

Research Round Up

September 2026 | Menopause + Brain

The Sage & Serenity Research Roundup brings you the latest menopause research in plain language, helping you understand what scientists are discovering about hormones, symptoms, brain health, movement, nutrition, sleep and more.

This Month's Research

1. Earlier menopause was associated with faster cognitive decline

A September 18 report in JAMA highlighted new research examining approximately 2,600 women followed for up to 18 years.

Researchers found that an earlier age at menopause was associated with:

- faster decline in global cognition
- faster decline in episodic memory
- earlier onset of Alzheimer's disease
- greater accumulation of white-matter hyperintensities among women who experienced spontaneous menopause

For women with spontaneous menopause, researchers estimated that being five years younger at menopause was associated with approximately 15% more white-matter hyper intensity volume over 10 years.

What this means for you

This doesn't mean that having an earlier menopause means you will develop dementia. Rather, the study adds to evidence that the timing of menopause may be one factor associated with long-term brain health. It reinforces the importance of thinking about menopause as part of a broader midlife brain-health conversation, rather than treating brain fog as something women simply have to put up with.

Read the article: <https://jamanetwork.com/journals/jama/fullarticle/2854426>

2. Researchers are taking a closer look at hormone therapy and the brain

A fascinating September study published in Scientific Reports investigated whether a particular hormone combination could improve cognitive symptoms associated with menopause. The study involved 20 menopausal women who received a combination of estriol and progesterone for 12 months. This was a very small case series—not a randomized controlled trial. There was no placebo group, no dose randomization and only 20 women were studied.

Participants reported improvements in:

- brain fog
- concentration
- working memory
- processing speed
- verbal memory
- problem solving

The researchers also conducted experiments in female mice to investigate possible biological mechanisms involving estrogen receptors, astrocytes, and the hippocampus.

The researchers themselves describe the findings as preliminary and call for further investigation. So this is interesting science but it is not yet a reason to prescribe this treatment for brain fog.

What this means for you

We're learning more about the relationship between estrogen, brain energy metabolism and cognitive symptoms.

It also highlights something important:

Not all hormone therapies, or all outcomes should be lumped together.

The type of hormone, dose, timing, route of administration, age and individual health history may all matter.

Read the article: <https://www.nature.com/articles/s41598-026-65603-4>

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3. New research challenges the idea that menopause simply means “brain shrinkage”

A September study in Nature Communications compared brain changes during three major hormonal transitions: **puberty → pregnancy → menopause**

Using longitudinal neuroimaging data, researchers found that menopause showed a different structural pattern from puberty and pregnancy.

In particular, women transitioning through menopause did not show the same pattern of cortical volume reduction observed during puberty and pregnancy. The researchers described menopause as a qualitatively distinct pattern of brain remodeling.

The female brain isn't simply sitting there unchanged until menopause and then suddenly deteriorating. Rather, the brain is dynamic and responsive to hormonal transitions throughout life. That gives us a much more nuanced way of talking about menopause and the brain.

What this means for you

Menopause is a biological transition—not a sign that your brain is simply “shrinking” or failing.

This research adds to our understanding that the brain is dynamic and can adapt and remodel in response to hormonal changes. That's an important distinction, especially when symptoms like brain fog, forgetfulness or difficulty concentrating can feel unsettling. Brain changes during menopause are complex, and researchers are continuing to explore how hormones, sleep, stress, cardiovascular health, movement and other factors interact.

You don't need to fear your menopause brain. You can support it. Think movement, nourishing food, quality sleep, stress regulation, social connection and continued learning—all pieces of the bigger picture of brain health.

Read the article: <https://www.nature.com/articles/s41467-026-76755-2>

4. Researchers are calling for menopause to be taken more seriously in neurological health

A new Nature Reviews Neurology roadmap published in August, with the September issue, argues that menopause remains under-recognized in discussions of neurological health.

The authors highlight that approximately two-thirds of women experience cognitive concerns during the menopause transition and that earlier menopause has been associated with greater cognitive decline.

At the same time, they emphasize that we still have major gaps in our understanding of exactly how menopause influences later neurological disease.

What Does This Mean for You?

If you're experiencing brain fog, forgetfulness, difficulty concentrating or feeling like your brain just isn't working the way it used to, you're not alone—and these symptoms deserve to be taken seriously. The research doesn't mean that cognitive changes during menopause are inevitable or that they will lead to neurological disease. In fact, researchers are still working to understand the relationship between menopause, cognitive symptoms and long-term brain health.

Consider menopause as an opportunity to take a closer look at your overall brain health: Notice changes, prioritize sleep, keep moving, manage stress, nourish your brain, and talk to your healthcare provider.

Read the article: <https://www.nature.com/articles/s41582-026-01244-5>
