

Cognitive Decline in Women

Hi, I am Dr. Sonya Hardin, in The College of Nursing at East Carolina University. Today I want to talk with you about cognitive decline in women. Cognitive decline in women starts at mid-life. For women, mental sharpness, particularly processing speed, begins to decline as early as age 50. Findings have suggested that cognitive problems experienced by middle-aged women are a normal part of the aging process. Don't be surprised when your 50 year old female patients come in saying that they're forgetting where they left their keys; this is cognitive aging. It's very common, very usual, and is just like aging of other organ systems. It is not a factor for dementia later on in life.

I want to share with you that we have found the mean decline in scores reflecting cognitive speed runs at 4.9% in 10 years. The mean decline in scoring for verbal episodic memory was 2% in 10 years. So basically what this means is approximately, we're going to see with women from the age of 50 and on, a 5% decline every 10 years after the age of 50. As women age, they experience cognitive decline and other changes such as slower gait speed, reduced muscle mass, and loss of reflexes. Lots of studies have shown that the more cognitively active you are, the less decline you have in the domains in which you're active. So if you do a lot of crossword puzzles, you'll continue to be able to do them well. But that doesn't mean it will translate to other domains.

Physical activity and controlling cardiovascular risk factors, such as blood pressure, blood glucose level, and cholesterol level are the most important aspects of being brain savers. Again, keep in mind that overall estimates are a 5% decline every 10 years after the age of 50 in women. Thank you. This is Dr. Sonya Hardin at East Carolina University.