



Menopause

Climacteric is a transitional period when a female's reproductive capacity ceases. Average age of menopause is 51 years.

Symptoms during menopause include sudden, intense, transient flushes of heat, night sweats, lethargy, poor concentration, irritability, anxiety, aggressiveness, depression, vaginal dryness and loss of libido, urgency and frequency of passing urine and increased risk of bone loss.

Physical Changes

Ovaries: cortical thinning and size reduction occurs.

Genital tract: myometrial tissue is replaced by fibrous tissue, endometrium becomes thin and atrophic, vulva and vagina become thin over the years with smoothing of the vaginal lining and loss of lubrication, pH rises occur, labia shrink, pelvic floor muscles become lax and risk of prolapse increases.

Bladder and urethra: epithelium thins and becomes more liable to infection.

Skin and Breasts: The epidermis and dermis become thinner and less elastic and glandular activity decreases. The breasts atrophy and are replaced by fat.

Cardiovascular: Levels of cholesterol, phospholipids and triglycerides rise and risk of heart disease increases slowly.

Hormone Replacement Therapy (HRT)

The ideal HRT regimen should alleviate symptoms and protect against osteoporosis and cardiovascular disease as well as have minimal side effects. Therapy using only oestrogen should only be used by women who have undergone a hysterectomy because of the high risk of endometrial cancer. Oestrogen will only delay, not reverse osteoporosis. To reduce side effects, take vitamins B1,2,6,C, biotin, folic acid and zinc.

Continuous combined HRT will lead to complete amenorrhoea in 90% of women (50-60% spotting before this). The addition of progesterone reduces the risk of endometrial hyperplasia and can reduce osteoporosis. In the past, cyclic regimens were used which caused periodic bleeding. Now combined HRT is used every day. High dosage of progesterone can have an adverse effect on serum lipids. Oestrogen can be cardio-protective i.e. it reduces the uptake of LDL cholesterol into vessel walls. Synthetic oestrogens are 1000x more potent than equine (i.e. from horses urine) oestrogens and have a higher risk of venous thrombosis and hypertension.

Side effects of oestrogen: breast tenderness, nipple sensitivity, nausea, fluid retention, leg cramps, possible weight gain, PMS-like symptoms, blood clots.

HRT following menopause prevents bone loss and future fractures by decreasing bone resorption (osteoclastic activity). Long term it can also reduce the risk of heart disease and stroke, fewer falls (less giddy spells).

Contraindications to using HRT: family history of, or active uterine, ovarian or breast cancer, undiagnosed uterine bleeding, acute thrombophlebitis (inflammation of the wall of a vein), pregnancy.

Natural Management

Lose weight, decrease sugar, salt, stress, alcohol, cigs and saturated fats, increase Ca, Mg, Zinc, Vit E (500i.u.), Vit B3, C, CoEQ10, fish oils and phyto-oestrogens.

Other helpful herbs include red clover, hawthorne, ginko biloba, bacopa, *sheng ma* black cohosh, hops, motherwort, garlic, sage and rauwolfia for high BP. *Bai ji li* tribulus has a unique capacity to increase androgen levels, improving mood, memory, cognition and energy. It will also increase oestradiol in pre-menopausal women, thus exerting a restorative effect.

Phyto-oestrogens are plant compounds that have oestrogen like effects on the human body. There are four main types. They are:

1. Steroidal Saponins e.g. red clover, *gan cao* licorice, *shan yao* wild yam, *tu fu ling* smilax, beetroot. Wild yam and soya beans are also high in progesterone.
2. Coumestans (most potent) e.g. red clover, aniseed
3. Isoflavones e.g. genistein/fermented
4. Lignans e.g. linseed and wheat.

Traditional Chinese Medicine uses many formulas for treating the symptoms of menopause, based on **Rehmannia 6 Formula (*Liu wei di huang wan*)**. This formula nourishes kidney and liver yin, kidney jing (“essence” and important for bone and marrow), clears empty heat, drains dampness and prevents stagnation. This formula will also reduce hypertension. If there is also excessive facial flushing, low grade fever worse at night, urinary difficulty or vaginal discharge, use ***Zhi bai ba wei wan*** (Anemarrhena, Phellodendron & Rehmannia Combination).

If eyes are also dry, red, photophobic and blurry with other menopausal symptoms, use ***Qi ju di huang wan*** (Lycium, Chrysanthemum & Rehmannia)

For chronic dry cough or with scant thick sputum that may be streaked with blood, breathlessness with exertion, use ***Mai wei di huang wan*** (Ophiopogon, Schizandra & Rehmannia Formula).

Femme Oestroplex by Metagenics is a unique combination of herbs from China, Europe and Nth America, plus vitamins and minerals for the effective relief of hot flushes and other menopausal symptoms. These herbs have both oestrogenic and progesterogenic effects to regulate hormonal fluctuations as well as significant sedative and anti-inflammatory activity, plus vitamins B6, B12 and folate to help reduce the danger of homocysteine toxicity.

Gynoplex contains traditional Chinese herbs designed to support gynaecological disturbances. In TCM terminology, these herbs clear damp heat and move and unblock qi and blood stagnation. They can relieve vaginal itch and discharge, menstrual pain, cramping, irregular or heavy periods.

Some of the herbs are anti-viral in action relieving cold sores associated with the herpes virus as well as being anti-inflammatory and broadly anti-microbial.

Skeletal: Calcium is lost from the bones at about 1% per year. Most bone density is lost in the first 10 years after menopause (3-5% loss of density per year). This most commonly presents as hip fractures and vertebral crush fractures, diagnosed by x-ray or bone densitometry. Higher risks are seen in those women who undergo early menopause, are caucasian or asian, thin, have no children, smoke, abuse alcohol, lead a sedentary lifestyle, have poor calcium intake or may suffer from coeliac or thyroid disease or hyperthyroidism or are receiving steroid treatments.

Osteoporosis

Osteoporosis affects one in four women and one in forty men causing loss of calcium from the bones. One in every two women over 70 years of age suffers a fracture related to osteoporosis. More women die from the consequences of a hip fracture than from cancer of the breast, cervix and uterus combined. Osteoporosis can also cause loss of height, hunched back and back pain. There are many diseases that can cause calcium loss and these must be addressed before supplementation of calcium is effective.

Prevention is far better than cure here. Don't leave it until too late. **Load bearing exercise** is essential for healthy bones. A piezo-electric charge between the ends of the long bones in the body cause more calcium to be deposited in the bones. Tai chi is highly recommended, especially some of the more aerobic and physically demanding forms such as the old Yang lu Chan style and the broadsword and spear forms. For information on purchasing instructional videos on these forms and more, please check out Master Erle Montaigne's website www.taicheworld.com Cut smoking, reduce coffee and alcohol and maintain optimal weight.

Take calcium 1200mg/day. Calcium citrate and calcium hydroxyapatite are best absorbed for osteoporosis. Be sure to take **magnesium** as well so as not to develop too much muscle tension and to reduce cardio-vascular risks. **Magnesium** is a major regulator of bone metabolism. **Vit C and Vit A** for bone osteoblastic activity.

Also take:

Tyrosine – 500 to 1000mg/day

Vit D 800i.u./day. Cod liver oil is often 400mg/capsule

Boron (i.e. rose hip tea) strengthens bone and helps oestrogen metabolism.

Zinc, copper, silica, manganese, folic acid, selenium, vit B6 and K, CoEQ10 and

mucopolysaccharides (found in oats, mussels, shark fin soup, irish moss) are also important.

Excessive intake of animal protein with its high phosphate content increases the urinary excretion of calcium and may promote bone dissolution.

Helpful Chinese herbs: **shan yao** wild yam, **sheng ma** black cohosh, **sheng di** rehmannia, **bai shao** white peony root, **dang gui** angelica sinensis.

Zuo Gui Wan (Left Returning Formula) is good for dizziness, lower back and knee pain and weakness as well as menopausal s/s. Deer antler velvet has been found to have osteoblastic (new bone stem cells) effects.

Metagenics Osteo Plus is a scientifically advanced formula containing all the necessary nutrients for the support of osteoporosis and maintaining optimal bone health. Therapeutic levels of microcrystalline hydroxyapatite and calcium citrate (which are the most absorbable forms of calcium) are formulated with balanced amounts of highly absorbable magnesium, zinc, manganese and other synergistic vitamins and minerals.

There are many other good products for pre- and post-menopausal problems, but they should only be prescribed by a qualified health professional.