

# A Powerful Transition: Life Balancing, Nutrition, and other Natural Approaches to Menopause

In the tradition of the Wise Woman or the Crone as she is sometimes known, menopause is the time when a woman makes claim to her wholeness. Moving to a state of emotional maturity, she has embraced and given birth to her child self (and perhaps to her own children), and no longer ovulating, she has given death to her mother self (and perhaps has seen her own mother die). In this wholeness, she is ready to accept the wisdom that is her birthright. In many cultures, menopause is a highly anticipated and revered transition that brings with it respect, honor, and power. In American culture, menopause has been treated medically as a disease, and treated socially as time of decline, loss of sexuality and stamina. It seems clear to me that cultural influence plays a powerful role in how we experience this life transition.

Menopause is a natural female process and even for American women, most experience a symptom-free menopausal transition. However, when imbalance and negative expectations are present, a wide number of uncomfortable menopausal symptoms are possible. They include irregular periods, flooding, fibroids, osteoporosis, weight gain, emotional uproar, hot flashes, night sweats, depression, fatigue, headaches, vaginal dryness, heart disease, and on and on. Of course there are times when medical intervention may be warranted, but in general, a natural body process is usually easily balanced with natural approaches. What follows here is a brief overview of some of the natural, self-care options available to all women.

## Life Balancing

Both external and internal balance are components of overall wellbeing and health. Menopausal wellbeing is no different. The extent to which a woman's life is out of balance is often the extent to which menopause is a time of discomfort. Consider the following strategies and know there are many, many others out there just for the looking.

- Stress management – stress has a very, very real impact on your hormones. But stress as an external phenomenon has no power over your wellbeing; it is only that stress which you internalize that can hurt you. Relaxation techniques such as deep breathing, visualization, and the use of affirmations can be very helpful. Eastern practices such as yoga, tai chi, chi gong, and others can also be very helpful. Treating yourself to a massage, a facial, a night at the movies, or a long, luxurious bubble bath may be other techniques that work for you.
- Exercise – a body has to move to be well; EVERY DAY. Virtually all menopausal symptoms are improved with exercise. Try my approach to committing to daily exercise: choose a form of exercise that you can fall in love with and then commit to a level that you simply can't find an excuse for. I mean it can be as low as ONE MINUTE PER DAY. Trust me, that time will expand naturally if you simply make a commitment to do it every single day.
- The *Foundations of Health* diet – food really, really DOES matter. But this doesn't have to be rocket science. There are four essential components of the healthy diet: water, protein, carbohydrate (think fiber), and fat. Drink half your weight in ounces of water each day and come to know the wonders of being hydrated. Get some protein (stick with fish, organic chicken and turkey, legumes (pintos, black, garbanzos, lentils, etc.), nuts & seeds, or low carb protein drinks) at every meal. Focus on carbs that give you fiber and stay away from sugar and processed grains (this will have you eating lots of veggies and whole grains). And learn the difference between good fat and bad fat. Make absolutely sure you're getting your good fats every day.
- Retreat – plan for your Crone's time away. If you're in perimenopause, begin to include alone-time into your plans. Maybe an afternoon to yourself each month or a weekend once or twice a year. Consider making plans to have an extended time to yourself during your menopausal year (menopause isn't official until 12-14 months have passed since your last period).

## Nutritional Medicine

You can approximate the standard dose of pharmaceutical estrogen with food sources. The foods that are highest in natural estrogens are soy and flaxseed. These foods are shown in research to balance hormones, decrease breast cancer risk, lower cholesterol, and protect bones with no negative side effects. What more can you want? Do the research, find the recipes, and begin to include these miracle food/medicines in your daily diet.

### SOY

- Decrease breast cancer risk: 1-2 portions
- Reduce menopausal symptoms: 1-2 portions
- Lower cholesterol: 2-5 portions
- Approximate a bone-protective dose of pharmaceutical estrogen: 3-8 portions

### FLAXSEED

- Decrease breast cancer risk: 1 tablespoon
- Reduce menopausal symptoms: 2-3 tablespoons
- Lower cholesterol: 2-5 tablespoons
- Approximate a bone-protective dose of pharmaceutical estrogen: 3-8 tablespoons

You can also increase your intake of the bone minerals with foods. Consider these ideas:

- 1 cup plain yogurt = 350-400 mg calcium
- 1 cup soy milk = 80 mg calcium
- 1 cup almond milk = 165 mg calcium
- 1 cup broccoli/kale/turnip greens = 200 mg calcium
- 2 corn tortillas = 120 mg calcium
- 1 cup cooked collards/ wild onions/lamb's quarter/amaranth greens = 400 mg calcium
- 1 cup herbal tea (nettle/sage/chickweed/red clover/comfrey leaf/raspberry leaf/ oatstraw = 250-300 mg calcium
- Get Vitamin D from 10-15 minutes daily sunshine on exposed skin, from salmon/halibut/mackerel and free-range eggs, and from alfalfa and nettle tea.
- Get Vitamin K from potatoes, yogurt, molasses, leafy greens, kelp, and nettles.
- Get Magnesium from oatstraw/kelp/nettle/horsetail/sage.
- Get Boron from organic fruits and vegetables
- Get Phosphorous from raw pumpkinseeds. Also avoid carbonated beverages.

## Natural Balancers

I always think of the earth's natural pharmacy as being infinite. Indeed, there are seemingly limitless options available to us when we look for natural solutions to health imbalances. So here is a very short list of options that can be very helpful in balancing menopausal symptoms. Remember that the best solution for you will be different than the best solution for your girlfriend. And also remember, that each menopausal symptom (hot flashes, flooding, depression, fatigue, etc.) will call for its own unique combination of these options.

- Vitamins & minerals
  - E: 400-1000 IUs d-alpha tocopherol daily
  - B complex
  - Bioflavonoids
  - Magnesium
  - Any vitamin or mineral in excess or deficiency needs balancing
- Herbs such as chaste tree, dandelion, nettle, red clover, black cohosh, licorice, sarsaparilla, wild yam
- Homeopathic remedies such as lachesis, sepia, belladonna, ipecacuanha, sulfur, natrum mur, crocus sativa
- Aromatherapy essential oils such as lavender, clary sage, geranium
- Natural Progesterone cremes
- Reflexology
- Bach flower remedies

## Education

Although menopause is a normal female process, seeking to regain balance when your body/life is out of balance can seem like an overwhelming undertaking. You will want to find at least one and perhaps a team of health care practitioners who can guide you through your changes. In order to find the best practitioners for you and to best lead their efforts, you will want to do some self-education on the subject. Here's my list of favorite books:

Borysenko, Joan, *A Woman's Book of Life*

Ford, Gillian, *Listening to your Hormones*

Lee, John, *What Your Doctor May Not Tell You About Menopause*

Lee, John, *What Your Doctor May Not Tell You About Premenopause*

Shandler, Nina, *Estrogen the Natural Way*

Sharan, Farida, *Creative Menopause*

Northrup, Christiane, *Women's Bodies, Women's Wisdom*

Weed, Susun, *Menopausal Years, The Wise Woman Way*