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Understanding Why Women May Age Slower Than Men

Keynote Address will review current evidence on how women's mental health and hormones affect telomere length

CLEVELAND – (October 3, 2018) – Why do women typically live longer than men? The Keynote Address at The North American Menopause Society (NAMS) Annual Meeting in San Diego, October 3-6, reviews some old and provides some new answers, highlighting the latest studies on the protective effects of sex hormones and estrogen, as well as other tips for slowing the aging process by improving telomere health.

Women have some natural physical advantages as to why they live longer than men. While this gender gap is not fully understood, it is well known that there are more reasons than just the typical riskier behaviors of some men, including smoking and drinking alcohol. It is thought to be, in part, due to estrogen protecting women from heart disease for a longer period in life.

In trying to understand why women age slower than men, researchers have looked at the rate of cellular aging. One of the biological differences from birth is that women have longer telomeres (the endcaps of DNA strands that protect chromosomes from deterioration). Scientists have long understood the importance of telomeres in healthy longevity. More recent studies have focused on those factors that affect telomere length and what can be done to protect them.

In her Keynote Address at the upcoming NAMS Annual Meeting entitled “Healthy Longevity and Telomeres: What Does Sex Have to Do With It?” Dr. Elissa Epel from the University of California in San Francisco will provide a detailed look at those factors that modulate telomere length, with special emphasis on women’s reproductive health, hormones and mental health. Longer telomeres predict less cardiovascular disease and, in many instances, a longer life for both men and women.

“Some experimental studies suggest estrogen exposure increases the activity of telomerase, the enzyme that can protect and elongate telomeres,” says Dr. Epel. She warns, however, that telomeres can be shortened prematurely by stress and chronic or childhood psychological adversity.

“We look forward to what promises to be a fascinating presentation with implications for slowing telomere attrition and age-related conditions,” says Dr. JoAnn Pinkerton, NAMS executive director.

Drs. Epel and Pinkerton are available for interviews before the presentation at the Annual Meeting.

Founded in 1989, The North American Menopause Society (NAMS) is North America's leading nonprofit organization dedicated to promoting the health and quality of life of all women during midlife and beyond through an understanding of menopause and healthy aging. Its multidisciplinary membership of 2,000 leaders in the field—including clinical and basic science experts from medicine, nursing, sociology, psychology, nutrition, anthropology, epidemiology, pharmacy, and education—makes NAMS uniquely qualified to serve as the definitive resource for health professionals and the public for accurate, unbiased information about menopause and healthy aging. To learn more about NAMS, visit www.menopause.org.