



Supporting a Healthy Transition through MENOPAUSE

Each year, about 1.3 million women enter menopause, the season of life when their monthly periods cease. This normal transition, which happens to every menstruating woman, typically occurs between the late forties or early fifties. Once a woman has not had a period for a year, she is considered postmenopausal. During the time prior to menopause, known as perimenopause, changes to periods and general health can occur due to declining levels of the sex hormones estrogen and progesterone.

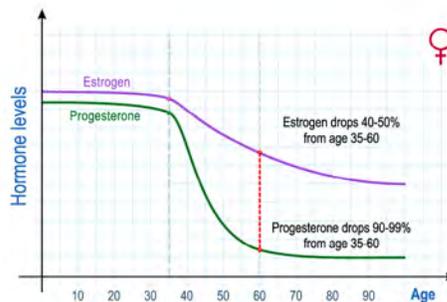
During perimenopause, menopause, and postmenopause, women may experience various symptoms. Three quarters of all women experience hot flashes at some point. Other common menopausal symptoms include weight gain, thinning hair, irregular periods, insomnia, vaginal dryness, and night sweats. Women may also experience emotional symptoms such as anxiety, depression, or irritability. After menopause many women will also start to experience bone loss (osteoporosis).

Over 60% of women with menopause symptoms report that they are severe enough to interfere with their quality of life. As a result of these changes many women will resort to hormone replacement therapy, taking synthetic hormones to try to control these symptoms. Since menopause is a natural transition, there may be some issues with artificially boosting hormones, when they're naturally meant to decline, and there are potential side-effects and risks to this approach.

Fortunately, there are natural ways women can make this major life transition easier. Changes in diet, herbs, and supplements can all help to reduce symptoms and maintain health through perimenopause and into postmenopause. We'll cover some of these natural supports for this change of life in this issue of *Sunshine Sharing*.

Blame it on Hormones

When it comes to menopause, you can blame it on hormones, because it is hormonal changes that create the physiological and psychological shifts that occur during menopause. Specifically it is the decline in production of estrogen and progesterone as shown on the right. To understand how you can support a healthy transition, you need to understand more about these two major hormones.

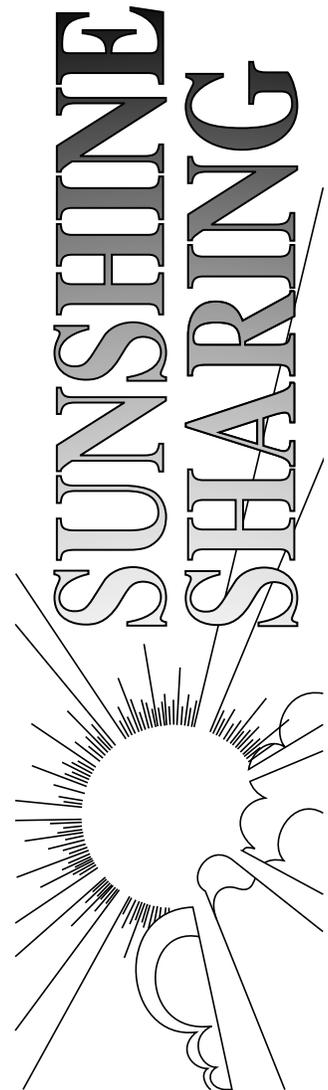


Understanding Estrogen and Progesterone

Estrogen is the hormone that creates feminine characteristics, just like testosterone creates male characteristics. However, estrogen is not a single compound. There are several forms of it. The one responsible for fertility during child-bearing years is estradiol (E2). Production of E2 begins at puberty and drops off dramatically after menopause.

E2 is primarily produced in a maturing follicle under the influence of the follicle-stimulating hormone (FSH). Although small amounts of E2 are produced by the adrenal glands, fat cells, breast tissue, and liver, E2 production drops off sharply at menopause.

E2 plays an important role in many body processes besides reproductive functions. It aids bone development and affects collagen production. This is why the loss of E2 will cause skin problems like wrinkles and dryness. E2 also influences cholesterol levels, blood sugar levels, circulation, and brain function.



Your guide to better health the natural way.

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Important Notice

The information in *Sunshine Sharing* is for educational purposes only and should not be used to diagnose and treat diseases. If you have a health problem, we recommend you consult a competent health practitioner before embarking on any course of treatment.

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Steven Horne Creations, LLC

P.O. Box 1858, Cedar City, UT 84721

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Managing Editor/Writer: Steven Horne

Editor: David Horne

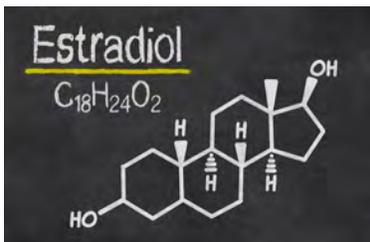
Associate Editors: Carolyn Hughes, Katie Horne

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In fact, estrogens play a role in about 400 functions of the body. So, it's easy to see why declining levels of estrogen during and after menopause result in a variety of changes in levels of health.

Other Forms of Estrogen

However, there are other forms of estrogen that were produced before puberty that continue to be produced after menopause. Having good production of these estrogens makes menopause easier.



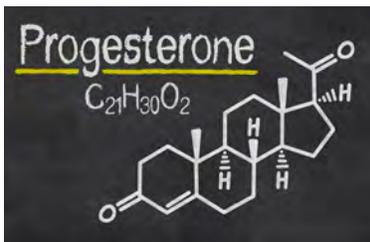
E1 is the main form of estrogen produced after menopause. It can be formed in the adrenal glands, liver and fat cells, as well as the ovaries. Therefore, having healthy liver and adrenal gland function will make menopause easier.

E3 is a milder estrogen that does not stimulate the breast tissue or uterine lining like E1 and E2 do. Because of this E3 protects the intestinal tract, vaginal lining and the breasts. Asian and vegetarian women have higher levels of E3 and lower rates of breast cancer. These diets are higher in plant estrogens known as phytoestrogens.

There are also chemicals that mimic estrogen. This includes synthetic estrogens used as drugs and in animal feed to increase milk and egg production. There are also pesticides that mimic estrogen and estrogen mimics are also found in some plastics. These chemicals are known as xenoestrogens, and they mimic the stronger forms of estrogen E1 and E2, which increases risk of breast cancer and other health problems after menopause. So, avoiding these xenoestrogens and increasing phytoestrogen intake will aid in creating a healthy transition.

Progesterone

The drop in progesterone is much larger than the drop in estrogen during perimenopause and menopause. This is because large amounts of progesterone are produced by the follicle after the egg is released. So, once ovulation ceases, levels of progesterone are also lower.



This reduction in progesterone affects many body processes. Progesterone plays a role in skin elasticity and bone strength. It has anti-inflammatory and antispasmodic actions and plays a role in blood sugar regulation. Lower levels of progesterone due to menopause may contribute to hot flashes, mood changes (anxiety or depression), loss of libido, difficulty sleeping, weight gain, and breast pain.

Supporting Hormones After Menopause

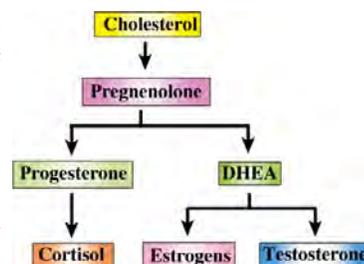
There are many herbs and nutritional options to help maintain health as hormone levels adjust. Supporting the adrenals, utilizing phytoestrogens, and taking other hormone balancing herbs can all help regulate hormonal production naturally.

Adrenal Function and Menopause

Prior to puberty and after menopause, the adrenal glands are tasked with the job of making estrogen and progesterone. Therefore, supporting healthy adrenal function is the first secret to making the transition of menopause easier.

Estrogen and progesterone production starts in the adrenal glands. These hormones are made from cholesterol that has been converted into pregnenolone. Pregnenolone can be further converted to form either progesterone or DHEA. DHEA is then used to make estrogens—primarily E2 before menopause and estrone (E1) and estriol (E3) after menopause.

Here's where the problem occurs. Stress causes the body to produce the stress hormone cortisol. A high stress life therefore, causes more pregnenolone to be turned into progesterone and less into DHEA. This reduces the amount of estrogens being produced.



The progesterone is also converted to cortisol, which lowers the levels of progesterone, too. Cortisol produces a more rapid aging process and contributes to weight gain, grey hair, and other changes associated with aging.

Modern society often causes high levels of stress which tax the adrenal glands. This increases the severity of problems that can occur during menopause. This is why supporting adrenal health is one of the first things to consider for natural hormone balance.

Adaptogens and DHEA

Adaptogens are an important category of herbs that can help reduce stress levels and support adrenal health. Taking adaptogens can help increase levels of DHEA and reduce levels of cortisol, making more estrogen and progesterone available to the body.

Because of these benefits try taking adaptogens starting with perimenopause and continuing through with postmenopause. Some of the best adaptogens to take regularly include ashwagandha, cordyceps, American ginseng, Asian ginseng, licorice, shatavari, maca, and schisandra. It is also useful to consider specific menopausal symptoms when choosing which adaptogens to take.

You can also supplement directly with DHEA, which can help to up-regulate estrogen production and down-regulate the production of cortisol. A *DHEA Formula with Herbs* containing false unicorn and chaste tree, which help regulate female hormones before, during, and after menopause may also be helpful.

Utilize Phytoestrogens

There are many plants that contain phytoestrogens, which can also help ease the transition through menopause. Women who consume a lot of these plant-based estrogens tend to have fewer and less severe menopausal symptoms than women who don't.

One of these foods is soy. Asian women who regularly consume soy products like tofu have lower rates of hot flashes than American women.¹ There is also evidence that soy can help prevent bone loss

and healthy weight after menopause.² However, in order to get these benefits soy foods need to be consumed regularly.

It should be noted that soy is not the only legume to have phytoestrogens. Many other beans contain them as well, including black beans, chickpeas, peanuts, and mung beans. Other foods that supply phytoestrogens include whole grains (wheat, rye, oats, and barley), flaxseeds, sesame seeds, and leafy green vegetables. This is why a more plant-based diet also helps with menopause. It reduces exposure to xenoestrogens and increases intake of phytoestrogens.

Hormone Balancing Herbs

There are a number of herbs that have been used to help balance hormones. Remedies that help support the estrogen side include licorice, hops, red clover, dong quai, and black cohosh. Essential oils that have an estrogen-enhancing effect include pink grapefruit, clary sage, and geranium. Herbs that support the progesterone side include wild yam, chaste tree berries and false unicorn. Consider a *Menopausal Support Formula* that contains herbs that help to support both sides.



Bioidentical Hormones

If you find these herbs and nutritional remedies are insufficient to help your menopausal transition, you don't need to resort to synthetic hormones. First, try finding a doctor who will prescribe bioidentical hormones. These natural hormones are identical to the ones produced by your body and will be less likely to produce harmful side effects.

Solving Specific Menopausal Symptoms

Having covered the basics of natural support for hormones during menopause, let's look at some remedies for specific problems that can occur during this life transition.

Hot Flashes and Night Sweats

Hot flashes are the most common symptom of menopause. Night sweats are simply hot flashes that occur at night and cause heavy perspiration.

Hot flashes occur via the hypothalamus, which regulates body temperature and monitors the blood to determine what hormones are needed. When the hypothalamus senses there is a need for more estrogen it signals the pituitary to the follicle-stimulating hormone (FSH). During the child-bearing years, FSH stimulates the development of an egg follicle, which releases estrogen and signals the hypothalamus and pituitary to stop producing FSH.



During menopause, when there is no viable egg to develop, there is no estrogen response from the ovaries. So, the hypothalamus and pituitary cause more FSH to be released. This results in a release of epinephrine from the adrenals, which stimulates the hypothalamus and resets the body's internal thermostat. This causes hot flashes,

night sweats, and increased feelings of anxiety, which may result in increased heart rate and a pounding feeling in the chest. After awhile the hypothalamus learns to adjust to lower levels of estrogen and stops trying to stimulate the ovaries and the problem goes away naturally.

Helpful Remedies for Hot Flashes

Fortunately, there are natural ways to help balance hormones to reduce the severity of hot flashes, if not eliminate them entirely. Try some of the following approaches to see which ones work best for you.

Black cohosh has helped many women with hot flashes. It works better taking small doses in liquid form (5-10 drops taken every 5-10 minutes until symptoms subside). However, it also works as part of a *Hot Flash Formula*, that contains a time-release form of both black cohosh and dong quai.

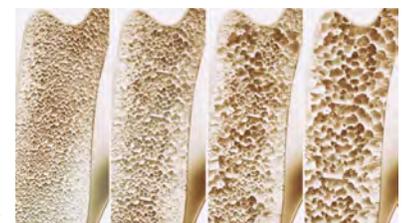
Many women have found essential oils with estrogen-stimulating effects helpful. These include clary sage, pink grapefruit and geranium. Lavender essential oil can also be helpful because of its relaxing effects. Mix a few drops of several of these oils in a small spray bottle filled with water. When you're experiencing a hot flash, shake the bottle thoroughly and mist the oils around your face. These essential oils directly affect the hypothalamus, via the sense of smell, which resets your body's thermostat and cools you down.

Other possible remedies include eating a teaspoon of flax seeds daily or high lignin flax seed oil. You can also take flax seed oil in capsules. Flax is one of the highest herbs in phytoestrogens and can signal the hypothalamus that estrogen is present.

You can also calm down the adrenal glands by taking an *Anti-Stress B-Complex Formula* containing B-vitamins, and vitamin C. The adaptogens schisandra and astragalus may be helpful for night sweats. Taking sage in capsules can also inhibit night sweats.

Osteoporosis

Osteoporosis is a decrease in bone density that causes skeletal weakness. This is a common problem to occur after menopause because the production of the reproductive hormones that help improve bone health have decreased. However, there are cultures where osteoporosis is not a problem in postmenopausal women suggesting that other factors are involved.



Bone building consists of an array of complex biochemical reactions that maintain a balance between breaking down old and injured bone and building new strong but flexible bone. Old bone is constantly being dissolved and reabsorbed, and new bone is constantly being laid down in its place. Bones weaken when the breaking-down process occurs more rapidly than the building-up process.

There is a common belief that problems with osteoporosis are due to a lack of dietary calcium. However, if that were actually the case, then all the dairy products, calcium-fortified foods, and calcium supplements would be fixing the problem. The real problem

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AskMara.com & Energy Wellness Products

Mara Gerke

9898 N 200 E, Decatur, IN 46733

Phone: 800-728-2425

Website: <http://www.askmara.com/>

Email: askmara@gmail.com



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lies in a deficiency of other nutrients needed to affix calcium into the bones. These include vitamin D3 and K2, which tend to be deficient in modern diets, along with the minerals boron, magnesium, and manganese.

So, to help maintain bone health postmenopause try taking a *Skeletal Support Formula* that combines calcium with other nutrients needed for bone health. It can also help to take *Watkin's Hair, Skin and Nails Formula* which supplies silica rich herbs like horsetail and dulse, because silica helps prevent brittleness in bones.

It's also important to note that bone is built in response to the body's need for structural support. This is why weight-bearing exercise helps keep bones healthy. So, get some exercise and lift some light weights to help maintain bone health both before and after menopause.

Mood Swings

Mood swings due to changing hormone levels are a common occurrence when going through menopause. These mood swings are similar to the ones experienced during problems with PMS. They include irritability, anxiety, and depression.



For depression during menopause black cohosh is often helpful. Another possibility is the *Chinese Qi-Regulating Formula*, which contains herbs like perilla, cyperus, and bupleurum root.

For anxiety and irritability, magnesium, zinc, folate (vitamin B6), and vitamin B12 may be helpful. The *Anti-Stress B-Complex Formula* mentioned earlier may be helpful as can the *Anti-Anxiety Formula* which contains magnesium, zinc, and a plant extract from the kana plant called zembrin®, which has adaptogenic and anxiety reducing properties.

Vaginal Dryness

One of the effects of lower estrogen levels can be vaginal dryness. If this is a problem some of the tissue moistening adaptogens that support adrenal health may be helpful. Specifically licorice, shatavari, schisandra, and astragalus. It may also help to use moistening herbs like marshmallow or linden taken as a tea.

If vaginal dryness is interfering with sexual relations, it is important to spend more time in foreplay as vaginal lubrication increases naturally during sexual arousal. A water-based lubricant can also be applied prior to sexual activity. Some women have found that *Nanoparticle Silver Gel* works as a nice lubricant.

Any kind of chronic burning, itching, discomfort, or pain should be checked by a doctor to determine the cause before embarking on a course of treatment.

Skin & Hair Health

The health of the skin and hair can suffer during the changes that come with menopause. *Watkin's Hair, Skin and Nails Formula* helps skin and hair maintain their elasticity. It also helps to make sure you have adequate intake of omega-3 essential fatty acids and the fat soluble vitamins A, D, and E. These help skin stay moist.

These are just a few of the many natural remedies that can help a women's healthy transition. There are many more. Utilize some of the resources below for more help.

Additional Help and Information

For more information about supporting a healthy transition through menopause contact the person who gave you this newsletter. You can also consult the following resources:

The Herbal Menopause Book by Amanda McQuade Crawford

The Wisdom of Menopause by Christine Northrup, MD

Strategies for Health by Steven Horne

Endnotes

1 <https://www.urmc.rochester.edu/ob-gyn/ur-medicine-menopause-and-womens-health/menopause-blog/march-2015/is-soy-a-remedy-for-menopausal-symptoms.aspx>

2 <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC7539339/>