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Menopause-related cognitive symptoms: impact on brain structure

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Menopause is associated with increasing cognitive complaints and older women are at increased risk of developing Alzheimer's disease compared to men. One proposed reason for this reduced cognitive performance is the loss of estrogen following the menopause transition. However, there is difficulty in delineating effects of age and estrogen loss in samples of aging women. To account for this difficulty, the present study looked at the impact of subjective cognitive complaints on the cortical structure in a sample of younger postmenopausal women. We chose to focus on subjective cognitive complaints, as they are more sensitive at younger ages compared to objective measures. Forty-four postmenopausal women aged between 50 and 60 years, completed a series of subjective measures of cognitive complaints and postmenopausal symptoms, as well as objective cognitive tests of verbal episodic and working memory, and also had a structural MRI scan. The results of the study showed that increasing levels of cognitive complaints were associated with lower gray-matter volume in the right medial temporal lobe. The findings of the present study indicate that endorsed cognitive complaints may represent cortical dysfunction and may indicate increased risk for cognitive decline.

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