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# Menopause & Peri-menopause

## Natural Remedies for Menopause & Peri-menopause

A natural therapies approach to menopause is to help the body adjust to lower hormonal levels. How easily the body becomes accustomed to these changes, reflects how severe or troublesome the symptoms of menopause are for each woman.

The menopausal transition can take several years and the duration of every woman's menopause is very individual. It is in accordance to her general level of health and primarily her adrenal health which can influence the length of menopause.

Adrenal health, or in many cases 'adrenal exhaustion', in the years leading up to menopause is a key factor in determining the severity of the symptoms of menopause.

The modern day approach is to only consider the lower hormonal level as the cause for menopausal symptoms. By replacing hormones (with HRT) that the body is no longer producing, this will help alleviate the symptoms of menopause but it is only delaying the process. It does not address the underlying causes of why some women experience severe problems during menopause.

The common menopausal symptoms include; hot flushes (70% of women), depression (40% of women), sweating, fatigue, irregular menstruation, cessation of menstruation, sleep problems/insomnia (up to 40% of perimenopausal women).

The aim of holistic menopausal support is to assist

the adjustment of these important changes; to provide symptomatic alleviation of the effects of hormonal withdrawal; to improve the overall health of the individual especially supporting adrenal gland health. It is not simply taking herbs to replace or increase hormonal levels as the approach with HRT (hormonal replacement therapy). Holistic treatment should not be used indefinitely.

Most people approach herbal treatment for menopause the same way they do HRT, which herb will increase the hormonal level? But that is not the main aim of holistic treatment. It is not aimed at DELAYING menopause by simply replacing hormones.

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## Free Talk on Menopause and Peri-Menopause

**FREE Talk by Tracey**  
**Menopause & Peri-menopause**  
**The Natural Alternatives that really work**  
**Friday May 12th at 6.30pm**  
**Venue Young at Heart Gym at**  
**Emerald Downs Shopping Plaza (at the back opp. preschool)**  
**Ring the clinic or just turn up**

## Natural Remedies for menopause & peri-menopause continued

The best time to start holistic treatment for menopause is in the peri-menopausal phase i.e. when the length of periods are starting to change. As this is the best time to ensure healthy adrenal function and general health, to help create a healthier and easier transition in menopause with hormonal balancing herbs and natural remedies.

Holistic treatment varies from six to 18 months but in some case's treatments may be necessary for years. The healthier the patient's adrenal status, the shorter the duration of treatment required. Healthy adrenal function can make a healthy amount of progesterone.

Recent concerns with the use of HRT has prompted increased interest in what holistic treatments can offer women in menopause. Many herbal and homoeopathic medicines can help alleviate menopausal symptoms without increasing the level of oestrogen.

### There are three choices for treatment in menopause:

1. HRT which uses synthetic hormones to replace what your body is not producing.
2. Natural hormones which are still replacing hormones BUT they are chemically the SAME as the hormones you produce in the body. I would tend to recommend these hormones over the synthetic hormones
3. Holistic treatment: to assist the body to make the adjustments more easily and improve the woman's overall health and adrenal function.

Note :most doctors do not prescribe natural hormones, these hormones have to be made up in a compounding chemist (the closest is Lismore or Bondi in Sydney) and must be prescribed by a doctor.

### Which natural remedies really work?

Herbal and homoeopathic medicine needs to be individualized to each person for it to be the most effective treatment for that individual woman. No one herb or one group herbs/ homoeopathic medicine will always work in every case.

The two main reasons why natural remedies fail to be effective in the treatment of menopause are; 1.poor quality of products especially of herbal products and 2. trying to use natural remedies the same way they use orthodox drugs without addressing other health issues (especially adrenal exhaustion) which are directly contributing to a difficult transition in menopause.

Remember, herbs and homoeopathic medicines do not work the same way as drugs, they are treating your whole health, improve your own body's response. Hence when you stop natural treatment your body stays healthier and in balance.

If you are on HRT and would like to come off it, it is better to start holistic treatment while you are still on HRT, then slowly increasing the natural remedies as you reduce the HRT over 8-12 weeks.

If you are on (or have been recently) HRT: to reduce the side-effects of HRT

supplements with isoflavones, estrofactor from metagenics, tumeric, rosemary, methylation factors (folate, trimethglycine, B6, B12), st mary's thistle, grape-seed and green tea all help the correct metabolism of oestrogen into a less harmful form.

This above treatment is also important for women who have or have had hormonal problems characterized by estrogen dominance. A saliva hormonal test is the best way to assess this.

Note on poor quality products: Please do not buy your herbs or homoeopathic medicines off-the-shelf. See a qualified practitioner (and not a 5-10min consult in a shop) who should spend no less than 45 minutes in your first consultation assessing not only your menopausal or peri-menopausal symptoms but also your overall health, especially your adrenal health, stress levels and lifestyle factors and others. This is the only way they can prescribe correctly and individualise your herbal and homoeopathic treatment that will work for you.

**Testing for hormonal levels; blood test and the more accurate saliva test through ARL laboratory in Melbourne ([www.arlaus.com.au](http://www.arlaus.com.au)). The saliva test kits can be ordered by any health professional including naturopaths. References Dr John Lee "Menopause what your doctor might not tell you" [www.johnleemd.com](http://www.johnleemd.com)**

## Dietary Changes for Peri-menopause

Consider the following diet changes, as research studies suggest, to help reduce symptoms of peri-menopause and prevent risk of CVD, osteoporosis and endometrial and breast cancer;

Maintain healthy weight and include a regular exercise programme.

Limit the intake of refined breads and cereal dishes, saturated fats, alcohol and spicy foods. Replace with whole grain products (especially low GI), high quality seeds, cold pressed vegetable oils, fish, and organic vegetables, some raw.

Limit the intake of well-done meat to

reduce breast cancer risk.

Increase intake of isoflavones (especially from soybean product like tofu) and lignans to provide modulation of estrogen activities, antioxidant effects and promotion of bone health.

Increase intake of cruciferous vegetable family to support healthy estrogen metabolism (include broccoli, cauliflower, brussel sprouts, cabbage,, bok choy,, radishes, turnips, kale)

Include phytonutrients that act synergistically with isoflavones, such as curcumin (found in the herb turmeric).

Increase intake of calcium, vitamin D, vitamin K, magnesium and trace minerals to promote bone health

Promote a healthy methylation pathway and manage homocysteine levels with folate, vitamin B12, and vitamin B6.

**An easier menopausal transition needs to be approached by firstly improving your overall health and wellbeing including diet and lifestyle factors.**

## Herbal Remedies for menopause and peri-menopause

### Herbal remedies in menopause: what really works?

There are many different herbal products on the market for menopause and peri-menopause and the difficulty is to know which ones will work and which one's are simply a waste of money.

Many herbal companies in Australia do not do the full range of testing that I would consider required to ensure quality of the herb i.e. contains the correct active constituents in the correct level to be effective. The two brands that I use are Mediherbs and Phytomedicine, these are practitioner only products. It is always best to have a qualified naturopath or herbalist prescribe for your individual symptoms.

### The Four clinically tested herbal medicines for menopause are:

These four herbs contains substances called steroidal saponins. This substance reduces symptoms of menopause via a negative feedback on the brain and NOT by increasing estrogen.

#### **Shatavari**

Has been traditionally been used as a general tonic and female reproductive tonic, it is a rejuvenating tonic for women; promoting oestrogen balance, a tonic for general debility, for fatigue and low libido and for most of the menopausal symptoms. It is adaptogenic, meaning it increases the body's tolerance to stress.

Shatavari does not increase oestrogen but helps the body's response (via the pituitary gland in the brain) and adjustment to the lower level of oestrogen. (It is believed that hot flushes are not caused directly by the lower oestrogen levels but from higher levels of FSH, the hormone released from the pituitary gland in the brain to trying to make the ovaries produced more oestrogen).

#### **Tribulus**

Is one of the best researched herbal medicine for menopause and is popular in Europe for the treatment of menopausal symptoms. It does not significantly change hormonal levels, although FSH tends to be lower.

The quality and type of Tribulus is very important, as it is only the Bulgarian Tribulus which has the active constituents (not the Chinese or Indian Tribulus) and it is only the leaves and stems which are used ( and not the fruit).

Many products on the market use incorrect types of Tribulus which has been

mostly due to the interest from body-builders.

#### **Wild yam**

##### Confusion over Wild yam creams and natural progesterone creams

Any cream containing extracts of wild yam and claims progesterone effects are unproven. The substance in Wild yam can be converted into progesterone, but this only happens in the digestive tract (the bowel flora chemically changing it and then it is absorbed into the body). Rubbing wild yam cream on the skin your body cannot convert the substance into progesterone.

True natural progesterone cream is made by a compounding chemist, (and must be prescribed by a doctor). These creams are made from wild yam (or other natural substances) which is chemically changed in the laboratory into natural progesterone (that is the same progesterone your body produces hence called "natural", as opposed to HRT which contains synthetic progesterone which is slightly different chemically to the progesterone your body produces). This natural progesterone cream when rubbed onto the skin gives the body a dose of natural progesterone.

As a herbal product, Wild yam needs to be taken orally to be effective. It also contains the steroidal saponins which work via a negative feedback on the hypothalamus.

#### **Black cohosh**

This herb has become known as the alternative to HRT, for reducing menopausal symptoms. It has been used in Europe for over 40 years, so has a long track record in menopause, peri-menopause and premenstrual syndrome.

#### **Other herbs**

##### **Sage**

Has traditionally been used for sweats and hot flushes.

##### **St. John's wort**

Has traditionally been used for the depression during menopause (long before the current use for depression in general).

##### **Chase tree**

Often use for erratic periods, for peri-menopausal stages where there is an worsening of PMT, and the sleep disturbances (it increases the production of

melatonin).

The most commonly used herbal medicines for the following (note which of the group you will need depends on your other symptoms)

Hot flushes; Shatavari, Black cohosh, Wild yam, Tribulus, Zizphus, Sage.

Low memory and concentration in menopause or perimenopause; Rhodiola plus adrenal herbs.

Sleep disturbance in menopause in peri-menopause; Chase tree, Zizphus.

Fatigue/Tiredness in menopausal or premenopause; ginseng Siberian and Panax, Withania, Rhodiola. Often required other adrenal supportive herbs

Depression during menopausal peri-menopause; St. John's wort, Damiana plus adrenal herbs.

Anxiety during menopause or peri-menopause; Zizphus, Black cohosh. Plus adrenal herbs

Vaginally dryness in menopause or premenopause; Codonopsis, Shatavari



Parsley is one herb which contains phytoestrogens, it is also high in calcium and iron. Others useful foods in menopause are tofu or tempe (from soybeans) and flaxseed meal (linseed).

# Adrenal 'Exhaustion'

## Why Am I so Tired? (part 3)

We all live with daily stress, but it is our ability to adapt to the stress which determines how it will affect our long term health. Healthy adrenal gland function will ensure a higher tolerance to stress and to the effects of stress.

The adrenal glands are located just above the kidney area and they produce the 'stress' hormones adrenalin and cortisol. Our body produces these hormones in times of stress to help us 'adapt' and deal with the stress. But the ability to adapt declines when the stress is long term and/or continuous.

This can lead to adrenal 'exhaustion', which has four phases; the longer you are under stress the more severe the adrenal exhaustion will tend to be;

**Phase 1: Stressed and Wired** where common symptoms include: anxiety, nervousness, insomnia, panic attacks, PMT, trembling, rapid shifts in body temperature, pressure, decreased appetite, diarrhea, palpitations or shortness of breath.

**Phase 2 Tired, then Wired** which includes an increased risk of depression, anxiety, insomnia and fatigue; decrease resistance to infections including aggravating allergic reactions, depletion of sex hormones and libido, decreasing thyroid function, obesity and insulin resistance. Common symptoms can include intense anxiety, melancholy depression, insomnia, poor appetite, allergies.

**Phase 3 Stressed & Tired** which includes symptoms of (apathetic) depression, increased daytime sleep, and tiredness, weight gain, lethargy, fibromyalgia, aggravation of autoimmune diseases like rheumatoid arthritis, multiple allergies and chemical sensitivities. Fibromyalgia is a disorder in this stage. Energy levels are extremely low and

manifest as muscle weakness and pain.

**Phase 4 Exhaustion;** this stage is usually after a period of the above stages and is often associated with post viral syndrome or chronic fatigue syndrome (as immune system is often compromised). These symptoms are mild fevers, sore throat and increased infections, painful lymph nodes, muscle weakness, headaches, painful joints, depression and sleeping disturbances. The treatment in this stage is similar to stage 3, but with more emphasis on repairing damaged nervous tissue and adrenal glands.

The level of adrenal exhaustion will directly effect the severity of menopausal symptoms, hence it is important to improve adrenal gland's adaptation & tolerance to your daily stress to ensure an easier transition in peri-menopause and menopause.

### **Herbal Treatment For Adrenal Exhaustion**

The commonly used herbs are;

Withania, Siberian Ginseng, Panax ginseng, Rhodiola, Licorice and Rehmannia

For adrenal tonic herbs that support the adrenal gland function Licorice and Rehmannia are commonly used (for all four phases)

Poor concentration and memory Rhodiola is specific and has an immediate effect on improving concentration.

Adaptogenic herbs are herbs which increase your tolerance/resistance to stress, the three lead herbs are Withania, Siberian ginseng and Rhodiola.

For exhaustion, stimulating herbs are used like Panax ginseng (note not to be used in phase 1 or phase 2 as it is too stimulating). Both Ginseng's can be too stimulating in many people hence it is best prescribed by a qualified herbalist.

A better choice is often Withania which has a relaxing effect.

In some people nervine herbs (which work on the nervous system) and/or immune herbs especially in phase 3 or 4 of adrenal exhaustion need to also be considered.

### **Diet & lifestyle factors to improve adrenal function:**

Relaxation techniques like yoga, tai chi, meditation & regular exercise.

Remove sugar, high GI carbohydrate food and stimulants like coffee/caffeine from the diet.

An insulin zone diet to correct any blood sugar imbalances is also important to help correct imbalances in adrenal gland function.

Supplements with Vitamin C, B complex with extra B5 & B6 and Magnesium are also important to improve adrenal function.

There are many herbs to choose from and it is important to take not only the correct herbs for your individual needs but also that the quality and the dosage of these herbs is correct. If you are considering taking herbs please see a qualified herbalist.

**To improve adrenal gland exhaustion you need to consider all lifestyle facts to help improve your tolerance/resistance to daily stress. Regular exercise and relaxation techniques like meditation, yoga, tai chi with the use of adrenal tonic herbal medicines can be helpful.**

If you have any questions regarding this newsletter or you would like to receive this newsletter via email please contact me at: [tlnat@dodo.com.au](mailto:tlnat@dodo.com.au) or [www.alternative-natural-remedies.com](http://www.alternative-natural-remedies.com)

### **Next Issue June 2006**

- **What is your biological age? VLA testing**
- **Viral infections**
- **How to stay healthy throughout winter**

