

6 Top Natural Therapies to Ease Menopause Symptoms

Menopause is Not a Disease

As uncomfortable as it can be, it's important to remember that menopause is a natural phase of life -- not a disease. As such, it doesn't *require* any treatment whatsoever; as the saying goes, this too shall pass.

Of course, if you're suffering from repeated hot flashes, insomnia and uncontrollable mood swings, simply waiting it out may not be a practical option, especially since perimenopause can last for *years*. You can also experience "menopause" symptoms for months or years after your period stops. This includes such symptoms as:

- Fatigue
- Depression
- Irritability and anxiety
- Trouble sleeping
- Hot flashes
- Joint and muscle pain
- Loss of libido

When you need relief, hormone replacement therapy (HRT) may seem like a viable option. Most menopausal symptoms occur because of fluctuating levels of the hormones estrogen and progesterone. When menopause occurs, your ovaries stop producing these hormones altogether, so HRT works by replacing them with synthetic alternatives.

HRT can be effective, but it's not without risks. The Women's Health Initiative (WHI) study, widely regarded as the most comprehensive HRT study to date, was stopped because the risks were found to outweigh the benefits. Specifically, the estrogen-plus-progestin pill increased the risk of breast cancer, heart disease, stroke, blood clots, and urinary incontinence, and doubled the risk for developing dementia.

Fortunately, there are natural, side-effect-free options available.

6 Natural Strategies for Overcoming Menopause Symptoms

1. Exercise

If you're not yet exercising regularly, now's the time to start. Studies show that exercise may ease feelings of stress, anxiety and depression post-menopause while helping you avoid middle-age weight gain as well. Research shows that overweight women who lose weight experience improvements in hot flashes. Specifically, for every 11 pounds lost, the likelihood of improving your exercise increases by one-third. Exercise may also help you achieve a better night's sleep.

The U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Office on Women's Health, recommends at least 2.5 hours a week of moderate aerobic physical activity, 1 hour and 15 minutes of vigorous aerobic activity, or some combination of the two, along with strength-training exercises two days a week.

Yoga, in particular, has also been linked to improvements in menopausal symptoms including hot flashes and sleep disturbances.

You may also want to try Kegel exercises, which involve contracting and relaxing the muscles of your pelvic floor (these are the muscles you use to stop urinating mid-stream). This may help to prevent urinary incontinence that can occur around the time of menopause.

2. Healthy Diet

A diet rich in vegetables, proteins and healthy fats is essential for women approaching menopause. Foods that contain naturally occurring phytoestrogens, such as the lignans in flaxseed, cruciferous vegetables such as broccoli, kale and spinach or the isoflavones in whole grains and beans, may also help provide some symptom relief by acting as a weak form of estrogen in your body.

You will also want to limit or avoid foods and beverages that contain sugar, caffeine and alcohol, which may exacerbate your symptoms or trigger hot flashes.

3. Acupuncture

Studies have shown that women who received traditional Chinese acupuncture had less severe hot flashes and mood swings than women receiving a placebo treatment, one recent study found. Past research has also found that acupuncture works as well as the drug Effexor, which is often used to treat hot flashes and other menopausal symptoms that may occur with breast cancer treatment.

Acupuncture studies have been shown not to have any negative sideeffects.

4. Stress Relief

Emotional stress can wreak havoc on your hormonal balance at any stage of your life, while also making symptoms like insomnia, anxiety and depression worse. This is why any strategy that helps you reduce stress is a good one. Exercise, yoga and acupuncture, along with deep breathing, guided imagery, meditation, or even relaxing with a good book can all help you to regroup from stress.

5. Herbal Remedies

A number of herbs have been explored as potential treatments for menopausal symptoms. Among the most promising are:

- **Black cohosh:** Early research suggested black cohosh may have some estrogenic activity in the body, although subsequent studies have been conflicting. However current evidence suggests that [black cohosh](#) may provide a safe alternative to synthetic hormones for easing mild mood changes, troublesome hot flashes and mood swings while promoting a normal, healthy attitude.

Clinical studies in Europe found black cohosh may provide symptomatic relief of menopausal hot flashes, night sweats, insomnia, nervousness and irritability.

- **Ginkgo Biloba:** Clinical studies have shown [ginkgo biloba](#) supports mental alertness.
- **Dong quai:** Commonly referred to as the "female ginseng," Dong quai may support treatment for hot flashes.
- **Sage leaf extract:** May help reduce night sweats due to menopausal hot flashes.
- **Combination remedies:** One double-blind trial of a formulation containing licorice, dong quai, wild yam, burdock and motherwort was found to reduce symptoms of menopause.

6. Bioidentical Hormones

A final option is to consult a health care practitioner who can recommend a combination of bioidentical hormones. An alternative to synthetic HRT, bioidentical hormones, such as certain progesterone creams, are identical to the hormones produced in your body, and some studies have shown them to be very effective for symptom relief.

However, keep in mind that long-term studies regarding safety of bioidentical hormones are scarce, so if you decide to use them they should only be used as long as necessary for symptom relief. Be sure to also work with a knowledgeable health care practitioner who can recommend the proper combination and dosages of bioidentical hormones for you.

Whether you are already experiencing perimenopause, menopause or post-menopausal symptoms, remember that although this natural life transition can be uncomfortable, it in no way signals an end to your vim and vigor. Often your level of energy and feelings of well-being and happiness will be dictated by your lifestyle choices and attitude more so than any life stage.