Swan Newsletter 2026

We are excited that SWAN continues to contribute to a deeper understanding of women's health during the midlife years and of the impact of midlife and menopause on women's health as they age. Findings from SWAN are being shared and made available to women everywhere.

You are one of a group of more than 3,000 racially and ethnically diverse women nationwide who participated in this groundbreaking research. Your contributions over the years—arriving for early morning appointments (postponing morning coffee), enduring the pokes for blood draws, bringing your medications, and answering all of our questionnaires—have all helped us gather the high-quality data needed to advance our understanding of women's health.

The SWAN team extends our most sincere thank you for your contributions to and continued participation in SWAN. We truly appreciate the time, effort, and commitment you have given. By participating, you have helped to expand important scientific knowledge that helps women better understand their transition through menopause and that provides guidance on aging well.

Looking Ahead

We are currently seeking additional funding from the National Institutes of Health to support another study visit. We remain hopeful and will keep you informed as we receive updates.

Thank you again for your support and for being part of this important work. We look forward to continuing this pioneering journey in women's health together.

Scan this QR code with your mobile device to visit us at swanstudy.org

Cognition and Aging

Cognition, the mental ability to process new information, acquire knowledge, and act on it, is key to making decisions, solving problems, and navigating daily life. Memory, for example, is one component of cognition. Forgetting things, like where we put our belongings, is common and is noticed by many of us as we get older. But it is important to note that getting older does not necessarily mean that other cognitive functions, such as attention span, language skills, or judgement, will decline. Some cognitive skills, such as vocabulary and verbal reasoning (the ability to think with words), may even improve with age.

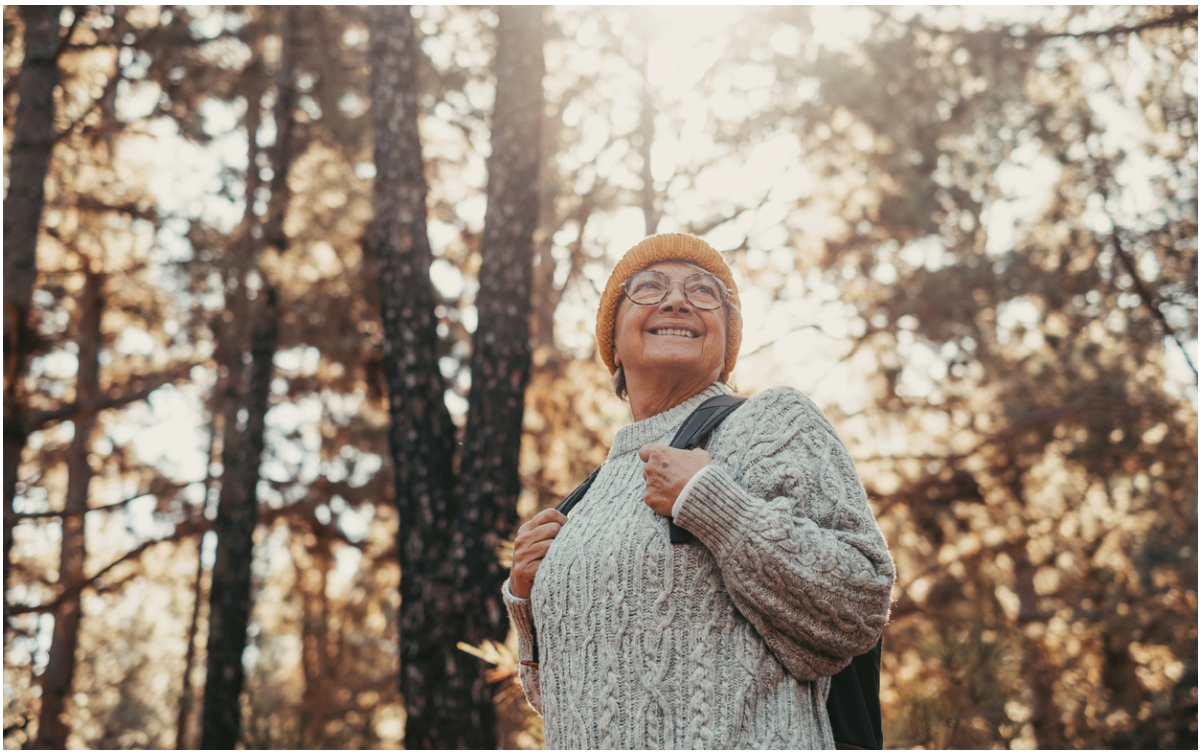
As participants in SWAN, you have helped us learn about the usual aging-related changes in memory, speed of mental processing, and attention span, and how one might be protected from such changes. SWAN found that some, but not all, women see a slight slowing in processing speed in the early 50's, some changes in memory in the later 50's, and in attention span in the early 60's. While such age-associated changes are common, they do NOT lead to dementia. Very few SWAN women who participated in V17 met the diagnosis of dementia.

SWAN research has shown that getting good quality sleep can stave off dementia in most women. It is also important to keep blood pressure, diabetes, and high cholesterol under control. Other studies have shown that being physically active and doing mentally challenging things like crossword puzzles and other puzzles, computer games, finding new routes for walking or driving, keeps one cognitively fit and agile, even as we get older. We will continue to assess cognition in future SWAN visits and learn more about how one can further prevent dementia.

Quality of Life and Psychological Well-being

SWAN has been studying quality of life and psychological well-being over the years and there is some good news about aging. Not surprisingly, we have found that many women experience some decline in their physical functioning as they have gotten older. However, the good news is that for most women, their mental health has been getting better! The other good news is that we have identified several things that women can do to have better quality of life and psychological well-being as they age. These include maintaining or increasing physical activity, reducing stress, and getting adequate sleep.

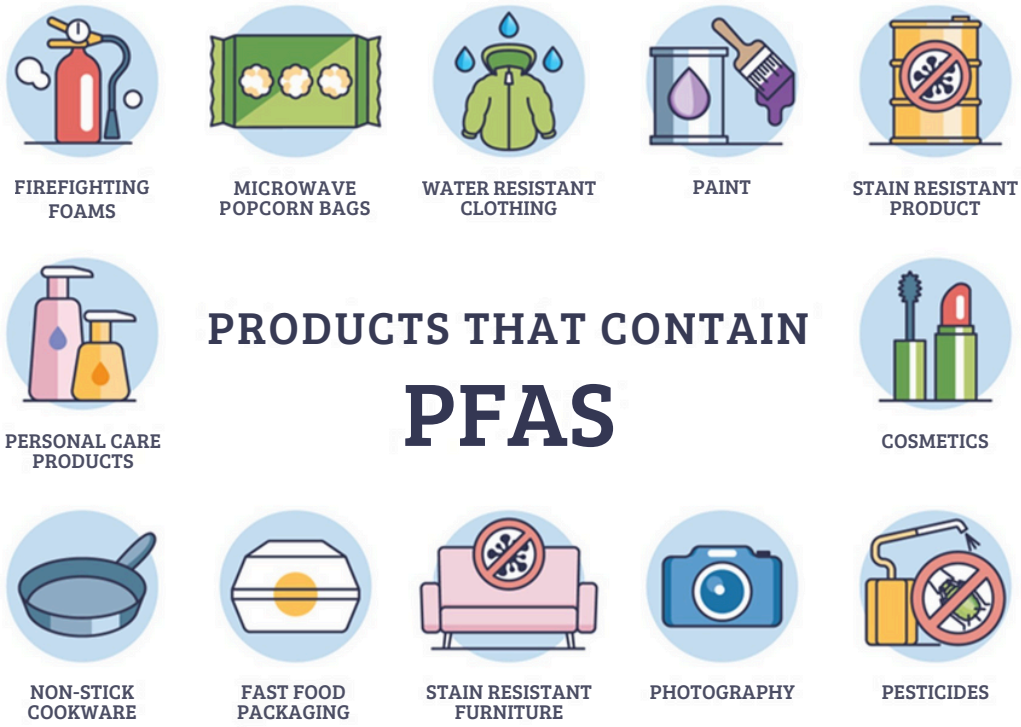
We have also found that many women feel they can adapt to changes and difficulties and that this resiliency helps women cope with stressful events.



Maintaining physical activity, reducing stress, and getting adequate sleep are key identified actions women can take to improve their quality of life and psychological well-being as they age.

Environmental Effects on Menopausal Women

We live in a world where we are exposed to many different chemicals in our environment. These chemicals can be found in the air we breathe, the water we drink, the food we eat, and even in everyday products we use. Some chemicals can leave the body in natural ways, such as during menstruation, but others stay in the body much longer. One example is PFAS, which stands for per- and polyfluoroalkyl substances. PFAS are man-made chemicals often called “forever chemicals” because they do not easily break down in the environment. PFAS are widely used in consumer products such as non-stick cookware, water and stain-repellent coatings, food packaging, carpeting, firefighting foam, and even cosmetics and personal care products.



Because women tend to use more everyday products than men including personal care products, they are at higher risk for exposure to these chemicals. In fact, on average, an adult woman uses 12 different personal care products daily. PFAS have been detected in almost all Americans, including participants in SWAN.

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Environmental Effects on Menopausal Women

For women, midlife (ages 40 to 64) is a time when the risk for long-term health problems like type 2 diabetes and heart disease can increase. During menopause when menstrual cycles end, this change may also cause harmful chemicals to build up in the body, since some of these chemicals were removed through menstrual blood in the past. Data and biospecimens from the Study of Women's Health Across the Nation have allowed us to tackle important but unanswered questions. SWAN researcher, Dr. Sung Kyun Park, and his team looked at how PFAS affects women's health. They found that women with more PFAS in their blood went through menopause about 2 years earlier than women with lower levels. That's almost twice as strong an effect as cigarette smoking has on menopause timing. They also discovered that women with high levels of PFAS in their blood were over 50% more likely to get type 2 diabetes and high blood pressure. Reducing exposure to PFAS could be an important way to lower these risks. Despite its significance, midlife remains relatively under-researched in the field of environmental health. Future research will look more closely at how these chemicals impact other areas of health.

Below, we provide some research highlights from SWAN on this important area of investigation.

Resources for PFAs

Per- and Polyfluoroalkyl Substances (PFAS) and Your Health - ASTDR
www.atsdr.cdc.gov/pfas/index.html

Per- and Polyfluoroalkyl Substances (PFAS) - US EPA
www.epa.gov/pfas/our-current-understanding-human-health-and-environmental-risks-pfas

University of Michigan NIEHS P30 Center - Fact Sheets
mleead.umich.edu/Community_Engagement_Core_Resources.php

PFAS in Cosmetics
mleead.umich.edu/files/CEC/PFAS in Cosmetics.pdf

PFAS Exposure
mleead.umich.edu/files/CEC/PFAS_Exposure_2023.pdf

PFAS Health Effects
mleead.umich.edu/files/CEC/PFAS_Health_Effects_202312.pdf

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