

Menopause

By Steve Seater, CNC, CPT
www.totalwellnessconcepts.com

Menopause is defined as the cessation of menstruation in women which usually occurs by about age 50. Six to 12 months without a period is the general rule for diagnosing menopause. Mainstream medicine in the US regards menopause as a disease rather than a natural stage in a woman's life. This view is in stark contrast to how most other cultures view this normal part of a woman's life.

Mainstream medicine's treatment of menopause centers upon the use of hormone replacement therapy (HRT), which utilizes horse hormones, so called conjugated estrogens such as Premarin and synthetic progesterone analogs called progestins, such as Provera, which has been lucrative for the pharmaceutical industry but not all that good for women's health. Is HRT really necessary and if some women do indeed need it, should it be in the form of horse and synthetic hormones not found in the human body?

The major symptoms of menopause are hot flashes, headaches, atrophic vaginitis (vaginal discomfort such as dryness and burning), headaches, urinary tract infections, cold hands and feet, forgetfulness, and inability to concentrate. Studies of menopausal women in many cultures demonstrate that most pass through menopause without these symptoms. This may in part be due to attitudes in traditional societies and also very likely to diet.

Hormone Replacement Therapy:

(HRT) prevents hot flashes and other menopausal symptoms and prevents a considerable amount of osteoporosis. Some studies have also indicated that HRT affords some protection against heart disease and strokes. The Women's Health Initiative, however, has shown that HRT in the form of horse estrogen and synthetic progestins actually puts women's health at risk while not improving any aspects of it that much.

Jonathan V. Wright, MD, a leading alternative and life extension physician, urges that women with significant menopausal symptoms take bioidentical hormones, i.e., hormones that are identical to those found in a woman's body. As a result of the Women's Health Initiative, more doctors are beginning to prescribe bioidentical hormones for menopausal women. This usually requires going to a compounding pharmacist since none of the drug companies can patent natural human hormones and therefore have no incentive to sell such preparations. Because even the natural estrogen, estradiol, is somewhat carcinogenic, Dr. Wright suggests including estriol to offset this risk. He also suggests using all of a woman's bioidentical hormones so that they mimic, as closely as possible, the timing of her full menstrual cycle.

Other Therapeutic Considerations:

It is essential for smokers to cease tobacco use as it increases the risk of early menopause. Diet is also of great importance. The amount of plant food in the diet should be increased.

Plant foods containing phytoestrogens such as fennel, celery, parsley, soy, nuts, whole grains, apples, and alfalfa should be eaten regularly. Soy is especially important since it contains genistein which reduces the risk of cancer. Dietary fat should be cut back significantly, especially saturated fat.

Nutritional Supplements:

Vitamin E is effective in relieving hot flashes and vaginal complaints. Vitamin E oil, creams, ointments and suppositories can be applied topically to relieve vaginal dryness and symptoms of atrophic vaginitis. The flavinoid hesperidin in combination with vitamin C is also useful in relieving hot flashes. Ferulic acid (gamma-oryzanol) is known to reduce many menopausal symptoms. A dose of 300mg/day has been shown to be most effective.

Botanical Medicines:

Angelica sinensis (Dong Quai), 1/4 tsp of the fluid extract, has been used to treat menopausal symptoms with considerable success. Licorice root or Glycyrrhiza glabra, 1 tsp of the fluid extract, reduces estrogen and raises progesterone levels to lessen menopausal discomfort. The castle berry, 1 tsp of the fluid extract or 250-500mg of the powder, affects pituitary function and produces a beneficial effect by altering LH and FSH secretion. A safe and effective alternative to HRT is Black Cohosh, fluid extract 1 tsp, or 250-500mg powder. Studies show it relieves hot flashes and vaginal discomfort. Ginko biloba, 24% flavonglycoside content: 40mg., is useful in improving cold hands and feet.

All supplements are available at most health food and vitamin stores.

Exercise:

Regular exercise – at least 30 minutes three times a week is also recommended.

These nutritional suggestions are not intended to treat or cure disease and or be used as a substitute for sound medical advice. This information should be used in conjunction with the services of a trained, licensed health care practitioner. If you are under a doctor's care, seek advice before taking supplements or beginning a new exercise program.

References:

Wright, Jonathan V., MD. Natural Hormone Replacement Update *Life Enhancement*. November, 2004

Pizzorno, Joseph E., Murray, Michael T. *Textbook of Natural Medicine*. pp. 1387-1395, Churchill Livingstone, 1999.

