

# Maca: Ancient Plant Intelligence from the Peruvian Andes

One of my favorite botanicals to bring harmony and balance to the mind, body and consciousness is *Lepidium Peruvianum*, also known as Maca. *Lepidium Peruvianum* grows in the central Peruvian Andes at 12–14,000 feet. Maca has been utilized by the people of Peru for thousands of years to maintain health, to enhance stamina, address infertility and to balance female hormones. Maca has high nutritional value as it is rich in minerals and contains thiamine, riboflavin, ascorbic acid, phytosterols, alkaloids, protein and carbohydrates.

Maca is known as an adaptogenic herb. An adaptogen modulates our response to stress when we are coping with physiologic, biochemical and psychological stressors. It restores balance and has a harmonizing effect on the mind-body. It is thought that adaptogens stimulate and balance the hypothalamic-pituitary-adrenal axis. Adaptogens reduce or eliminate the exhaustion phase that typically follows a stress response. Some common adaptogens include *Rhodiola*, *Panax Ginseng*, *Ashwa-*

*ganda*, *Licorice* and there are many others.

One of the unique aspects of *Lepidium peruvianum* is that it appears to affect female hormones. Research conducted by Meissner, et al, (1) using a proprietary maca product (Maca-GO), found that Maca had significant effects in peri- and post-menopausal women. Research results demonstrated an increase in the body's production of estradiol (the most active form of estrogen), decrease in FSH and



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by Moira Fitzpatrick, PhD, ND

**“We are at exciting time in complementary healthcare as research is being done on plants that have been used for thousands of years.”**

LH, increased HDL, the good cholesterol, reduced LDL, bad cholesterol and reduced triglycerides. There was a small increase in bone density after four months of use. Additionally, there was a significant decrease in menopausal symptoms as measured by the Kupperman index. Since Maca is an adaptogen containing no phytoestrogens, it

is thought that the herb stimulates the hypothalamic-pituitary-adrenal and ovarian axis by supporting the female body to produce its own hormones at a level that is optimal for the wellbeing of the woman. This is good news as it may provide an alternative to hormone therapy during this life transition.

How can Maca affect you? I have found in my clinical practice that Maca-GO is helpful in some women of all ages, and especially in women going through peri-menopause and menopause. Peri-menopause is a time of transition. When we enter into this phase of life chronically stressed, we are at a disadvantage because transitions are often stressful simply by the nature of change. I have found that prescribing Maca-GO has resulted in a decrease of menopausal symptoms such

as hot flashes, night sweats, and there is an improvement in mood, sleep and increased energy. It appears that Maca-GO, balances, harmonizes and optimizes the hormone reserves in the woman. One woman, who came into my practice was exhausted, experiencing hot flashes throughout the day, depressed, forgetful and struggling with recent weight gain. I started her on 1,000 mg of Maca twice a day and the first change she noticed was an increase in energy almost immediately. It took about a month and a half to decrease her menopausal symptoms and after four months, she noticed that she was able to lose weight. The Maca had a normalizing effect on this patient and provided the support she needed while discovering and making changes in her life. I have found Maca to be useful for women who are on hormone replacement therapy and want to come off their hormones. I will add Maca as the woman is decreasing her hormones and this smoothes the transition.

Maca-GO is helpful in younger women, who may be amenorrheic (menses have ceased after being regular). I often see this condition in college age women. It is noteworthy that women in college can be under significant stress. Another balancing effect that I have seen in my practice is calming and often eliminating premenstrual symptoms. It appears that Maca has a positive effect on hormone balance by regulating

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## Establishing Rapport

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work, and doing things right. They are sometimes very perfectionistic. They'll have noticed throughout their lives how other people tend to miss details that they don't, and often, as a result, they're more anxious about the quality of the work you'll do for them, or worry that you've missed some important detail they mentioned to you. People with very large noses are often accused of not trusting others, but in their minds, it's been proven to them time and time again that they can't really trust other people to have the awareness they do about the little things that matter so much to them.

People with two deep vertical wrinkles between their eyebrows tend to work hard and focus intently when they do. They appreciate logic and commonsense, and don't like to pussyfoot around in conversation so it's best to get to the point when you're talking to them. These people like to take action and get things done, so results-oriented work appeals to them the most.

And most importantly, if you recognize any of these features on your own face, it can help you understand why you may have certain reactions to people you encounter in life. Gaining the awareness of why you're attracted to one person but feel an aversion to another can be explained by the messages your face expresses. It can be a revolutionary change in your own perceptions to understand why you tend to think, feel and behave as you do, and this can open many new way to look with love at whoever you encounter, even that face in the mirror.

Jean Haner is the author of "The Wisdom of Your Face." With her 25-year background in ancient Chinese principles of balance and health, Jean places an emphasis on compassionate and affirming ways for people to live in alignment with their own true selves. Please visit [www.wisdomofyourface.com](http://www.wisdomofyourface.com) for information on workshops, consultations and Jean's free newsletter.



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menstrual cycles, balancing mood and decreasing pain and bloating.

As women attempting to create balance at various times in our lives, Maca may provide an option to help you achieve hormone balance, improve energy, balance mood, and adapt to stress. It is helpful to remember that we are cyclic beings, who function optimally when we are in balance. We are blessed with bodies in tune with the cycles of the moon, the seasons and the tides. Our intuition and creativity flourish at different times of our cycles and when we listen to what

we need, there is harmony.

Our mother the earth provides us with many plants to bring harmony during times of stress. The adaptogens provide stabilizing effects on the neuroendocrine system, modulate or enhance the immune system and have antioxidant properties. *Lepidium peruvianum*, Maca, has hormonal effects in addition to its adaptogenic properties. We may begin to think of *Lepidium peruvianum* as the "root of hormone balance."

We are at exciting time in complementary healthcare as research is being done on plants that have been used for thousands of years. There

is growing evidence of the health benefits of adaptogens, which seem to have much to teach us about coping with stress.

*Lepidium peruvianum* is safe and I have seen few side effects. Generally adaptogens are safe. I would recommend that you check in with your health care provider to determine which adaptogen may be most beneficial for you and to help you determine the dose that is optimal for your body at your phase of life.

(1) Meissner HO, Mscisz A, Reich-Bilinska R, et al. hormone-balancing effect of pre-gelatinized organic maca: (II) Physiological and symptomatic responses of early-postmenopausal women to standardized doses of Maca in Double Blind, Randomized, Placebo-controlled, Multi-Centre Clinical Study. *IJBS* 2006, 2(4):360-374.

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## On The Bookshelf

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are well-known authors and teachers in the horse world.

From each of these, she gained some information about how our culture has mistreated horses by our accepted training methods and she learned new ways to approach horses. There are some upsetting pictures of horses reacting negatively to common ways of guiding

and training them. Horses are, of course, conscious beings who are capable of thinking, feeling, and relating to humans in a variety of ways. They can be our teachers if we know how to listen and how to relate to them,

Anyone who works with horses will find this film very interesting and they might decide to change some of their ways of being with horses. Those who love horses will also enjoy watching them in this movie for the sheer joy of seeing these magnificent creatures being who they are.

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