

Counseling Points

Counseling Women with MS in Middle Age and the Postmenopausal Years

- People with MS are living longer and remaining active in their later years. Currently, one-quarter of people with MS are adults over age 60. About half of all women with MS are postmenopausal.
- Studies of sex hormones (such as estrogen) in MS are still in their early stages, but there may be potential in the future to use hormones like estriol or progesterone as part of MS treatment.
- For most women with MS, menopause appears to be associated with worsening MS symptoms. For those who are candidates for hormone replacement therapy (HRT), this treatment may help improve symptoms and overall functioning for some.
- Should postmenopausal women with MS discontinue disease-modifying therapy (DMT)? Data are still limited, but many MS care providers will advise patients to stay on therapy if it is well tolerated and appears to be helping control disease activity. There is no particular cut-off age, so this is an individual decision for the patient and healthcare provider.
- Age-related changes in health may affect the course of MS. Brain atrophy is one way to measure brain changes in progressive MS.

However, brain atrophy is not a useful way to judge how an individual person is doing over time. This MRI finding is mainly useful in studies involving large numbers of people with MS.

- As a woman ages, it is essential that she keep up with other aspects of health: bone density screening, mammograms for breast cancer screening, and recommended vaccinations.
- Other serious health conditions can co-occur with MS and increase as a person ages. High blood pressure and/or cholesterol, diabetes, and heart and lung diseases are examples. Maintaining regular exercise and a healthy diet can reduce the risk and severity of some of these conditions.
- Changing priorities of postmenopausal women may affect MS care. They may no longer be raising young children, but many have retired, gone on disability, or cut back on work. In general, women with MS have a desire to stay active and independent as they age.
- Overall, studies have shown that women aging with MS are highly resilient in coping with challenges of their condition. Staying active socially and involved in the community are major factors that help women cope.