

TRADITIONS

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MENOPAUSE UPDATE

Tori Hudson, ND



I often tell women, that perimenopause and menopause is an evolving process with many changes that are often unpredictable. Not only do symptoms and health issues evolve, but the treatments then need to change and evolve as well. And of course, all of this is going on at the same time that the science related to herbal and nutritional treatments, hormonal therapy, and management of more serious conditions such as osteoporosis and heart disease is also evolving. A critical part of the process, is keeping up with the information. Both practitioners and menopausal women are challenged by this task.

There have been many developments in the recent past in the area of menopause management. Here are a few research updates and some information to make it a little easier to navigate your menopause:

- While conventional HRT such as Premarin and Provera were found to slightly increase the risk of breast cancer, heart disease, strokes, deep vein thrombosis and gallbladder disease, estrogen only studies have been showing no increase risk in breast cancer or heart disease
- Bio-identical estradiol and progesterone (the kind we mostly use at A Woman's Time), have been shown in a recent French study, not to be associated with an increased risk of breast cancer
- Hormone therapy, when started in perimenopause or early menopause, is now proving to be cardioprotective. If we wait 2 or more years after menopause, and then start hormones, and especially if the synthetic Provera is used along with estrogens, this is the most problematic situation for cardiovascular disease.
- Black cohosh is not associated with adverse liver function in women who do not have pre-existing liver disease
- 4 new studies of black cohosh show that 3 had benefit, and one did not
- Scientific research demonstrates that hormone replacement therapy does not cause weight gain
- Scientific research and our clinical experience shows us that herbal and nutritional therapies are found to be effective for most perimenopausal/ menopausal symptoms such as mild to moderate symptoms such as hot flashes, mood swings, anxiety, depression, irregular bleeding, fatigue and body aches.
- It can be more difficult to treat low libido and severe insomnia with herbal and nutritional therapies alone. Enhancing sexual desire may require herbal therapies *and* the use of bio-identical hormones, including estradiol, progesterone and testosterone. Some types of insomnia are very challenging and may need an integrative approach of herbal/nutritional and pharmaceuticals. Vaginal dryness is very well treated with bio-identical vaginal estriol (a prescription item at A Woman's Time).
- Policosanol, a plant sterol and natural substance, shows excellent research in reducing total cholesterol, LDL cholesterol and triglycerides, while increasing the good cholesterol, HDL.

Let us know how we can help you with your menopause transition.

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NATURAL APPROACHES TO DEPRESSION

Erin Sweet, ND

Each year approximately 20 million Americans will be diagnosed with depression and more than 30 million will take medication to treat their depression. Women experience depression about twice as often as men. Many hormonal factors may contribute to the increased rate of depression in women—particularly such factors as menstrual cycle changes, pregnancy, miscarriage, postpartum period, pre-menopause, and menopause. Many women also face additional stresses such as responsibilities both at work and home, single parenthood, and caring for children and for aging parents.

Depression is defined as having the presence of 4 to 5 or more of the following symptoms:

- Change in appetite or weight
- Change in sleep patterns
- Inability to find joy in activities of daily living
- Feeling tired
- Change in ability to think clearly
- Feelings of worthlessness
- Thoughts of suicide

Depression can have many causes and is usually the result of a combination of factors. A thorough clinical evaluation can establish a diagnosis of depression and, more importantly, rule out any other potentially serious problems. Some general areas that may be addressed by your doctor when investigating the cause of depression include looking at your overall health, thyroid function, stress and adrenal function and lifestyle.

Factors we can influence which may contribute to the development of depression include nutrition, lifestyle, environment and hormone balance. It is important to work with a qualified health care practitioner in order to appropriately diagnose and treat depression. The goal of naturopathic treatment is to identify and treat the cause of the depression whenever possible

A Naturopathic approach to the treatment of depression begins with diet. Nutrition has a powerful influence on mood and brain function. Nutrient deficiencies are common in depressed individuals. Ask your doctor about new tests that are available to determine whether you are deficient in key amino acids and other vitamins that are necessary for healthy neurotransmitter formation. Regular meals with a focus on colorful, seasonal, organic fruits, vegetables, protein, fish, and whole grains are the first step to a healthier body and mind.

Exercise can be as effective as antidepressants and psychotherapy for mild to moderate depression. Combined aerobic and strength training will provide the best effect. A minimum goal is to exercise 5 days per week for 30 minutes each at a moderate intensity level.

Depressed patients are more commonly deficient in particular vitamins and minerals. Folic acid and the B vitamins including B6 and B12 are very important cofactors in the production of neurotransmitters. A daily multiple vitamin complements a healthy diet in providing a full range of vitamins and minerals important in brain function.

There are many herbal and nutritional supplements which may be useful in treating depression. St. John's Wort is an herb that has been shown to be effective in the treatment of mild to moderate depression. Rhodiola is an adaptogenic herb which has the ability to increase our body's resistance to stressors and has been reported to improve mental fatigue, sleep and mood. 5-HTP and SAMe are amino acids involved in neurotransmitter production and there is some evidence to show that their effects may be comparable to that of some conventional antidepressants. Your naturopathic physician can help you with a specific treatment plan utilizing amino acids, vitamins and herbs.

Counseling is an important part of any treatment plan for depression and it has been shown to be as effective as antidepressants for mild to moderate depression. Patients who seek counseling have fewer episodes of depression and decreased length of drug treatment.

Unfortunately, many people do not recognize that depression is a treatable illness. Most people with a depressive illness do not seek treatment, although the great majority can be helped. Talk to your health care provider if you are experiencing symptoms of depression.

“Nutrition has a powerful influence on mood and brain function.”

CHOLESTEROL: BEYOND THE NUMBERS

Wendy Vannoy, ND

Your doctor tells you that your cholesterol is too high—what do you do now? Well, that depends on which cholesterol marker is elevated, whether your triglycerides are elevated and what personal heart disease risk factors you have. A total cholesterol of 250 can mean something entirely different for two individuals.

With increased awareness of the deadliness of heart disease in women, the focus is turning to early detection of women at risk for heart disease. New guidelines recommend a fasting lipid profile at age 20 and then every 5 years if cholesterol levels are normal. (*National Cholesterol Education Program (NCEP) guidelines. JAMA. 2001;285:2486-97*) The following chart lists the most current recommendations for cholesterol numbers.

Cholesterol Fraction	Goals for those with no heart disease risk factors	Goals for those with known heart disease risk factors
Total Cholesterol	<200mg/dl	<200mg/dl
Triglycerides	<150mg/dl	<70mg/dl
LDL	<130mg/dl	<100mg/dl
HDL	>40mg/dl	>50mg/dl

“New guidelines recommend a fasting lipid profile at age 20 and then every 5 years if cholesterol levels are normal.”

A standard fasting lipid panel only gives you part of the cholesterol picture, however. More and more physicians are recommending a test that, in addition to evaluating the above measures of cholesterol, also evaluates the different types of lipoproteins. This test is called the Vertical Audio Profile (VAP). Measuring the subparticles of the lipoproteins LDL and HDL allows for identification of risk factors under strong genetic control such as Lp(a), small LDL (pattern B), and HDL subclasses. These patterns can assist your healthcare provider in more accurately assessing your heart disease risk.

It turns out that not only is the amount of LDL important, but so is its size. The smaller the LDL particles, the more atherogenic—causing damage to blood vessels. Patients with Metabolic Syndrome, for example, are more likely to have a higher ratio of small LDL particles (Pattern B). Likewise, the "best of the best" is the part of the HDL known as HDL2b. Those with HDL2b particles that make up more than 28% of total HDL are better protected by their level of HDL—even if it is not at the ideal level of >50mg/dl.

Finally, LP(a) is an independent risk factor for CHD that is more predictive for women than men and increases the risk of blood clots. These fine points are only important if you can do something about it . . . and you can. Not all lipid disorders are helped optimally with the same agents, having this detailed information can help determine the most appropriate therapeutic treatment option.

Who should have this test? Those with high risk factors for heart disease: patients with known Coronary Heart Disease (CHD), Type 2 Diabetes, Metabolic Syndrome, a positive family history of heart disease and those with abnormal screening profiles, including triglyceride level of > than 200. In the interest of early detection, every woman might consider this type of in-depth testing as a baseline screen for heart disease risk factors. Ask your doctor if the VAP test is right for you.

Did You Know...

Meditation may stimulate the growth of brain tissue and reduce cognitive decline sometimes associated with aging. In a small study, people who meditated exhibited increased thickness in brain regions involved in attention and sensory perception compared to people of the same age who did not meditate. Take a few minutes every day to calm your mind and focus your thoughts.

Meditation experience is associated with increased cortical thickness. Lazar, S. W., Kerr, C. E., Wasserman, R. H., Gray, J. R., Greve, D. N., Treadway, M. T., McGarvey, M., Quinn, B. T., Dusek, J. A., Benson, H., Rauch, S. L., Moore, C. I., Fischl, B., NeuroReport 2005 Nov 28;16(17):1893-1897.

SPRING: ARE YOUR ALLERGIES IN BLOOM?

Stephanie Kaplan, ND

Whether the blooms are inducing a smile or sneeze, this season is full of changes.

The bloom came early and strong this year in the Willamette Valley. Some of us have been sniffing and sneezing since February. There are many ways to welcome and work on the changes of spring. One is to shed the heaviness of winter by changing our habits toward lighter and fresher foods. Some people choose this time of year to implement a dietary cleanse. These changes in our food choices tend to have a great impact on how strongly our allergies present themselves. Other ways to move on from winter include increasing movement and having purposeful relationships with people and the environment.

If you are experiencing seasonal allergies, eliminating inflammatory/mucous-producing foods, particularly dairy, just before and during the peak of your allergy season can have a great impact. Other inflammatory foods include eggs, wheat, corn, nightshades (tomatoes, potatoes, peppers, eggplant), coffee, and alcohol. One's reactions to these foods can be very individual and as a naturopathic patient you have many choices to determine which foods are, in fact, an issue for you. Following an anti-inflammatory diet or an elimination diet, and then adding back each food separately may help you discover the culprit(s). Also, a variety of testing options exist for determining your food intolerances. You can consult with your naturopathic doctor to find out more.

Besides eliminating offending foods, adding anti-inflammatory foods is very helpful in decreasing our allergic response. Extra bioflavonoids in the diet help stabilize our mucous membranes and help normalize our body's response to allergens. All fresh fruits and vegetables are high in bioflavonoids. The ones found to be particularly helpful are found in berries. One-half of a cup of berries per day may do the trick for you. Increasing our vitamin C intake, through these live foods or a supplement, has a similar effect. Another food/herb that helps many people stabilize their immune response is nettles. Nettles may be taken in the form of a tea, tincture, or dried herb. Contact your naturopathic physician to learn specific ways to manage your allergies!

Another key to welcoming spring, allergies or not, is to make sure you are eliminating well by consuming high amounts of fiber in the diet and drinking plenty of water. I recommend half of your body weight in ounces of pure water and 5-9 servings of fruits and vegetables everyday. Of course proper elimination is important year round, but particularly if you are cleansing. Our skin is our largest detoxification organ, therefore sweating from regular exercise is one of our most important daily activities. Alternate activities throughout the week to prevent losing interest, and try to get some of your regular exercise outside. It is estimated that 50-60% of people in the Pacific Northwest are vitamin D deficient. We can get this vitamin/hormone from exposure to natural light. Rain or shine, get outside! For more intensive sweating regimens, a sauna can be used to promote detoxification. Sauna time is not for everyone, but if you are interested, ask your physician before starting a regular sauna program to make sure it's the right thing for you.

There are numerous plants and nutrients that act as decongestants or anti-histamines. Some can even decrease our sensitivities to our allergens. Consult with one of our doctors about what treatment plan might be the most effective for you.

Enjoy the transition of spring and breathe easy!

Did You Know...

Adding more nuts to your diet may help reduce your risk for diabetes.

In a study, the people who ate an ounce of nuts or a couple of tablespoons of peanut butter five times per week had a much lower risk of type 2 diabetes compared to the people who rarely ate nuts or peanut butter.

Nuts and peanut butter are high in magnesium and poly- and monounsaturated fats -- nutrients that help maintain optimal glucose and insulin levels. Note: when adding calorie-dense nuts to your diet, cut back on other foods that are high in fat and calories to help balance things out.

Nut and peanut butter consumption and risk of type 2 diabetes in women. Jiang, R., Manson, J. E., Stampfer, M. J., Liu, S., Willett, W. C., Hu, F. B., The Journal of the American Medical Association 2002 Nov 27;288(20):2554-2560.

ENHANCING FERTILITY

Leigh Kochan, ND, LAc

Impaired fertility affects over 6 million in the U.S. alone and recent estimates suggest that approximately 10 million couples have sought infertility services. Of the couples that are infertile, 35-40% is due to male factors, 35-40% due to female factors, 20-30% is a combination of both. Infertility is defined as no conception after 12 months of intercourse without contraception in women under 35 or after 6 months in women over 35. Since fertility declines with age, it is necessary for women to get timely evaluations and treatment.

Complementary medicine has a role in the management of infertility both before and after a referral has been made to a reproductive specialist. After a detailed history and physical including pertinent lab work, treatment can be targeted to address any identified underlying causes. Unfortunately, in many cases, no cause can be determined. In these causes of unexplained infertility, the first step is to address basic issues of diet and lifestyle. Overweight and underweight individuals have increased rates of infertility. In a woman with a Body Mass Index (BMI) > 25, weight loss of as little as 10% can be significant in helping to normalize menses and ovulation. Similarly, weight gain in an underweight woman is important as well. Focusing on daily exercise and a whole foods diet free of processed foods, alcohol, and caffeine is important to help normalize weight as well as blood sugar. In addition, a normal body weight increases the success of assisted reproductive therapies such as in vitro fertilization. Smoking, caffeine (yes, even decaf) and alcohol have been linked to decreased fertility in both partners so avoidance is important in couples with fertility issues.

Mental and emotional issues deserve to be addressed as well since the whole process of dealing with infertility can be very stressful and emotionally taxing. In addition, research suggests that past or current stress, especially depression, can be the cause of many cases of unexplained infertility. This can be especially problematic since continued inability to get pregnant often fuels depression, leading to a vicious cycle of emotional upset and a veritable rollercoaster of monthly hopes and let-downs. Stress hormones have inhibitory effects on the reproductive system and, therefore, needs to be addressed in anyone receiving fertility services. A variety of relaxation techniques, including acupuncture, biofeedback, individual and couples counseling, progressive muscle relaxation, yoga, tai chi, qi gong, and meditation should be part of the treatment plan for anyone with past or present depression.

Acupuncture has been supported in the research literature in terms of improving pregnancy rates in women undergoing fertility treatment. Pelvic ultrasound studies have confirmed that acupuncture treatments can improve pelvic blood flow and this may account for its effectiveness in improving fertility rates. In addition, acupuncture can also be helpful in improving sperm density, menstrual cycle regulation, ovulation induction, and stress and depression.

Dietary supplements and botanical treatments can also help to improve fertility both in achieving and maintaining a pregnancy. A multivitamin and mineral in the form of a prenatal preparation has much of what is needed, but women who are deficient in vitamins like folic acid and B12 and minerals like iron may need additional supplementation. Specific botanicals like flax, chaste tree, and soy help improve hormonal balance to regulate menstruation, stimulate ovulation and improve ovarian function. A number of supplements can also improve sperm quality and quantity, specifically by decreasing sperm DNA damage and improving sperm count, motility and vitality.

In short, fertility is a complex mechanism that is affected by an intricate set of both modifiable and non-modifiable factors so doing all that one can to improve those things that can be changed may be the key to success.

***"Use your imagination not to scare yourself to death,
but to inspire yourself to life."***

--Adele Brookman



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HEALTHY LIFESTYLE CHOICES FOR HEALTHY BREASTS

Barbara MacDonald, ND, LAc

Eat Organic

Organic produce contains up to 70% more nutrients than conventional, pesticide sprayed products. Organic produce is usually grown nearby which allows for less time from the farm to your plate thus preserving nutrient status. Consuming meat, eggs and dairy products from sources that are hormone-free, are allowed to roam freely (free-range) and that are organically fed is very important as well. Conventional animal products are often given hormones, their feed may contain a high amount of estrogen-like (xenoestrogen) chemicals that may mimic the estrogen in our bodies and stimulate the development of breast cancer and other breast diseases.

Filtered Water

It is as important to drink high quality water as it is to eat health enhancing foods. City water contains a high volume of pesticides and hormones from the urine of animals and humans who consume hormone medications. These chemicals can be avoided by using a high-quality water filter that attaches to your faucet.

Vegetables and Fruit

For healthy breasts, a diet must contain a high amount of fresh organic fruits and vegetables. Eating 3-5 portions of vegetables a day is the general recommendation. Eat vegetables that are a variety of colors to get a balanced array of nutrients. The vegetables from the cruciferous family (broccoli, cauliflower, brussel sprouts) contain nutrients that can help your body to have the correct balance of various forms of estrogen to help prevent breast cancer.

Proteins and Fats

Eating protein sources that are low in saturated fat are a great way to maintain healthy breasts. Foods that are low in saturated fat and high in healthy essential fats are fish, beans, legumes and avocado. Even non-hormone fed animals produce their own hormones which can mimic our body's hormones and therefore all meat and dairy products should be eaten infrequently (1-3 times a week) or as a condiment. Reduce the total amount of fat you consume to 20-35% or less of your total daily calories with less than 10% coming from saturated fats.

Healthy Beverages

Drink Green Tea. Green tea contains naturally occurring antioxidants. It has multiple actions such as preventing the development of cancer, inhibiting cancer cell growth and inspiring cancer cell death. For a tea that contains less caffeine and perhaps even more antioxidants you can drink White Tea or Rooibos (red tea) as well. Both can be found at specialty tea shops.

Low-stress Lifestyle Choices

Many studies have found an association between chronic stress and the development of cancer. In Chinese medical theory, the experience of chronic stress is considered an internal toxin that directly contributes to cancer formation in the breast tissue. When we experience stress, we secrete chemical messengers such as cortisol and adrenaline that initiate the body's sympathetic alarm system that switches off those things not needed to save your life. Things such as immune mediation, cancer cell surveillance, digestion and blood sugar balance get very little energy.

Supplementation

There are numerous risk reduction/breast healthy supplements. Consult with one of our doctors about the use of Indoles, Vitamin D, green tea, essential fatty acids, flax seeds and anti-oxidants.