

HERBAL MEDICINE FOR PERI-MENOPAUSE AND MENOPAUSE | Lisa Bedner, RN, RH (AHG)

Menopause refers to that part of a woman's life after she has stopped menstrual bleeding completely, for at least one year. But is not unusual for a “menopausal” woman to have one or two spotting or scant bleeding episodes within this last year. Peri-menopause can last anywhere from two to 10 years. During this time most women experience changes, or negative symptoms. These can include: spotting between cycles, skipping cycles, excessive bleeding with clots, excessive cramping, irregular heart rates, hot flashes, mood swings, depression, brain fog, and more. Unfortunately, most OB/GYNs don't receive training in menopause or peri-menopause. They still consider this an abnormal disease process to be fixed by pharmaceuticals!

The most important points to remember in the female hormonal system are these: There are SIX hormones, not just two. They are Estrogen, Progesterone, Oxytocin, Human Chorionic Gonadotrophin, Follicle Stimulating Hormone and Testosterone. (Although HCG, FSH, and Oxytocin are only needed during pregnancy and lactation.) And most important, there is NO SUCH THING AS ABNORMAL for women's cycles and Peri-menopause.

The majority of negative symptoms that occur are caused by hormonal imbalance. In Native American Herbal medicine we do not seek to add “natural” hormones or substitutes, but to help the body balance the amount of hormones present. Certain herbs help to gradually lower all these hormones until they reach an evenly balanced post-menopausal level. These are the female hormonal balancing herbs:

Angelica	<i>Angelica archangelica</i>	Borage seeds	<i>Borago officinalis</i>
Black Cohosh	<i>Cimicifuga racemosa</i>	Chaste tree berries	<i>Vitex agnus castus</i>
Evening primrose seeds	<i>Oenothera biennis</i>	Don Quai	<i>Angelica sinensis</i>
Lyreleaf sage	<i>Salvia Lyrata</i>	Mugwort	<i>Artemesia vulgaris</i>
Wingstem	<i>Verbesina alternafolia</i>		

When preparing Lyreleaf sage, Mugwort, or Wingstem, the aerial parts are used.

For Borage, Chaste tree, and Evening primrose the seeds or berries are most medicinal.

For Angelica, Don Quai, and Black cohosh, the medicine is made from the root.

Herbal balancers work on the root cause, but sometimes a remedy for specific symptoms is most welcome!

Hot flashes or night sweats: a topical cream to the abdomen with Wild Yam *Dioscorea villosa* or Diosgenin (extracted from soy)

Irregular heart rate: Motherwort *Leonurus cardiaca*

Anxiety: Scullcap *Scutellaria laterifolia*

But herbs, supplements, and hormones are not all that are important at this stage of life. There are four aspects to women's good balance and health: Spirituality and acceptance, hormones, nutrition, and stress. It's important to honor yourself and your body every month, even if you no longer have monthly cycles. Aboriginal cultures have honoring ceremonies for menarche and menopause. Modern American culture disdains both. It's never too late to positively impact your health and attitude. Negative attitudes create more uncomfortable menstrual cycles, more difficult pregnancies and labor, and more negative symptoms at perimenopause and menopause. Remember also that emotions, trauma, diet, the nervous system and more, can alter the secretion of hormones.

*****REMEMBER, THEY'RE NOT HOT FLASHES! THEY ARE POWER SURGES!!!*****

MEDICINE BUNDLES

Any woman can follow the Native American tradition of making a Medicine Bundle, to honor or heal.

A medicine bundle for a mature woman, entering into peri-menopause, or at menopause, might include these:

Lyre leaf sage, Cedar branches, Scullcap, Stinging Nettles

Sweet Smelling herbs, including Tulsi basil, Sweet annie, and Lavender

Not all medicine bundles include all of the above herbs, and some may include ones not listed above. It is also appropriate to include other items you have acquired during your lifetime, or a piece of nature you have found while walking outside. Keep the bundle by your bed, under a pillow or on an altar. When you decide it's time for a new one, the old bundle should be buried or burned.

NUTRITION

Nutrition is very important during peri-menopause. A varied, balanced, diet is more important than any specific diet. Drink lots of water and avoid carbonated beverages. Cravings are fine in moderation. Latest studies show chocolate is GOOD for mood swings, depression, etc! It is normal and natural to gain weight at this time of life. Slightly overweight (i.e. padded) women break their hips less often than slim women! Many women do not get enough Vitamin E, Vitamin B's, and Magnesium.

Nutritive herbs to help with vitamin/mineral balance:

Milky oats, Stinging Nettles *Urtica dioica*, and Wild leaves *Viola species*

The great Calcium controversy -- what is osteoporosis and osteopenia? Calcium supplements are hard to absorb, must be taken with Vitamin D and Magnesium to be effective. Liquid calcium carbonate and citrate are easiest to absorb. Take all mineral supplements in the evening. Since calcium is found in dark green leafy vegetables, it is also found in fresh herbs like parsley, cilantro, violet leaves, and nettles. You can't drink milk to increase your calcium levels – due to the Calcium/Phosphorus ratio.

BREAST HEALTH

Like monthly cycles, breast tissue will go through NORMAL changes in a woman's lifetime. Most importantly: Know your ladies! Your number one defense against all maladies, cancers, and diseases is self breast exam and the mirror. Be aware of changes, discolorations, and especially unusual pain or leakage. Ratio of finding a cancer on mammogram verses self exam is at least 1:5. Some diet choices, like processed sugars, excess caffeine, and most commercial meats (that contain hormones) can cause breast problems.

VAGINAL DRYNESS AND PAINFUL SEXUAL INTERCOURSE

This is very common during peri-menopause and menopause. Lubrication is the answer, but there are many options. The best and longest lasting is an oil-based salve or cream, especially ones that contain Aloe or Nettles. These herbs help with healing of chafing and small abrasions of the vaginal wall.

UTERINE FIBROIDS

These are non-cancerous growths in the uterus. They are very common during menopause. Most need no treatment unless they are extremely painful or cause very heavy bleeding. Less than 1% will become cancerous. Almost 100% will disappear on their own after full menopause is reached. Herbs that may help shrinkage include hormonal balancers and raspberry leaves.

Thank you for coming to learn about herbs today. For more information about classes, books, and more see: www.pipsissewaherbs.com or the FB page pipsissewa herbs. Here is one of the best references for menopause: The Wisdom of Menopause by Christiane Northrop, MD.