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## Investigating the Link Between Sexual Activity & Menopause Onset

Dr. Doghramji:

Menopause is an inevitable transition in every woman's life, but what if there was a way to delay its onset? And what if that was by engaging in a basic physiological need like sex? Well, that's exactly what a recent study investigated and here to walk us through its findings and what they could potentially mean for the more than 165 million women in the United States is the lead investigator herself. Welcome to the *Clinician's Roundtable* on ReachMD. I am Dr. Paul Doghramji and joining me today is Megan Arnot, a PhD candidate in the Department of Anthropology at the University College London and lead author of a study examining sexual activity and age of menopause. Thanks so much for joining us today, Megan.

Dr. Arnot:

Thanks for having me.

Dr. Doghramji:

So before we jump right into the study findings, I'd like to hear more about how you started exploring the potential link between sexual activity and menopause. What sparked this line of research for you?

Dr. Arnot:

We were researching menopause in general and noticed that married women were going through the menopause slightly later than unmarried women. We're just trying to work out why that might be, and I wondered whether sexual frequency might have some kind of relationship with marital states and, therefore, a relationship with age of menopause. So I thought we'd test and, it turns out that there is something going on there.

Dr. Doghramji:

Well that's very interesting. So now that we have that background information then, let's dive into some of the details here. How was this study conducted and who were you following to get a representative of patient sampling?

Dr. Arnot:

We used data that already existed. So those longitudinal studies being conducted in America as we speak that started in the 1990s, and they collect data annually on just under 3,000 women. And all this data is available online. So we took the data from online and analyzed it, and they have a representative sample so they target different ethnic groups to try and make sure that it is representative of every woman within the United States.

Dr. Doghramji:

So what kind of characteristics were you looking for in the women represented in this study? Like, the age, the amount of physical and/or sexual activity, the number of sexual partners, and other factors that weighed in. How are the characteristics formulated?

Dr. Arnot:

So, we don't look at how many sexual partners. We just look to how often they have sex and so the study already had a variable that asked women whether they had sex daily, weekly, monthly, less than monthly. They also had the different kinds of sex. So it wasn't just intercourse; it was oral sex, masturbation, stuff like that. We just created the sex index and that states whether a woman had any kind of sex, either weekly, monthly, or less than monthly. And then we also included the standard variables within the study. Like, socioeconomic position, how many children they've had, the age at which they had their first period; so just little standard characteristics of that.

Dr. Doghramji:

And what age groups did you look at?

Dr. Arnot:

The women in the first entry were aged between 42 and 52. So, it varied, but it was on average about 52 at the first entry.

Dr. Doghramji:

So let's run through some of the results then. What did you find?

Dr. Arnot:

We found that women who had sex more, so women who had sex at least weekly, were, at any given age, the least likelihood to go through menopause. And then women who had sex at least monthly were again less likely to go through menopause. And then the women who had sex less than monthly were most likely to end menopause at any given age.

Dr. Doghramji:

Did the type of sexual activity matter at all?

Dr. Arnot:

No. We included all of them in just one variable as we made a sex index, but if we looked at all of them individually, they all had a similar effect on the age of menopause.

Dr. Doghramji:

And, did the frequency of sexual activity also have anything to do with the delay of menopause?

Dr. Arnot:

Yes, in women who had the most amount of sex entered menopause later.

Dr. Doghramji:

Was there a specific amount? Like, once or twice a week or more than once or twice a week or several times a month?

Dr. Arnot:

It was weekly, monthly, less than monthly variables. We don't have any specific numbers.

Dr. Doghramji:

And what about living with a partner? Did that affect the age at which menopause begins?

Dr. Arnot:

We looked at that as well. So we looked at whether a woman lived with a man, so, are their sexual partner a man or just a man in general. So it could be a family member or a male friend and neither seemed to have any relationship with the age of menopause interestingly.

Dr. Doghramji:

And did you look at same-sex engagement versus heterosexual activity?

Dr. Arnot:

No, there wasn't a massive amount of people that were in same-sex relationships within the study. So there wasn't really enough sample size to include that.

Dr. Doghramji:

For those just tuning in, this is the *Clinician's Roundtable* on ReachMD. I'm Dr. Paul Doghramji and today I'm speaking with anthropologist, Megan Arnot, from the University College London about a recent study linking sex frequency to age of menopause. So now that we've covered what the study entailed and what was found, let's talk about the potential impact. So based on these results, Megan, how do you think this might affect the outlooks of menopause for women who come across this study?

Dr. Arnot:

While the results are quite provisional, and we don't quite understand the direction of causation yet, we hope that further research might allow women to be more autonomous about their age of menopause and take actions which may encourage menopause or delay it, depending on perhaps which way they want to go. But just hopefully it will empower women with more knowledge of how they can take control of their intimacy.

Dr. Doghramji:

In turn, how do you think this might impact the overall views on menopause from women's health professionals?

Dr. Arnot:

From - experience, it doesn't seem that health professionals talk about menopause that much with women of the menopausal age. So, hopefully, it will just the dialog open between clinicians and between patients and just get people talking about menopause a little bit more because at the moment, people don't really talk about it too much.

Dr. Doghramji:

And you know potentially professionals that are talking to their patients may just give them that option. That if you want to delay your menopause increasing sexual activity might be one of the ways of doing so. Can you see that happening?

Dr. Arnot:

If more research finds support for our findings, then yeah, it'd be a great way for women to be able to delay their menopause because it didn't just include sex with a partner, it included self-stimulation as well. So, it's something that people can do by themselves to delay menopause.

Dr. Doghramji:

And looking ahead here, Megan, what's next on the horizon for you and your colleagues? Will there be another line of investigations extending from this study sometime down the road?

Dr. Arnot:

Hopefully, the next step will be replicating the results using a different data set. We're just trying to find data sets that have both variables on sexual frequency and age of menopause, which is actually quite hard to find because sexual frequency is a sensitive topic, and not all studies ask about age of menopause. So, hopefully, we will be able to find more data on it.

Dr. Doghramji:

So, this study was conducted in women in the United States, is that correct?

Dr. Arnot:

Yeah, that's right.

Dr. Doghramji:

Do you plan on conducting similar studies in other countries or in other cultures?

Dr. Arnot:

Yeah, looking at data from the UK at the moment, which I think we will be able to replicate on hopefully. Other cultures sometimes are a bit harder talking about sex, and also just how sex is used in their relationships and stuff like that. So, I think different cultures will be a bit trickier.

Dr. Doghramji:

Well, Megan, I'd like to thank you for joining me to talk about these study-driven insights on the potential links between sexual activity and age of menopause. It was great having you on the program today.

Dr. Arnot:

Thank you for having me.

Dr. Doghramji:

I'm Dr. Paul Doghramji and you've been listening to the *Clinician's Roundtable* on ReachMD. To access this episode and others in this series, visit [reachmd.com/cliniciansroundtable](https://reachmd.com/cliniciansroundtable) where you can be part of the knowledge. Thanks for joining us.