

Nutrition for Menopause

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Of all the changes women experience during their reproductive life, there is no doubt the most dreaded are the three phases of menopause. This is not surprising since all of the symptoms associated with menopause are replete with unpleasantness. Hot flashes, night sweats, sleep disturbance, mood swings, bone density issues, hormonal imbalance and low libido are not only distressing, but also can impact a woman's health and quality of life in multiple negative ways.

The gradual depletion of estrogen production associated with aging is the catalyst for most menopausal symptoms. Lack of estrogen may affect other organs of the body including the brain, contributing to negative emotional well-being; as well as the skin, reducing thickness and elasticity. There is also evidence that declining estrogen levels may make women more vulnerable to heart disease and stroke.

With such a comprehensive list of negative effects brought on by menopause, it is understandable that the most logical remedy for symptoms associated with menopause became the administration of synthetic hormones, or hormone replacement therapy.

HRT came into use nearly six decades ago and was generally prescribed to women as they began to experience menopausal symptoms. However, as multiple studies over the decades associated traditional HRT with various cancers and other negative side effects, the use of artificial hormones to treat menopausal women has declined significantly.

Natural Options to Consider

Although artificial hormone therapies for menopausal women continue to be debated and refined, alternative therapies with no link to negative side effects merit serious consideration.

Examining the nutritional deficiencies that may accompany the demands that menopause places on the female body indicates that addressing nutritional needs at the cellular level is vital to effectively treating all phases of menopause.

The process of aging diminishes the body's ability to activate vitamin D. This lowers calcium absorption rates, which increases the risk of osteoporosis in the postmenopausal woman.

Calcium may lose its effectiveness if vitamin D is deficient or estrogen levels are low. Magnesium deficiency can contribute to insomnia and other menopausal symptoms.

Estrogen enhances magnesium utilization and absorption; declining levels of estrogen associated with the stages of menopause can create magnesium and other mineral deficiencies.

B vitamins play a key role in reducing menopausal stress. Thiamine, niacin, B₁₂ and folic acid are often referred to as the "stress vitamins." Although the ovaries stop producing estrogen in time, adrenal glands and fat cells will continue to produce the hormone. B₃ and folic acid help support this production.

Mildred Seelig, MD, describes this in the *Journal of the American College of Nutrition*:¹⁻²

"Estrogen enhances magnesium utilization and uptake by soft tissues and bone, and may explain the resistance of young women to heart disease and osteoporosis, as well as the increased prevalence of these diseases when estrogen production ceases."

Superfoods and Cellular Nutrition for Women's Health

Dark-green leafy vegetables such as kale, collard greens and broccoli are low-calorie sources of phytoestrogens. They are also rich in important nutrients such as iron, calcium, folate and B vitamins which support healthy management of menopausal symptoms.

Beans and other botanicals are rich in phytoestrogens. Daidzein, an isoflavone found chiefly in legumes such as soy beans and other plant-based sources, such as red clover, helps reduce menopausal hot flashes.³ Pantothenic acid, or vitamin B5, is found in salmon, sunflower seeds and avocados. It can reduce hot flashes and help mood stabilization.

Royal jelly is a true superfood loaded with minerals, vitamins, protein and pheromones. Plant hormones stimulate weak estrogenic actions and stimulate adrenals to help alleviate stress, reduce hot flashes and fight fatigue associated with menopause.

Bee pollen extract also helps with these symptoms and may help with weight management as well.⁴

Plant-based supplements such as guggul gum, *Cnidium monnieri* and Moringa leaf⁵ contain vitamin D and calcium for bone health; they help regulate mood swings, reduce hot flashes and night sweats, and increase libido.

Take-Home Points

In my practice, I have experienced a substantial rise in menopausal patients seeking alternatives to traditional hormone replacement therapy. This trend has been experienced by my colleagues as well. Women have concerns about HRT, but want relief from the debilitating symptoms of menopause.

While traditional hormone therapy has helped many women, we have generally ignored correcting nutritional deficiencies and using functional medicine, an approach women prefer and has been quite successful in my own practice. Using quality, organic sources, the symptoms associated with menopause can be successfully treated with virtually no negative ramifications.

Addressing nutritional support for women during menopause, perimenopause and postmenopause with scientifically validated phytonutrients can and does provide a front-line treatment for symptoms associated with all stages of menopause.

In addition to reducing the risks associated with traditional hormone therapy, this approach to wellness empowers women to take more control of their own unique health needs holistically and in a much more natural way than previously accepted protocols.

References

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