

# Menopause: A Time to Change

The menopausal transition spans three to nine years, typically starting around age 45, with a range of age 44-56. The transition is dynamic, beginning with longer cycles, then increasing times of amenorrhea until the woman reaches menopause, defined by 12 months without a period. During this time, estrogen fluctuates and becomes low around the time of menopause and post menopause. The many fluctuations of hormones affect the brain, which in turn affects the hormones.

This dynamic, plus a time in our life where other changes occur such as children leaving home, career changes, aging parents and their eventual death, leaves us in the place of increased stress, difficult choices, and challenges. It is also a time when we have the opportunity to think about our own self-care, how we want to create the second half of our life, and opportunities to express our creativity. I see this transition and all of its storms as a passage into the stage of life of wisdom. Each of us has lived many years and it is our time to pass on what we have learned to younger women and men.

Menopausal experiences are individual and yet there are symptoms that appear to affect us all including hot flashes, night sweats, poor sleep, emotional sensitivity, joint pains, vaginal dryness, and moments of losing words. The physical body becomes our guide as we seek support, health, well being, and balance. There are many options to support each of us during this transition.

The beginning of the change is an opportune time to see your physician for a complete physical, labs, and conversation about your unique symptoms, medical history,



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by Moira Fitzpatrick, PhD, ND

lifestyle and current stressors. This is also an important time to assess your cardiovascular risk, vitamin D level and osteoporosis risk.

I imagine that your first concern is to decrease symptoms that are affecting your current life. During early peri-menopause irregular bleeding and heavy bleeding are often issues. I have found maca (*Lepidium peruvianum*) to be helpful in stabilizing

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menses. *Lepidium peruvianum* is an adaptogen that works to balance the hypothalamic pituitary ovarian and adrenal axis. It may also help to restore balance with other symptoms such as irritability, depression, hot flashes and fatigue. Soy and flaxseeds have been found

to improve cognitive function, reduce vaginal dryness, and improve bone mineral density.

Other supplements to improve cognition include fish oil, Huperzine A, Galantamine and Acetyl-L-Carnitine. I have often treated fatigue with adaptogens such as rhodiola, maca, glycyrrhiza, ginseng and ashwaganda. Some herbs to improve sex drive include damiana, ashwaganda and maca. Hot flashes and night sweats may improve with black cohosh, red clover and maca. Sleep is a common issue during the menopausal transition. I work with sleep using herbs such as kava, valerian root, hops, and passionflower. Sometimes I suggest 5-HTP, melatonin, and if a woman is on hormone therapy, taking her progesterone right before bed. I will also

utilize hypnotherapy and Emotional Transformation Therapy to facilitate entering into the sleep state.

DHEA, the precursor to sex hormones, gradually decreases with age. Supplementing with DHEA can be helpful for women to increase vitality, improve the stress response and for some improve sex drive. A recent study, Labrie et al (2009)<sup>1</sup> demonstrated that local DHEA applied to the vagina improved sexual functioning in postmenopausal women.

What about bio-identical hormones? Are they safe? Bio-identical hormones are identical to your hormones. They are FDA approved for moderate to severe vasomotor symptoms (hot flashes, night sweats). What is currently known from recent studies

suggest that estrogen and progesterone are safe for women close to the menopausal transition for approximately five years and estrogen alone for approximately eight years.

If a woman has a uterus, she must take progesterone with her estrogen. It is recommended that estrogen be given in a transdermal form. There is a risk for venous thromboembolic events with oral estrogen.

Transdermal estrogens come in the form of patches, creams, gels, and sprays. There are two ways that bio-identical estrogens are made, one is a synthetic made by pharmaceutical companies the other is compounded. The primary difference is that

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## A Time For Change

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there are preservatives and fillers in the pharmaceuticals plus specific dosages. Compounded bio-identical hormones can be individually dosed for the woman and have no preservatives or fillers. There are local estrogens that can be used vaginally for vaginal dryness and to protect against vaginal atrophy. I typically use estrinol suppositories for local treatment, which has little systemic effect. It is important to discuss your medical and family history with your physician prior to starting hormone therapy to evaluate your risks and benefits.

The foundation of our health is how we take care of ourselves. Our internal structure is our bones. Bone health includes regular physical activity, 1200mg of calcium and adequate vitamin D. Generally, you can get 500mg of calcium in your diet. Other dietary recommendations include a whole foods diet high in vegetables and fruit, legumes (especially soy), and whole grains. Reduce saturated fats such as cheese, beef, and pork. Increase your intake of cold water fish, salmon, tuna, halibut. Reduce refined foods, alcohol, sugar and salt.

Menopause, like the autumn time, is a transition, a time of letting go of what no longer serves us and walking through the gateway to new time, a time to step into our power, our wisdom. We all go through this transition, let us walk together.

(1) Labrie et al, "Effect of Intravaginal DHEA on libido and sexual dysfunction in postmenopausal women", Menopause, September/October 2009.

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## Reiki for Veterans

by Eileen Dey, M.A.

Even after 10 years of Reiki practice with the public, I had never really considered myself a peace activist until the U.S. went to war in Iraq.

As a counselor and Reiki master in practice, I began seeing the families of soldiers going overseas. Listening to the worries of parents and spouses, helping them to deal with their own fears, I also realized we would be creating a next generation of Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder sufferers when those soldiers did come back home.

PTSD, the anxiety disorder that occurs so often when an individual has been exposed to a traumatic event, is something veterans have often tried to suffer in silence. They remain hyper-vigilant, and without even the structured military life to support them, in their return to civilian life they remain in a perpetual state of heightened alertness.



Knowing that Reiki can do no harm and has the effect of helping to unblock emotional obstacles and bringing the mind, body and spirit to balance, in 2004 I felt compelled to reach out to the local veterans center to see if there was a possibility of offering Reiki, either in session or class form. It was a daunting task to approach the U.S. government. But after only a few e-mails and phone calls, I did get a response and a request to come and see them.

I feel anyone who has a desire to help veterans should just come from their heart and approach their local center. Reiki practitioners interested in providing sessions can contact me (we hold a monthly clinic) as well as quarterly classes.

Over the last two years, I and interested Reiki colleagues have held both Reiki I and Reiki II classes several times a year and each is an amazing and unique experience. In each case below, the veteran's name has been changed to protect his privacy.

One veteran, Craig, looking up at the clock, noted that it was 3 p.m.

Without prompting, he shared with us how he felt by this time every day for years; the screaming he felt inside, the rage he didn't always manage to control on the outside. Yet here it was, at 3 p.m. on this Saturday, and he was perfectly relaxed, happy, and unbelievably calm. His sense of gratitude even, as he said — if it was just for that day — was almost overwhelming.

Another veteran, Paul, was in tears during an attunement. Afterwards, he explained he had finally come to know a place of peace within himself that he thought had left him long ago. He felt that by learning how to apply Reiki to himself he could actually begin to get a sense of being quiet within and that realization caused him much happiness, resulting in his tears of joy.

But probably the most amazing and dramatic effects of the Reiki training was Mark's spontaneous healing story. In the afternoon of a Reiki I class we were holding, Mark shared how his long-term leg pain from shrapnel wounds had all but disappeared during the second Reiki attunement. In an e-mail he wrote:

"...It was a most interesting and beneficial day. I'm still reflecting on my personal experiences during attunement. And... I wanted to pass on an overview of my pain relief results for the day. In that regard, the nerve pain in my right leg (related to a couple old shrapnel wounds) has recently made

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