

Impact of menopause on blood glucose control: Type 1 diabetes, menopause, and cardiovascular health

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Received: 23-Apr-2024, Manuscript No. FMDM-24-141024; **Editor assigned:** 25-Apr-2024, PreQC No. FMDM-24-141024 (PQ); **Reviewed:** 09-May-2024, QC No. FMDM-24-141024; **Revised:** 16-May-2024, Manuscript No. FMDM-24-141024 (R); **Published:** 23-May-2024, DOI: 10.37532/1758-1907.2024.14(3).623-624.

Description

Cardio Vascular Disease (CVD) is a significant health concern globally, particularly affecting individuals with diabetes. Among these, women with type 1 diabetes present a unique challenge due to the loss of natural protective factors post-menopause. This article discusses about the complex relationship between type 1 diabetes, menopause, and cardiovascular health, highlighting the factors contributing to increased CVD risk in this population. Managing type 1 diabetes during menopause requires a proactive approach, involving close collaboration between the woman and her healthcare team to optimize both diabetes control and menopausal symptom management.

■ Risk factors

Menopause marks a significant hormonal shift, particularly a decline in estrogen levels. Estrogen can affect insulin sensitivity, and its reduction during menopause might lead to changes in blood glucose levels in women with type 1 diabetes. Historically, premenopausal women with type 1 diabetes have exhibited a lower risk of CVD compared to their male counterparts and women without diabetes. This advantage has been assigned to the protective effects of estrogen, which helps maintain favorable lipid profiles and vascular function. However, with the onset of menopause, women lose this protective shield due to declining estrogen levels, thereby experiencing a dramatic rise in CVD risk.

Metabolic changes: Post-menopause, women with type 1 diabetes often face exacerbated metabolic challenges. Insulin resistance may increase, leading to poorer glucose control and higher blood pressure, all of which are significant contributors to CVD development.

Lipid profile alterations: Estrogen withdrawal can negatively impact lipid metabolism, resulting in unfavorable changes such as elevated LDL cholesterol and decreased HDL cholesterol levels. These lipid abnormalities further escalate the risk of atherosclerosis and cardiovascular events.

Inflammatory pathways: Both type 1 diabetes and menopause are associated with heightened inflammatory states. When combined, these conditions can synergistically promote endothelial dysfunction and plaque formation, accelerating CVD progression.

■ Clinical implications and management strategies

Addressing the heightened cardiovascular risk in postmenopausal women with type 1 diabetes requires a multifaceted approach.

Optimized glycemic control: Tight glucose management remains important in reducing vascular complications. Continuous glucose monitoring and insulin pump therapies can assist in achieving stable blood sugar levels.

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Cardiovascular risk factor modification: Aggressive management of hypertension and dyslipidemia through pharmacotherapy and lifestyle interventions (diet, exercise) is important.

Hormone Replacement Therapy (HRT): While controversial and not universally recommended, HRT may be considered in select cases to mitigate menopause-related cardiovascular risks. However, individualized assessment and careful monitoring are needed due to potential adverse effects.

■ Future directions

Further research is needed to elucidate the precise mechanisms underlying the loss of cardiovascular protection post-menopause in women with type 1 diabetes. Longitudinal studies examining the exchange of hormonal changes, metabolic

factors, and inflammatory markers are warranted to develop targeted preventive strategies and therapeutic interventions.

The transition through menopause poses a significant challenge for women with type 1 diabetes concerning cardiovascular health. Understanding the complex interactions between diabetes, menopause, and CVD risk is critical in formulating effective management strategies. By addressing metabolic control, lipid abnormalities, and inflammatory pathways, healthcare providers can work towards reducing the burden of cardiovascular disease in this vulnerable population.

By shedding light on these interconnected factors, clinicians and researchers can collaborate to improve outcomes and quality of life for postmenopausal women living with type 1 diabetes.