

Healthcare Seeking Behavior Among Peri-and Post-Menopausal Women: Results from the US Population-Based MEPI Study

Rachel E Williams, PhD¹, Dana Britt DiBenedetti, PhD², Xiaolei Zhou, MS², Sheri E. Fehnel, PhD², Richard V Clark, MD, PhD¹

¹GlaxoSmithKline, Research Triangle Park, NC. ²RTI-Health Solutions, Research Triangle Park, NC

Introduction

Few population-based studies have investigated healthcare practices, the prevalence of use of prescription medications and alternative therapy in association with menopausal symptoms.^{1,2} Most of the data available are based on the experiences of women who seek help for advice and symptom relief from healthcare providers.³ The Menopause Epidemiology (MEPI) Study, a large population-based survey, was used to estimate prevalence and impact of menopausal symptoms, and healthcare seeking among women 40-65 years old in the United States (US).

Methods

- The MEPI study is a cross-sectional population-based study of women 40-65 years old in the United States.
- Participants were selected from a panel that is based on random digit dialing and probability sampling (Knowledge Networks). Web-TV was provided for panelists without existing Internet service.
- The questionnaire was administered via the Internet in April 2005.
- For the purposes of this study,
 - Pre-menopausal = monthly periods for the past 12 months
 - Peri-menopausal = having at least one period in the past 12 months, but not every month.
 - Post-menopausal = no periods in the past 12 months.
- Women were asked about healthcare seeking in the past 12 months and about current medications used for menopausal symptoms.

Results

Figure 1. Study Population

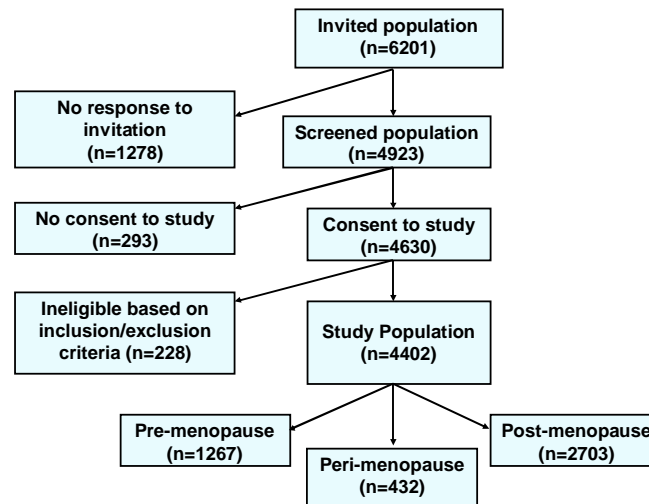


Table 1. Comparison of MEPI Study population with US population, women 40-65 years old

	MEPI Study (n=4402) %	US CPS* %
Age (years)		
40-49	39	48
50-59	40	37
60-65	21	15
Race/ethnicity		
White, non-Hispanic	78	75
Black, non-Hispanic	11	12
Hispanic and Other	11	13
Education		
Some college or higher	55	54
High School or lower	45	46

* US CPS = US Current Population Survey¹

Table 2. Women 40-65 years old who talked to a healthcare professional about menopausal symptoms in the past 12 months

	Peri-menopausal (n=432) %	Post-menopausal (n=2703) %
Ever seen doctor or healthcare professional for treatment of menopausal symptoms	47	62
Gynecology	30	40
General or Family Practice	23	32
Internal Medicine	5	8
Other	3	4
Menopausal symptoms discussed with doctor or other health care professional		
Hot flashes	24	19
Night sweats	19	14
Difficulty sleeping	17	12
Feeling tired or worn out	13	10
Weight gain	14	9
Aching in muscles or joints	8	9
Feeling down, depressed or blue	10	7
Feeling anxious or nervous	10	7
Lack of energy	10	7
Vaginal dryness	8	7
Headaches or migraines	9	6
Aches in back of neck or head	7	6
Low backache	7	5
Poor memory	7	5
Decrease in sexual desire	8	5

References

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2. Avis NE, McKinlay SM. Health-care utilization among mid-aged women. *Ann N Y Acad Sci*. 1990;592:228-38; discussion 257-62.
3. Xu J, Bartoces M, Neale AV, Dailey RK, Northrup J, Schwartz KL. Natural history of menopause symptoms in primary care patients: A MetroNet study. *J Am Board Fam Pract*. 2005;18:374-382.4.
4. US current population survey (CPS) february 2002. Accessed at: <http://www.bls.census.gov/cps/cpsmain.htm>. May 2005.

Table 3. Types of medication used in 2005 at time of study.

	Peri-menopausal (n=432) %	Post-menopausal (n=2703) %
Current Medication		
Hormone therapy (oral, patch or cream)	19	41
Vaginal lubricant	18	22
Current Herbal Supplements		
Black cohosh	7	3
Soy	9	5
St. John's Wort	1	2
Estroven®	5	2
Ginseng	2	2
Flax seed	3	4
Evening primrose oil	3	2
Dong quai, red clover, kava, wild yam, licorice, Hawthorn, flax hull lignans, geranium, motherwort	≤2	≤2
Current Alternative Therapy		
Exercise	29	25
Change in diet	17	11
Relaxation exercise or stress reduction techniques	11	9
Counseling or psychotherapy	5	4
Massage therapy	4	4

Conclusions

- The MEPI study is a large US Survey that is representative of the US population, as compared to the US CPS.
- Gynecology, General Practice, and Family Practice were the specialist that women talked to most often about their menopausal symptoms.
- Vasomotor symptoms, symptoms associated with energy and sleep (sleeping, being tired or worn out, lack of energy), weight gain, mental health (feeling depressed, down or blue, feeling anxious or nervous, poor memory), and vaginal dryness were some of the most common symptoms discussed with healthcare providers.
- Women are using a variety of medications to treat their menopausal symptoms, including prescriptions, over-the-counter supplements, herbal supplements, and alternative therapy.
- In conclusion, a large proportion of women are actively seeking health care and treatment of menopausal symptoms.