

Oral discomfort: An often overlooked symptom of menopause?

Sir,

Menopause in women is a physiological state that gives rise to adaptive changes at both the systemic and oral level. Menopause literally means “without estrogen” and by definition, it is the time at which cyclic ovarian function, as manifested by menstruation ceases.^[1]

Earlier reports on the various oral manifestations of menopause emphasized on the cytological studies of the oral mucosa and gingiva of postmenopausal women and reported tissue changes.^[2,3] Additional studies, later supported correlations between estrogen deficiency and oral changes seen during menopause.^[4,5] Women may demonstrate menopausal gingivostomatitis and the clinical signs of this disease such as drying of the oral tissues, abnormal paleness of the gingival tissues, redness and bleeding on probing and brushing.^[6]

The most significant problem that develops during menopause is osteoporosis.^[4] The incidence of periodontitis also correlates with signs of generalized osteoporosis.^[6] One of the major oral problems in these patients is burning mouth syndrome. Menopause plays an important role in the incidence of glossodynia.^[7]

Other less common menopause-associated symptoms include bad or altered taste, viscous saliva and mucosal disorders such as lichen planus, benign mucosal pemphigoid and Sjogren’s syndrome.^[8] Postmenopausal women have decreased unstimulated and stimulated submandibular and sublingual salivary gland flow compared with premenopausal women; a finding unrelated to any medication effect.^[9] A significant reduction in sucrose perception and palatal sensitivity in postmenopausal women is also noted.^[10]

Research on interventions and treatments for diseases with differing prevalence in women, including diseases of the oral system, should be considered a priority in women’s health research.^[11] Physicians caring for postmenopausal women should be vigilant and encourage their patients to seek regular dental

evaluation for prevention and early management of oral disorders.

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