



Making Menopause Marvelous

Holistic Helps for a Woman's Change of Life

Menopause has been called the "change of life," but it's really the second change of life women undergo. The first was puberty, when hormonal shifts transformed her from being a girl to being an adult woman. Traditionally, a girl's first period was seen as her passage from being a child to being a woman.

Menopause is a second hormonal shift that transforms a woman's body from the child-bearing years into the wise-woman (or elder) years. At menopause, periods cease because the ovaries no longer produce fertile eggs.

Just as the hormonal shifts during puberty may cause discomfort or problems, so might the hormonal shifts during menopause. So, although menopause is a natural process, ninety percent of all women experience some menopausal symptoms. In most cases, however, it's not necessary for women to turn to synthetic hormone replacement or synthetic drugs to ease these symptoms. There are plenty of natural remedies that can help.

Common Menopausal Problems

To understand how to make menopause marvelous instead of uncomfortable, it is necessary to understand some of the common problems women experience during menopause and the potential problems of medical solutions. Besides the cessation of periods, common menopausal symptoms include hot flashes, night sweats, vaginal dryness, breast tenderness and mood swings. It's also common for many women to experience some bone loss (osteoporosis), thinning of hair and the development of more facial hair, and some weight gain.

Emotional changes can also occur with menopause, including irritability, depression or anxiety. There may be difficulty concentrating, mental confusion and memory lapses.

In modern times, doctors began to routinely prescribe synthetic hormone replacement for women going through menopause to ease menopausal symptoms. However, these drugs are not without their side effects.

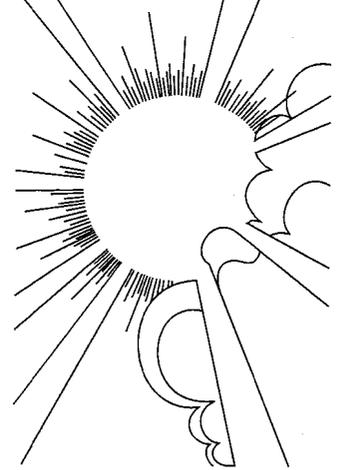
In July 2002, a study of 16,000 women on a common hormone-replacement drug, Prempro®, revealed some serious side effects. There was an increased risk of breast cancer and heart attack in women taking these hormones. Specifically, the stroke rate was 41% higher, breast cancer was 26% higher and the rate of blood clots doubled. So, although the synthetic hormones did reduce the rate of hip fractures, the increased risks in other areas made routine use of these medications unwise.

These synthetic hormones have other side effects, too. The side effects of synthetic progesterone can include weight gain, hair loss, low energy, depression, water retention, migraine headaches, reduced sex drive and skin problems. In fact, it has been found that one-half of all women who take synthetic hormone replacement quit after one year because they are unable to tolerate the side effects.

The good news is that women living in traditional cultures did not experience as many problems with menopause. So, it is possible to reduce or eliminate menopausal symptoms by creating a healthier lifestyle and using natural herbs and supplements. And, that's what we're going to explore in this issue of *Sunshine Sharing*.

Turn the page to learn more about natural approaches to menopause

SUNSHINE SHARING



Your guide to better health the natural way.

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Important Notice

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Blame it on Hormones

Ladies, when it comes to menopause, you really can blame it on hormones, because it is hormonal changes that create the physiological and psychological shifts you experience at menopause. So, in order to understand how we can remedy the situation, we need to understand a little bit about the two types of hormones that make you a woman—estrogen and progesterone.

Understanding Estrogens

Estrogen, of course, is the hormone that dominates in the female body, just like testosterone dominates in men. The word estrogen is derived from the Latin *oestrus* and Greek *oistros*, words that refer to the time of the month when a female is fertile and ready to mate. *Gen* means to generate or produce, so the word estrogen refers to a compound that makes a woman ovulate and become fertile.

What most women don't understand is that estrogen isn't a single compound. There are, in fact, many forms of estrogen.

For starters, a woman's body produces three primary forms of estrogen: estrone (E1), estradiol (E2) and estriol (E3). As if that's not enough, there are also phytoestrogens (estrogen-like compounds found in plants) and xenoestrogens (chemical pollutants that have estrogenic effects).

Estrogens are involved in a lot more than just ovulation. There are over 300 tissues in the body with estrogen receptor sites and estrogens play a role in 400 functions of the body. These include bone density, mood, eye health, muscle strength, energy production, temperature regulation, intestinal function, libido and even brain function (which is also why men and women think differently and even have different sensory perceptions).

Estradiol (E2)

Estradiol is the strongest estrogen and the main form of estrogen produced by a woman's body during her child-bearing years. Estradiol is produced in the ovaries under the influence of the follicle-stimulating hormone (FSH) from the pituitary. FSH causes an egg-bearing follicle to mature, producing E2.

E2 is the estrogen that stimulates breast development, so it is increased E2 that causes many of the changes a woman experiences during puberty. After menopause, when eggs are no longer maturing, the ovaries stop producing E2. The decline in levels of E2 causes many of the changes associated with menopause.

High levels of E2 increase the risk of uterine and breast cancer. However, E2 also has many benefits.

E2 helps absorption of minerals (which help to build bone). E2 also decreases LDL, increases HDL and balances triglycerides, which reduces a woman's risk of heart disease. It also makes tissues more insulin-sensitive, which reduces diabetes. Low levels of E2 can cause fatigue, problems sleeping, memory problems, increased risk of blood clots and depression.

Estrone (E1) and Estriol (E3)

E1 is the main form of estrogen produced after menopause. It can be formed in the adrenal glands, liver and fat cells, as well as the ovaries. During a woman's fertile years the ovaries convert E1 to E2. After menopause this conversion stops.

E3 is a milder estrogen that does not stimulate the breast tissue or uterine lining like E1 and E2 do. Because of this E3 protects the intestinal tract, vaginal lining and the breasts. E3 is even used to treat breast cancer in other countries. Asian and vegetarian women have higher levels of E3 and lower rates of breast cancer.

Balancing Estrogen After Menopause

Many of the symptoms women experience after menopause are the result of declining levels of estrogens. However, when the ovaries stop producing E2 a woman still continues to produce estrogens through the adrenals, liver and fat cells. So, here are three natural ways a woman can enhance her estrogen after menopause.

For starters, the body has a natural way of storing estrogen to ease the transition to menopause, increasing fat cells. It is common for women to experience a slight weight gain (5-10 pounds) just prior to entering menopause. This is nature's way of storing extra estrogen to be prepared for the hormonal shift. So, ladies, don't fight it or worry about it, accept it gracefully because it will make menopause easier.

Secondly, since the adrenal glands are a major source of estrogens after menopause, having healthy adrenal glands is vital to having a trouble-free change of life. Unfortunately, many women enter menopause suffering adrenal fatigue from sugar and caffeine consumption and chronic stress. Remedies that support the adrenals like **Adrenal Support**, **pantothenic acid** and **Nutri-Calm** can help to build the adrenals and reduce menopausal discomfort.

Finally, many natural foods and herbs contain plant-based estrogens called phytoestrogens. Women whose diets contain phytoestrogen-rich foods have fewer menopausal problems. Beans (including the highly promoted soybeans) are great sources of phytoestrogens, as are whole grains and dark green, leafy vegetables. Another good source of phytoestrogens is flax seed or **Flax Seed Oil with Lignans**.

Additional Help and Information

For more information about how to ease problems associated with menopause, contact the person who gave you this newsletter. Their contact information should be found at the top of page four. They have additional handouts and resource materials to help you. You can also consult some of the following sources:

Marvelous Menopause DVD by Tree of Light Publishing

The Herbal Menopause Book by Amanda McQuade Crawford

The Wisdom of Menopause by Christiane Northrup

Every Woman's Herbal by John R. Christopher with Cathy Gileadi

Menopausal Years the Wise Woman Way by Susun Weed

Women's Encyclopedia of Natural Medicine by Tori Hudson

There are also herbal remedies that contain phytoestrogens. **Black cohosh** is one of the best, and has been used for generations to ease menopausal symptoms. So, if you're concerned about low estrogen levels, try a hormone-balancing herbal formula that contains black cohosh as a primary ingredient, such as **C-X** and **FCS II**. Many menopausal women have found these formulas helpful.

Avoid Xenoestrogens

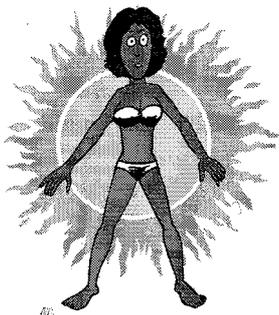
Women of all ages who want to protect their health should avoid xenoestrogens, the third type of estrogenic compound. These environmental pollutants that mimic estrogen cause abnormal changes in breast and uterine tissue, contributing to the development of breast lumps, breast cancer, uterine fibroids and endometriosis. They may also contribute to mood swings, cramps or heavy bleeding, thinning hair, hot flashes

and weight gain. The American Geriatric Society also reports that postmenopausal women with higher levels of circulating estrogen also experience greater cognitive decline.

Xenoestrogens come to us in the form of eggs, meat and dairy products from hormone-fed animals, pesticide residues on food, plastics and other sources. You can help to rid the body of these substances by supporting the liver, which breaks down these chemicals.

All Cell Detox is a great formula for helping the liver free the body of xenoestrogens and other toxins. Cruciferous vegetables are also valuable in reducing levels of xenoestrogens because they contain compounds like indole-3-carbinol which enhance the liver's ability to break down excess estrogens in the system. **Indole-3-Carbinol** is also available as a supplement.

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What Causes Hot Flashes?

The most common menopausal problems are hot flashes and night sweats. Night sweats are simply hot flashes that occur at night and cause heavy perspiration. Women with good overall health and hormonal balance have less extreme hot flashes and may experience little discomfort. Women whose bodies are more out of balance may have severe hot flashes that cause a great deal of discomfort.

Hot flashes occur via the hypothalamus, a part of the brain that sends signals to the pituitary gland to activate various hormones. The hypothalamus also regulates the body temperature.

When the hypothalamus senses there is a need for more estrogen it sends the gonadotropin-releasing hormone (GNRH) to the pituitary. GNRH stimulates the release of the follicle-stimulating hormone (FSH). During a woman's child-bearing years, FSH stimulates the development of an egg follicle, which releases estrogen. The hypothalamus senses the increased estrogen level and stops producing GNRH.

During menopause, when there is no viable egg to develop, there is no estrogen response from the ovaries. So, the hypothalamus increases production of GNRH to try to increase estrogen. The low estrogen can cause epinephrine to release from the adrenals, which stimulates the hypothalamus and resets the body's internal thermostat. This doesn't just create the sensations of heat, it can also cause the heart to speed up, resulting in feelings of anxiety and a pounding sensation in the chest.

Heat and substances that dilate arteries (coffee, chili and alcohol) can all aggravate hot flashes, so can smoking and sugar consumption. Stress and adrenal fatigue also contribute to increased problems with hot flashes. Establishing basic health practices, like a good diet, exercise and adequate sleep is also important to minimizing problems with hot flashes.



Tips to Help You Cool Down

After awhile the hypothalamus learns to adjust to lower levels of estrogen and stops trying to stimulate the ovaries. But, until this happens, hot flashes may be a problem.

Fortunately, there are ways to help balance hormones to reduce the severity of hot flashes, if not eliminate them entirely. Different women will respond to different remedies, so if the first thing you try doesn't work, don't be discouraged. Try some other approaches.

The first approach is to use phytoestrogens to help increase estrogen activity. This may help to calm down the hypothalamus. Black cohosh has been a popular phytoestrogen remedy for hot flashes since the 1800s. Unfortunately, in high doses it can cause vasodilative headaches because of its vasodilative effects. To get the benefits of black cohosh without these undesired effects, try **Flash-Ease**, which combines black cohosh with another female-balancing herb, dong quai, into a slow-release form so that you get a sustained phytoestrogenic action.

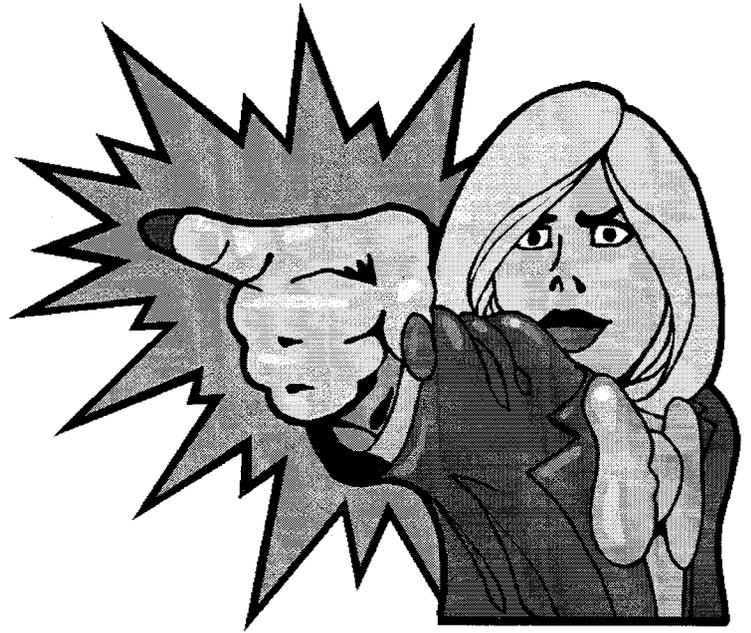
Many women find Flash-Ease effective, but it's not the only remedy that can help. Essential oils with estrogen-stimulating effects can also be helpful. These include **clary sage**, **pink grapefruit** and **geranium**. **Lavender** essential oil can also be helpful for hot flashes because of its relaxing effects. Mix a few drops of these oils with a little water in a small spray bottle and mist this around your face when you are having a hot flash. Essential oils directly affect the hypothalamus via the sense of smell, so this can help to instantly reset your body thermostat and cool you down.

Because the adrenals are involved in hot flashes, remedies that help to calm down stress levels and balance adrenal function may also reduce the severity and frequency of hot flashes. These include **eleuthero root**, **pantothenic acid** and **Adrenal Support**. Increasing your intake of good fats like flax seed oil, **Super Omega-3 EPA** or **krill oil** may also be helpful.

Going Through Menopause?

No need to get all
“hot and bothered!”

Herbs and supplements
can help you have a
“cool and calm”
change of life



Continued from Page Three

Understanding Progesterone

Progesterone is made by the ovaries before menopause and by the adrenal glands after menopause. This hormone helps lay down new bone, relieve depression, enhance sex drive and support thyroid function. Because it competes with estrogen for receptor sites, it also helps prevent over-stimulation of estrogenic processes, reducing the risk of fibrocystic breasts, breast cancer and other estrogen-dependent cancers.

After menopause, women also experience a decline in progesterone production. Increasing progesterone levels after menopause can help balance blood sugar levels, prevent blood clotting and maintain bone health. Two herbs that are very good at enhancing progesterone and helping to balance estrogen and progesterone levels are chaste tree berries and **false unicorn**.

Formulas that contain chaste tree or false unicorn as primary ingredients can also be used to balance hormones and reduce menopausal symptoms. These include **NF-X**, **Female Comfort** and **Wild Yam and Chaste Tree**.

Natural progesterone is also available in a cream form for topical application. Many women, both pre- and post-menopausal, find that using **Pro-G-Yam Cream** improves their overall health. It may be a good idea to get a saliva hormone test before using natural hormone replacements to see if you really need them.

If you're not sure where to begin, a great all-around pack that can be helpful for balancing hormones during menopause is **Natural Changes**. This pack contains C-X and Wild Yam and Chaste Tree to balance hormones, Flax Seed Oil for essential fatty acids and phytoestrogens and Nutri-Calm for reducing stress and supporting the adrenals.