



Thank you again for joining us for the Swedish Women's Wellness Series on Cognitive and Mental Wellness

The Swedish Women's Wellness Virtual Series promotes our vision of the Women's Wellness and Specialty GYN Services at Swedish. This program will provide every woman coordinated care that meets her unique needs now, and in the future, with a focus on prevention, menopause, sexual health and healthy aging.

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Located at Swedish First Hill

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Veronika Zantop, M.D.

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In general, how do hormone changes play into the shifts we see in mental and cognitive wellness as we age?

Dr. Dunsmoor-Su shared that hormonal transition in women are typically the times of highest symptoms (commonly sleep disturbances, stress, anxiety, depression, weight gain, hot flashes or night sweats, or others). The absolute values of hormones in your system may change and result in less estrogen or progesterone, but often the increase in symptoms come from your brain responding to the hormone change itself. There's a period where the brain re-calibrates and adjusts to the change which often alleviates those symptoms.

Can you speak on perimenopause and menopause and the impact it has on emotional wellness?

Dr. Zantop shared that some women are more vulnerable to changes in hormones than others, particularly if they have a history of depression and anxiety. However, there's a high percentage of women who experience their first episode of major depression disorder during postpartum or menopause.

Estrogen has a neuroprotective and antidepressant effect on the brain, so when estrogen is withdrawn, the neurotransmitter system is impacted. The neurotransmitter serotonin is responsible for depression, sleep, and many other important things. Those changes are reflected throughout different areas of the brain such as the amygdala, which is the emotional center of the brain, and the hippocampus which is responsible for memory.

Dr. Zantop also emphasized that research is finding that although depression is more understood in postpartum and menopausal women, anxiety is more common. Particularly in menopausal women, anxiety could show up as several things, including indecisiveness, irritability and anger, sleep disturbances, restlessness, and heightened sensitivity to external stimuli like sound, light, or people.

Are these changes permanent? Does Hormone Replacement Therapy (HRT) help?

Dr. Dunsmoor-Su reassures that for most women, the cognitive and emotional changes they face as hormones change in menopause are not permanent. In the short

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term, HRT can improve a lot of associated symptoms such as mood, sleep, and cognitive function. HRT's long-term benefits are less widely understood, in part due to the complexity of the question.

When should a woman see a specialist in brain health? Are there particular signs we should be looking for that we attribute to menopause?

Neurodegenerative conditions like Alzheimer's and dementia are of huge concern to many women as they age. If a woman is experiencing persistent cognitive challenges that are impacting her day-to-day life, Dr. Isenberg recommends they be seen in the women's brain health clinic at Swedish for evaluation.

However, Dr. Isenberg shared that with early prevention over the course of a lifetime, 40% of dementia cases are preventable. She stressed the importance of coordinated care to identify different areas of health that providers can intervene in, such as diet, mental health, and brain health along with overall wellness. Dr. Isenberg shared a new program coming to the Women's Wellness specialty clinic at Swedish called HOME: Holistic Optimism and Mindfulness Engagement. Through HOME, this evidence-based wellness program utilizes lifestyle medicine and coordinated care across providers to promote healthy aging for women.

How does mental health play into cognitive change? When is it time to see a psychiatrist or therapist for evaluation?

Mental health support is critical for women going through the menopausal cycle, particularly as rates of depression and anxiety increase for many women. Dr. Zantop urges women to be screened for depression, which can have a snowball effect on other menopause symptoms like poor sleep and impacted cognitive ability.

As a psychiatrist, Dr. Zantop explained her role in treating mental health conditions as a psychiatrist are threefold. First, medication management can be utilized to support the re-calibration of a woman's neurotransmitters as their levels naturally change in menopause. Secondly,

psychiatrists can identify if a medication a patient is currently taking could be causing more harm than good.

Lastly, women can discuss their experience and feel like they aren't alone. Menopause isn't often publicly discussed, and there is a strong tendency in our culture to de-value women as they age. Dr. Zantop and other psychiatrists can be a great source of emotional support outside of a woman's personal support network, which is also critical.

What are the Seven Habits of Healthy Aging?

In her practice, Dr. Isenberg utilizes an evidence-based concept of holistic wellness to intervene and support women as they age, called the Seven Habits of Healthy Aging. They are:

1. Intentionally cultivate a positive outlook. This promotes plasticity in the brain and is neuroprotective, particularly shielding against the toxicity of ageism.
2. Eat healthy. The Mediterranean and low-salt diet has been shown to hold numerous health benefits as people age, which was shown in another study to cut the risk of Alzheimer's by over half.
3. Exercise, both strength training and aerobic. Hormones released in muscles during exercise are neuroprotective and help to increase overall cognitive function and mood.
4. Restful sleep. Regularly getting seven or more hours of sleep per night not only helps to consolidate memory and restore health, but to also clear out protein aggregates that accumulate in neurodegenerative diseases.
5. Social connection. A positive support network is critical to support overall wellbeing.
6. Lifelong learning. Continually learning helps to strengthen concentration and awareness, which is key in cognitive health.
7. Limit harmful substances, and harmful practices like criticism and negative self-talk.

The program for Women's Wellness is supported through donations from our community. Contributions will help to create educational programs and materials, build out clinical services and address research needs to provide women with knowledge to navigate their healthcare while providing the highest level of care.

To view this webinar, along with others in the series, please visit: <https://swedishfoundation.org/VE/womenswellness>

If you are interested in supporting the creation of a comprehensive healthcare continuum for all women, please contact Lorna Kneeland, (206) 215-2217 or lorna.kneeland@swedish.org.

For additional information and to donate to the Women's Wellness and Gyn-Specialty Services, please visit our website at: <https://swedishfoundation.org/women-health#women's-wellness>