

NONPRESCRIPTION REMEDIES FOR MENOPAUSE SYMPTOMS

MAUDE S. GUERIN, MD
Alliance Obstetrics & Gynecology

EXERCISE

Women who participate in regular, hard physical exercise have 50% fewer hot flashes, better sleep quality, less depression, and gain less weight than women who don't. Thirty to sixty minutes, 5 days a week is ideal. Find something you enjoy and make it convenient so you can stick with it. You'll feel better and reduce your chance for diabetes, heart trouble and even cancer.

MEDITATIVE/ENERGY PRACTICE

Yoga, paced breathing, meditation, Tai Chi, etc have all been shown to increase a feeling of well being, especially in perimenopausal women who feel pressured and overly busy. Acupuncture improves hot flashes, depression in some women.

DIETARY CHANGES

Increasing isoflavone intake can reduce hot flashes and improve thought processes significantly. Soy containing foods (tofu, tempeh, soy nuts) are the most concentrated dietary sources. Aim for 30 grams of soy protein daily from dietary sources – pills and powders may be too concentrated for safe use

PROGESTERONE CREAM

Shown to be effective in controlled trials for relief of hot flashes. Reputable brand is critical as many "progesterone" or "yam" products contain no active ingredients. Use Progest, Progonal, Ostaderm brands for reliable content. Apply 1/4 teaspoon to thin skin twice daily for the 2 weeks before a period. If no periods, use daily.

HERBS

For optimal benefit, work with a knowledgeable herbalist. Look for "USP" or "NSF" designation on label for purity. Check www.consumerlab.com, a good natural products database unaffiliated with a company. Also through www.iherb.com go to The Natural Pharmacist area for excellent reviews of supplements.

BLACK COHOSH: Approved in Germany 1989 for relief of menopause symptoms and PMS, the most widely used remedy in Europe. Controlled trials show benefit. Best brand "Remifemin". One 20 - 40 mg tablet twice daily. Risks – low pulse, nausea, one report of hepatitis. Not studied longer than 12 months of use.

OIL OF EVENING PRIMROSE (gamma linolenic acid): Improves breast tenderness and PMS. One controlled trial showed no benefit. One to 6 500 mg capsules daily. Potential risk – thrombosis (blood clots).

ST. JOHN'S WORT: Reduces depression, works like SSRIs ie Prozac. Many controlled trials show benefit. 300 mg three times daily. Risks – intestinal complaints, fatigue, cataracts in sunlight. Do not use with SSRI (antidepressant) drugs. Birth control pills may be slightly less effective with this herb.

VALERIAN (gamma amino butyric acid, GABA): for sleep disturbance, approved for use in Germany. Many controlled trials show benefit. 400 – 1000 mg 1 hour before bed. Risks – dystonic reaction.

VITEX (chasteberry): increases number of days between periods, decreases prolactin, and increases progesterone. Controlled trials show benefit. 175 mg daily – may take up to 6 mo to show benefit. Risks – decreased libido.