
Your Guide to Natural Medicine for Menopause

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When a woman stops ovulating, the levels of estrogen and progesterone in her body decline. This can occur naturally or be hastened by surgery or cancer treatment. During this transitional period, which may take up to five years to complete, menopausal symptoms may strike. Some women report problems with hot flashes, night sweats, mood swings, dizziness and fatigue in response to these fluctuating hormone levels. Long term complications of lowered estrogen levels include elevated risks of cardiovascular disease and osteoporosis. It is because of these risks that doctors prescribe estrogen replacement therapy.

Women who have a strong family history of cancer or who are diagnosed with cancer may want to consider naturally occurring botanical estrogen and progesterone replacements instead of hormone replacement therapy. For these women, and others who have diseases that are aggravated by estrogen, the natural approaches to hormone replacement therapy may be more preferable. Consideration of estrogen replacement therapy versus natural hormonal supplements should be discussed with your physician.

Ultimately, the decision to use natural estrogen replacements is up to each individual. Here are some nutritional guidelines to assist you in your desire to treat menopausal symptoms naturally.

Dietary Changes

Increase the amount of plant foods in your diet. Foods like soy, flaxseed, nuts, whole grains and apples contain phytoestrogens. Phytoestrogens tend to balance out hormonal levels. If levels are low, they contribute some of their estrogenic activity to the body; if estrogen levels are high, they decrease estrogen levels by competing for estrogen receptor sites. A 1991 study revealed that 1 cup of soybeans was equivalent to about 0.45 mg of conjugated estrogen, or one tablet of Premarin.

Ensure adequate dietary calcium intake. Excessive dietary protein, phosphorus, salt, fat, sugar and alcohol all strip the body of calcium. This mineral is responsible for bone growth and health. Research shows that diets adequate in bone-building nutrients like calcium, magnesium, manganese, zinc, phosphorus, copper, boron, silica, fluoride, Vitamins D, C, A, B vitamins and essential fatty acids prevents bone loss in post-menopausal women. Daily calcium requirement is estimated at 1500 mg of calcium per day for a menopausal woman. Because only a fraction of dietary calcium is absorbed, most people should provide adequate coverage by supplementing with calcium.

Avoid aluminum containing antacids like Roloids, Maalox and Mylanta. Aluminum is not only linked to cancer and Alzheimer's disease, but interferes with bone mineralization and contributes to bone loss. Other common sources of aluminum include aluminum cookware, foil, antiperspirants, tin cans, baking powders, food additives, and soft water.

Avoid phosphate-containing foods like soft drinks, baked and other packaged foods. Read the label! The American diet currently contains 3 to 4 parts phosphorus to 1 part calcium; this greatly deviates from the desirable 1:1 ratio! Excessive phosphates causes leaching of calcium from the bones.

Nutritional Supplementation

Several nutrients and botanicals have been used to provide effective relief of hot flashes and other symptoms of menopause. Most work by improving blood supply to the vaginal wall, improving vascular integrity and enhancing adaptive responses to stress. Scientific investigation has shown chasteberry has beneficial effects in menopause due to altering certain hormonal secretions. Black cohosh contains triterpenes which relieves hot flashes, depression and vaginal atrophy. Vitamins C and E appears to offer significant relief from hot flashes and B vitamins are needed to support the adrenal glands in times of stress. Here are some of the most effective dietary supplementation recommendations for menopause.

These guidelines are for general information and should be discussed with a health care professional who can devise a safe and efficacious supplement program for you with all of your health needs in mind.

Vitamin B complex	50 mg per day
Vitamin C with hesperidin and other bioflavonoids	500 mg twice per day
Vitamin E	800 IU until symptoms improve; then 400 IU per day
Calcium with magnesium and Vitamin D	500 mg twice per day
Gamma-oryzanol	300 mg per day
Chasteberry	500 mg three times per day
Black cohosh	500 mg three times per day
St. John's wort	300 mg three times per day
Ginkgo biloba	40 mg three times per day

Lifestyle Factors

Exercise regularly. Exercise increases bone density, improves your ability to deal with stress, improves circulation and heart function and decreases blood cholesterol level and blood pressure. Studies have clearly demonstrated that exercise can reduce the frequency and severity of hot flashes and improve mood.

Avoid stressful situations if possible. Chronic stress puts a burden on the adrenal glands, causing them to exhaust their ability to produce hormone that are needed to help balance the body's hormone levels. Try meditation, yoga or some other type of relaxation method.

Quit smoking. Cigarette use is associated with early menopause.