

MENOPAUSE

RECOGNIZE SYMPTOMS EARLY

Menopause signifies the cessation of menstruation, which occurs around the age of fifty years. The peri-menopausal phase begins as early as thirty-five to forty years - during this stage the ovaries begin to decrease their estrogen output. Recognizing symptoms early will enable you to take natural steps to balance your hormones before the menopausal stage. Symptoms to watch for include: feelings of hopelessness or being overwhelmed, irritability, malaise, anxiety, depression and menstrual irregularities.

THE IMPACT OF STRESS

During the decline of ovarian estrogen, the adrenal gland secretes a weaker form of estrogen. However, the prolonged stress of modern life takes a toll on our adrenal function, greatly reducing its function, especially during the menopausal stage. Consequently, the estrogen secreted during the peri-menopausal and menopausal phase is even further reduced. Modern women have come to accept menopausal symptoms such as hot flashes, insomnia, night sweats, vaginal dryness, depression and irritability as normal. However, these symptoms can be prevented and relieved by naturally supporting the healthy function of the adrenal gland.

NUTRITION

As we age and enter menopause we have to be aware of the other changes in the body, such as hormone imbalances, reduced bone density and heart disease. Making healthy nutritional adjustments is the key to preventing these outcomes. With the help of your naturopathic clinic intern, you can develop an optimal diet to help your body thrive during menopause. Your diet should be high in fresh fruits and vegetables, and should also include moderate amounts of lean proteins, raw nuts and whole grains. Menopausal symptoms can be greatly reduced by minimizing your consumption of red meat and dairy products, saturated and hydrogenated fats, refined carbohydrates, caffeine, alcohol and carbonated drinks.

PHYTOESTROGENS IN FOODS AND HERBS

Phytoestrogen in foods and herbs contain *isoflavones*, which are weak, estrogen-like molecules that adapt to the body's hormonal requirements. Isoflavones can act as a supplement if your estrogen levels are low, and they can also block damaging environmental estrogens that can unbalance your hormones.

Dietary phytoestrogens include soy and wild yam, and botanical phytoestrogens include dong quai (*Angelica sinensis*), black cohosh (*Cimicifuga racemosa*) and alfalfa (*Medicago sativa*). Any of these may help you naturally balance your hormones. To determine which foods and botanicals are most appropriate for you, consult with a naturopathic intern to develop an individualized treatment plan.

EXERCISE

Because exercise stimulates endorphin activity in your body, regular exercise is one of the best ways to reduce the frequency and severity of hot flashes. Studies show that impaired endorphin activity within the hypothalamus linked to hot flashes. Exercise also has many other health benefits such as reducing excess weight, building bone density, strengthening the cardiovascular system and improving your mood.

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