



## Review

# Health issues for menopausal women: The top 11 conditions have common solutions



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## ABSTRACT

Multiple health issues affect women throughout the life course differently from men, or do not affect men at all. Although attention to women's health is important in all stages in life, health among middle-aged and elderly women has not received sufficient attention by scientists and policy-makers. Related to the menopausal transition and the experiences accumulated until that age, many diseases occur or further develop in middle-aged and elderly women. To improve women's quality of life and guarantee a long-lasting and active role for middle-aged and elderly women in society, prevention of chronic diseases and disability is a key aspect.

In this manuscript we give an overview of the major health issues for peri- and post-menopausal women, we summarize risk factors and interventions to improve menopausal health. Based on the available scientific literature and the global burden of disease endeavor, we have selected and herein describe the following top 11 key health issues, selected in terms of burden exerted in women's mortality, morbidity, disability and quality of life: cardiovascular disease, musculoskeletal disorders, cancer, cognitive decline and dementia, chronic obstructive pulmonary disease, diabetes mellitus, metabolic syndrome, depression, vasomotor symptoms, sleep disturbances and migraine.

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## Contents

1. Introduction .....	25
2. Major health issues for menopausal women.....	25
3. Cardiovascular disease: number one cause of mortality and morbidity.....	26
4. Musculoskeletal disorders: the burden increases with age.....	26
5. Cancer in middle-aged and elderly women .....	27
6. Cognitive decline and dementia.....	27
7. Chronic respiratory disease .....	27
8. Diabetes.....	27
9. Understanding metabolic health .....	27
10. Depressive disorders .....	28
11. Vasomotor symptoms or hot flashes.....	28
12. Menopause raises the risk of sleep disturbances .....	28
13. Migraine affects women throughout life .....	28
14. Multimorbidity and frailty .....	28
15. Common solutions: lifestyle and nutrition .....	28

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Contributors .....	29
Competing interests .....	29
Funding .....	29
Provenance and peer review .....	29
References .....	29

## 1. Introduction

Although specific attention to women's health is important in all stages in life, health in middle-aged and elderly women (50+ years) is of particular interest in life course health research. Related to menopause and the experiences accumulated until that age, many diseases occur or develop in middle-aged and elderly women. On average, women live 6–8 years longer than men [1]. Considering the increase in the prevalence of various health issues with advancing age, women constitute a greater proportion of older people suffering disability. Based on the Global Burden of Diseases 2010 study, the difference between life expectancy and healthy life expectancy is 11.5 years for females [2]. To improve women's quality of life and guarantee a long-lasting and active role for elderly women in the society, prevention of chronic diseases and disability is a key aspect.

In the present review, we aim to give an overview of the key health issues, risk factors and care approaches for women during and after menopause.

## 2. Major health issues for menopausal women

Middle-aged and elderly women may experience a variety of disorders leading to death or hampering their quality of life. According to the Global Burden of Diseases [3], the top causes of death in women in developed countries worldwide are cardiovascular diseases (CVDs; including ischemic heart disease and stroke), cancer, chronic obstructive pulmonary disease (COPD), and diabetes (Table 1). Disease prevalence differs between women aged 50–69 and women aged over 70. Notably, the top 5 causes of death for women aged 50–69 has not changed since 1990.

All these diseases cause disability at different levels. Table 2 displays disabling diseases presented by years of life lived with disability (YLD) and by disability adjusted life years (DALY). Musculoskeletal diseases, cancer, CVD, diabetes, COPD, Alzheimer's diseases and depression are identified in the top list of disabling diseases in both age groups. The top 5 diseases presented by DALY for both age groups and for YLD for women aged 50–69 has not changed since 1990, only the order of the diseases has changed.

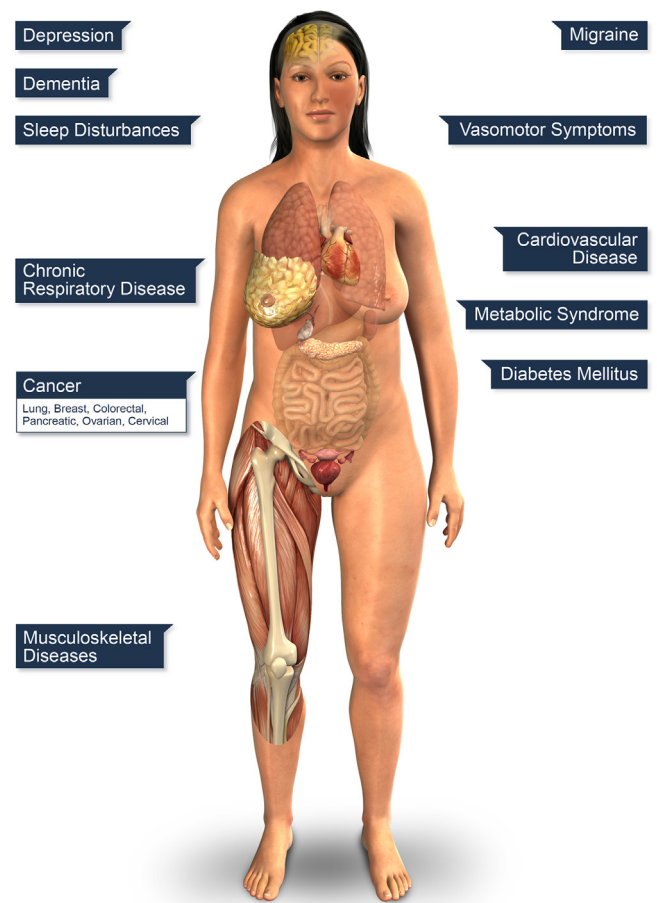
**Table 1**

Top causes of death (presented in descending order) in developed countries globally for women aged 50–69 years and women aged over 70 years, according to the Global Burden of Disease Study in 2010.

Causes of death	
50–69 years	70+ years
Ischemic heart disease	Ischemic heart disease
Stroke	Stroke
Breast cancer	Alzheimer's disease
Lung cancer	Lower respiratory infections
Colorectal cancer	COPD
Cirrhosis	Other cardiological and circulatory diseases
COPD	Colorectal cancer
Ovarian cancer	Hypertensive heart disease
Diabetes	Lung cancer
Pancreatic cancer	Diabetes
Stomach cancer	Breast cancer
Cervical cancer	Chronic kidney disease

A wide variety of conditions have been studied in peri- and postmenopausal women. A systematic search in PubMed (July 2013) revealed that in line with the Global Burden of Diseases findings, the most frequently studied conditions were CVD (including coronary heart disease – CHD, hypertension and stroke), cancer and depression. Although not part of the top 10 causes of death or disability in the Global Burden of Disease study, vasomotor symptoms but also osteoporosis were often studied in peri- and postmenopausal women. Other frequently studied diseases found in PubMed were body weight change, type 2 diabetes mellitus (DM), metabolic syndrome (MetS), sleep disturbances and urogenital symptoms. Less frequently mentioned in the literature were cognitive decline and dementia and migraine. COPD and respiratory infections were not found to be extensively studied in (post)menopausal women.

Based on the available scientific literature and the Global Burden of Disease study, we selected the following top eleven major health issues in peri- and postmenopausal women to be discussed in this review (Fig. 1): CVD, musculoskeletal diseases, cancer, dementia, chronic respiratory disease, diabetes, MetS, depression, vasomotor symptoms or hot flashes, sleep disturbances and migraine.



**Fig. 1.** “Metawoman”: top eleven major health issues in peri- and postmenopausal women.

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