levels of hormones around menopause have complex interactions with pain modulation and [pain sensitivity](#), which may be associated with vulnerability to either the development or exacerbation of pain conditions," says Dr. JoAnn Pinkerton, NAMS executive director. "This study suggests that menopause symptom burden may also be related to [chronic pain](#) experience."

**More information:** Carolyn J. Gibson et al, Menopause symptoms and chronic pain in a national sample of midlife women veterans, *Menopause* (2019). [DOI: 10.1097/GME.0000000000001312](https://doi.org/10.1097/GME.0000000000001312)

Provided by The North American Menopause Society

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