Is Menopause Shrinking Your Brain? An OB-GYN Explains the Truth! Transcript

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Your Brain Is Changing During Menopause

I want to share with I want to share with you a statistic that shocked me shocked me when I first when I first learned about it in learned about it in medical school. Women medical school. Women account for nearly two- account for nearly two- thirds of thirds of Alzheimer's cases Alzheimer's cases in the United States.

in the United States. Not because we live Not because we live longer, and not because of our longer, and not because of our genetics, but because of what genetics, but because of what happens to happens to our brains during our brains during menopause. Literally, menopause. Literally, menopause accelerates menopause accelerates this transition. And this transition. And no one talks about it.

So today I'm going So today I'm going to tell you what exactly to tell you what exactly happens to your happens to your brain during brain during menopause and why it menopause and why it matters when you matters when you take action. How take action. How can can can Alzheimer's disease be prevented?

Alzheimer's disease be prevented? How can brain- How can brain- related problems be prevented related problems be prevented? So I want to? So I want to look at hormones, look at hormones, lifestyle, and lifestyle, and all sorts of tips that will all sorts of tips that will help you help you protect your brain protect your brain for the long for the long term. Hi, term. Hi, I'm Dr. Jennifer I'm Dr.

Estrogen: Your Brainu2019s Maintenance Crew

Jennifer Rollins, an Rollins, an integrative obstetrician -gynecologist, and this is one -gynecologist, and this is one of my most important of my most important videos. As someone who videos. As someone who carries the APOE4 gene, which carries the APOE4 gene, which puts you at three times puts you at three times the risk of the risk of Alzheimer's, I want Alzheimer's, I want women to know that this is women to know that this is incredibly important, incredibly important, and you can make a difference and you can make a difference long before long before symptoms appear.

symptoms appear. Most people Most people think of estrogen think of estrogen simply as a simply as a simply as a reproductive reproductive reproductive hormone. Pregnancy, hormone. Pregnancy, menstruation, menstruation, menstruation, menopause—that's the context in which it is most often most often mentioned. But in mentioned. But in your brain, your brain, estrogen estrogen estrogen receptors are everywhere. In receptors are everywhere. In the part that allows you the part that allows you to remember things, to remember things, and in the part that processes the and in the part that processes the information you hear. And information you hear. And most women are most women are not told by doctors that not told by doctors that estrogen estrogen estrogen receptors are scattered receptors are scattered throughout the brain.

throughout the brain. The simplest way The simplest way to explain this is to say to explain this is to say that estrogen is like a " repair crew" repair crew" for your brain. It for your brain. It supports supports supports the vital activity of the vital activity of the vital activity of your nerve your nerve cells. He protects cells. He protects them. It ensures them.

Why Brain Fog Happens

It ensures their interaction with each their interaction with each other. Thanks to this, other. Thanks to this, you have a better memory, you have a better memory, faster thinking, and faster thinking, and overall your brain works overall your brain works efficiently. It efficiently. It helps remove helps remove so-called sticky so-called sticky amyloid plaques, which amyloid plaques, which accumulate over accumulate over time and are associated with time and are associated with Alzheimer's disease. When. When estrogen levels begin to estrogen levels begin to fluctuate and fluctuate and decline during decline during perimenopause, the perimenopause, the repair repair

repair crew is disrupted. Connections become. Connections become weaker, weaker, weaker, energy efficiency changes, and energy efficiency changes, and the brain literally the brain literally shrinks in volume.

shrinks in volume. That's when women That's when women start complaining start complaining about "head fog." about "head fog." They can't They can't find the right find the right word. They know word. They know it, but it seems to be it, but it seems to be slipping away and it is slipping away and it is impossible to find it.

impossible to find it.

Or: "What was the name of that

The Truth About Hormone Therapy & Dementia

Or: "What was the name of that guy I guy I went to high went to high school with?" Why can't I school with?" Why can't I remember this? Where did I remember this? Where did I put my keys?

put my keys? This is not just a sign of This is not just a sign of aging. It's not because of aging. It's not because of stress. These are real, stress. These are real, measurable measurable measurable biological changes biological changes occurring in occurring in your brain.

your brain. Estrogen no longer Estrogen no longer acts on estrogen acts on estrogen receptors. So, receptors. So, your your your thinking speed and your thinking speed and your nerves are not nerves are not properly protected. This properly protected. This anti-inflammatory anti-inflammatory anti-inflammatory property of property of property of estrogen does not work.

estrogen does not work. In the United States, In the United States, two-thirds of two-thirds of Alzheimer's cases Alzheimer's cases occur in women. occur in women.

For a long time, medicine For a long time, medicine believed that this was because believed that this was because we were simply living we were simply living longer. But longer. But research is pointing research is pointing to something new, and to something new, and thanks to Dr. Lisa thanks to Dr. Lisa Mosconi, we know that certain certain changes occur in the brain during the transition to menopause. You may have changes occur in the brain during the transition to menopause. You may have heard that hormone heard that hormone therapy increases the therapy increases the risk of dementia. This risk of dementia. This claim claim claim came after came after a study in the a study in the early 2000s early 2000s that attracted that attracted huge attention and huge attention and scared a whole scared a whole generation of women and generation of women and doctors away from hormones—it was the was the Women's Health Initiative. I've.

The Critical Window for Brain Protection

I've talked about this several times before, talked about this several times before, especially in my especially in my video "The video "The Doctor's Guide to Doctor's Guide to Hormone Hormone Hormone Replacement Therapy." Replacement Therapy." But I want to address But I want to address this issue this issue directly, directly, directly, because the story is much more because the story is much more complicated than what complicated than what was written in the headlines.

was written in the headlines. The women in that The women in that study were an study were an average of 65 years old average of 65 years old when they started when they started hormone therapy.

hormone therapy. Most of them were Most of them were well beyond that well beyond that 10-year period, 10-year period, long past long past menopause, and they menopause, and they were using a were using a were using a form of estrogen that form of estrogen that we hardly we hardly use now. This is not use now. This is not the type we the type we prescribe. It prescribe. It was made from was made from horse urine. We horse urine. We rarely rarely rarely prescribe it.

prescribe it. We mostly prescribe We mostly prescribe bioidentical bioidentical bioidentical estradiol. When estradiol. When researchers study researchers study women who started women who started taking hormones taking hormones during perimenopause during perimenopause or within the first 10 or within the first 10 years after years after menopause, the picture menopause, the picture looks very looks very different. A large different. A large analysis of analysis of over 11,000 women over 11,000 women showed that those who showed that those who used used used hormone therapy hormone therapy during this window—we during this window—we sometimes call it the sometimes call it the “critical window”—had a significantly lower risk of developing Alzheimer’s disease.

significantly lower risk of developing Alzheimer’s disease. The strongest effect The strongest effect was observed in was observed in women who started women who started therapy before menopause.

therapy before menopause.

Progesterone, Sleep & Brain Health

They started early, They started early, using using using estradiol, a estradiol, a bioidentical form of bioidentical form of estrogen. Scientists estrogen. Scientists call this the call this the critical window. And critical window. And if you're in your 40s if you're in your 40s or early or early 50s now and you're watching this 50s now and you're watching this video, let's video, let's talk about how talk about how it actually it actually helps with helps with hormones. If you hormones. If you experience “ experience “ brain fog,” have trouble sleeping, have, have mood swings, a family mood swings, a family history of history of Alzheimer’s, or Alzheimer’s, or are a carrier of the APOE4 gene or are a carrier of the APOE4 gene or other genetic other genetic variants for variants for Alzheimer’s, Alzheimer’s, Alzheimer’s, hormone therapy is a serious topic is a serious topic to discuss with your to discuss with your doctor, not a reason doctor, not a reason to be afraid.

to be afraid. Studies Studies Studies confirm that this confirm that this helps protect the brain. helps protect the brain. It's an anti-inflammatory It's an anti-inflammatory for your for your brain. And it doesn't matter whether brain. And it doesn't matter whether we're talking about a we're talking about a patch, gel, spray, patch, gel, spray, or pills—they all or pills—they all have a positive have a positive effect. Just effect.

Why Strength Training Protects Your Brain

Just remember: if you remember: if you take estrogen and take estrogen and you have a uterus, you you have a uterus, you need to take need to take progesterone to progesterone to support it. The earlier support it. The earlier in the transition period, the better. The data the better. The data supports that supports that perimenopause and perimenopause and even this first 10- year window are year window are crucial. But that does crucial. But that does n't mean you can't n't mean you can't get it get it if you're if you're outside that window. It's outside that window. It's just a conversation just a conversation you need to have you need to have with your doctor with your doctor to know if you're at to know if you're at increased risk increased risk based on other based on other factors, like factors, like cardiovascular cardiovascular cardiovascular risks, and whether hormones are right for you at all. This is hormones are right for you at all. This is also very important.

also very important. Some women Some women choose not choose not to take hormones. But to take hormones. But I also want to I also want to talk about talk about progesterone because it progesterone because it helps you sleep.

helps you sleep. So while you sleep, So while you sleep, your brain is actually your brain is actually cleaning out that sticky cleaning out that sticky residue and basically residue and basically rebooting itself every rebooting itself every rebooting itself every night. So when night.

Blood Sugar & Alzheimeru2019s Risk

So when perimenopause or perimenopause or menopause disrupts menopause disrupts your sleep, your brain your sleep, your brain loses its nightly loses its nightly cleansing cycle, and that's cleansing cycle, and that's very,

very important.

very, very important. Protecting your sleep is Protecting your sleep is protecting your brain. protecting your brain. Another thing that Another thing that helps is strength helps is strength training. Not light training. Not light activity, but activity, but real real real muscle strain muscle strain two to three times a two to three times a week. Lifting week. Lifting weights increases weights increases the production of a substance the production of a substance that acts as fertilizer that acts as fertilizer for your neurons.

for your neurons. Research suggests that if women are consistent in middle that if women are consistent in middle age age age and and and develop strong develop strong muscles and stability, they will have an, they will have an overall reduced overall reduced risk of risk of brain disease. Finally, I want to brain disease. Finally, I want to mention mention mention blood sugar control. There is blood sugar control. There is a lot of a lot of new research emerging new research emerging that elevated that elevated blood sugar levels blood sugar levels or insulin or insulin or insulin resistance resistance resistance in diabetes in diabetes increase the risk of increase the risk of Alzheimer's disease, Alzheimer's disease, and it's related to and it's related to how the brain processes how the brain processes insulin.

insulin. insulin.

How Chronic Stress Affects Your Brain

Low glycemic Low glycemic index foods, more index foods, more protein, and avoiding protein, and avoiding sugar spikes sugar spikes will protect will protect your brain's energy. Finally, I know I already said this is the last point, but—, but— stress management. Chronic stress management. Chronic stress stress stress literally shrinks the literally shrinks the memory center of your memory center of your brain over time. I know we brain over time. I know we never want to never want to deal with stressful deal with stressful things, but it is very things, but it is very important that you important that you rest, walk, rest, walk, do breathing do breathing exercises, and sleep.

exercises, and sleep. Treat it like Treat it like medicine, because it medicine, because it is medicine. That's what I is medicine. That's what I want to leave you with want to leave you with today. The today. The brain changes that brain changes that occur during occur during perimenopause and perimenopause and menopause are real.

menopause are real. It's not in your head. It's not in your head. These are literal changes. These are literal changes.

Your Brain Changes Are Real

Your brain Your brain is shrinking. Your is shrinking. Your energy energy energy efficiency efficiency efficiency is changing. The choices is changing. The choices you make now, you make now, at 40-50, matter at 40-50, matter more than what you will more than what you will make in make in ten years. You are not ten years. You are not going crazy. You are going crazy. You are going through a going through a hormonal shift hormonal shift that medicine that medicine has paid too little has paid too little attention to for decades. And now you attention to for decades. And now you know what know what to pay attention to and what to to pay attention to and what to ask about. If ask about. If you want to you want to dive deeper into dive deeper into hormone therapy, hormone therapy, watch my video watch my video "A Doctor's Guide to "A Doctor's Guide to Hormone Hormone Hormone