Estrogen Drop Affects Peripheral Vasculature

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ORLANDO, Fla. — Declining estrogen levels during late perimenopause and postmenopause substantially affect the peripheral vasculature, recent study data suggest.

Specifically, lower estrogen levels during these periods were associated with larger common carotid artery (CCA) adventitial diameter, Rachel P. Wildman, Ph.D., reported at an international conference on women, heart disease, and stroke.

This can be problematic, because greater baseline dilation limits the future ability to dilate and compensate for adverse conditions such as increased blood pressure, explained Dr. Wildman of Tu- lane University, New Orleans.

In 377 white and African American women from the Pittsburgh and Chicago sites of the Study of Women’s Health Across the Nation (SWAN), an ongoing multienthic, multisite longitudinal study of the menopausal transition, the cross- sectional relationship between the CCA adventitial diameter and both menopausal status and sex hormones was assessed.

Artery diameter was measured using B-mode, grayscale, and harmonic imaging. Evaluations included levels of estrogen, testosterone, FSH, sex hormone binding globulin, the free androgen index, testosterone not bound by sex hormone binding globulin, and androgen excess.

The women had a mean age of 50 years, and 149 were in late perimenopause or postmenopause. These women, compared with those in pre- or early perimenopause, had significantly higher total and LDL cho- lesterol, lower HDL cholesterol, lower es- trogen levels, and lower levels of androgen excess.

CCA adventitial diameter in the late perimenopausal and postmenopausal women were significantly larger overall, compared with those in pre- or early perimenopause (6.84 mm vs. 6.70 mm), but the differences appeared to be limited to those with higher baseline cholesterol levels.

As for the relationship between sex hor- mones and CCA adventitial diameter, only decreased estrogen levels were significantly associated with increased diameters, but in the subset of patients with systolic blood pressure (SBP) greater than 130, decreased estrogen levels were also strongly associated with larger diameter.

The findings suggest that the menopausal transition, with its accompanying decrease in estrogen levels is associated with decreased vascular tone, and it appears that women with higher cholesterol and blood pressure are at the greatest risk, she said.

Follow-up data in the SWAN participants are being collected by the investiga- tors for further evaluation of these inter- actions.

New Immigrants Less Likely to Undergo Pap Test

WASHINGTON — Foreign-born women living in the United States were significantly less likely to have had a Pap test within the past 3 years, compared with American-born women, Xu Wang, M.D., and colleagues reported in a poster presented at the annual meeting of the American College of Preventive Medicine.

Immigration status was associated with lower Pap test use independently of poverty, lack of insurance, and lack of a regular source of medical care, noted Dr. Wang and associates of Meharry Medical Col- lege in Nashville, Tennessee.

The logistic regression analysis included data on 16,593 women who had completed the 2001 National Health Interview Survey.

Overall, the age-adjusted percentage of women who had Pap tests within the past 3 years increased the longer they lived in the United States. Only 47% of women who immigrated less than 5 years ago had undergone Pap tests, compared with 58% of women who immigrated 5 years ago or more, and 78% of women who were native-born women.

Compared with the American-born women, the foreign-born women in the survey were more likely to be younger, im- powered, unemployed, have less than high school level, and lacking a reg- ular source of health care.

—Heidi Splete