

## **Hot and Bothered by Menopausal Symptoms? There are other options...**

Last July the National Institute of Health halted some of the trials on hormone replacement therapy because of increased risks of blood clots, heart disease, stroke, and breast cancer. Since then researchers are racing to evaluate a host of alternative therapies which could bring about a revolution in health care for peri-menopausal women here in the U.S. At the top of the list are herbal remedies, acupuncture, meditation, and change in diet, exercise, and lifestyle. Certainly there is a more "natural" way to age that can offer relief to the thousands of women who suffer from menopausal symptoms.

For some women menopause is a phase of life that does not require medical intervention. For others it can be a chaotic, uncomfortable or even life halting experience. By far the most common complaint is "hot flashes". About 85% of peri-menopausal women suffer from this symptom, with about half of these finding it disturbing. About 20% of women will experience symptoms for less than one year, but approximately 50% experience unpleasant symptoms for five years or more. Other symptoms often include night sweats, menstrual irregularity, anxiety, depression, migraines, and insomnia.

Western medicine typically offers hormone replacement therapy for the discomforts which come with menopause. With new information emerging about possible problems with hormone replacement therapy, many women can not or do not wish to take hormones. Traditional Chinese Medicine (TCM) has a great deal to offer those women. Instead of a standard hormone replacement therapy, Chinese medicine looks at each woman individually, taking into account the whole pattern of each patient's physical, mental, and emotional symptoms.

According to Chinese medical theory, menopause occurs when a woman's body no longer produces sufficient blood to sustain a monthly period without this blood loss being draining on her body and particularly her "kidneys". In Chinese medicine, the kidney is the root of life and longevity. When a woman is young, the energy in the body flows down a channel in the center of the body from the heart to the uterus. During menopause the body, in its infinite wisdom, reverses the flow of energy in the channel so that blood and essence from the kidney flow upward to the heart in order to nourish the woman's spirit. This is why in many traditional cultures postmenopausal women are regarded as wise.

This age-old traditional wisdom is not just superstition. TCM is a 2000-3000 year old professional medical system, and gynecology is one of its specialties. In TCM, menopausal syndrome is one of the most easily and satisfactorily treated complaints. TCM practitioners may use acupuncture and/or Chinese herbal medicine to treat menopausal syndrome. They also typically advise patients on diet, exercise, and lifestyle, thus bringing balance to the woman's entire being.

Chinese medicine looks at menopause as a natural stage of the life cycle. During the reproductive years, women's bodies manufacture a great deal of blood and fluids. In the process of the monthly menstrual cycle, the gestation, birthing, and nursing of children, women lose a great deal of the blood and fluids. By the time menstruation ceases, the production of blood has diminished and fluids are scarce. The typical problems of menopause - hot flashes, night sweats, vaginal dryness, etc. - are consequences of these changes. Chinese medicine has discovered substances, mostly herbs and foods, which counteract the drying effects of menopause. Rather than introduce hormone treatment exogenously, hormone production is stimulated naturally with traditional herbs and foods that moisten the body and gently encourage the hormonal system to make this adjustment smoothly into a new phase of life. Acupuncture is also utilized to bring organs, glands, and the entire system back to a harmonious relationship. Most women find relief from their menopausal symptoms within days of beginning treatment.

In any case, basic lifestyle factors - quitting smoking, eating a good diet (low in sugar and processed foods), and getting regular exercise - will help almost anything. Also, many women find that limiting the intake of hot and spicy foods, decreasing caffeine, taking adequate amounts of calcium and magnesium, adding soy to the diet, and practicing a form of relaxation such as meditation often help their menopausal symptoms.

Before beginning any alternative or complementary therapy, you should always consult your physician and a qualified herbalist and/or acupuncturist.

For more information on the HRT studies visit: [The National Heart Blood and Lung Institute](#)

For more information on complementary therapies visit:

- [Acupuncture.com](#)
- [Acupuncture and Oriental Medicine Alliance](#)
- [Blue Poppy Enterprises](#)