

Menopause signifies the end of a woman's menstrual cycle. It is estimated that 1.3 million women in the US will reach menopause each year between now and 2010. The majority of women end their menstruation between the ages of 48 to 52m but uncomfortable symptoms of peri-menopause or pre-menopause can begin as early as forty and last until fifty-five years of age. A woman may notice that her menstrual cycle starts to be different from what it used to be—slight irregularity, increased breast swelling, abdominal bloating, mood swings, sweets cravings and low energy. As she gets closer to the actual menopause—the cessation of her menstruation—the symptoms may become more extreme—such as hot flashes, night sweats, vaginal dryness, decreased libido, headaches, insomnia and moodiness.

When the menopause phase is finally over, a woman needs to be concerned about the decrease in the various essential hormones of her body, mainly estrogen and progesterone. These hormones are responsible for maintaining healthy bones and elastic blood vessels and skin. Though mainstream medicine focuses on osteoporosis and heart disease, many women also experience decreased quality of life issues such as weight gain, dry and wrinkled skin and mucus membranes, thinning and loss of hair, lower vitality, decrease in sex drive and mood swings.

Current Western medicine offers Hormone Replacement Therapy ( HRT ), which may be useful for some women whose uterus and ovaries have been removed. However, many women have become wary of the potential side effects of hormone replacement therapy, including the increased risk of certain

cancers. Their fears were abundantly justified when a recent study concluded that a popularly prescribed synthetic estrogen and progesterone pill can cause increased risks of breast and reproductive cancers, as well as a danger of blood clots, while offering no protection against heart disease.

According to Chinese Medicine theory, menopause occurs when a woman's body begins to preserve blood and energy in order to sustain her vitality and allow for the maximum available nourishment for her body, especially her kidneys. The kidney is the organ Chinese Medicine sees as the root of life and longevity. Therefore, the body, in its wisdom, reserves the flow of a channel in the center of the body which sends blood and energy down to the uterus. Instead, blood and essence from the kidneys are conserved and cycled through the body to nourish the woman's spirit and extend her longevity. Thus, in the Chinese Medicine, menopause is seen as true change in life from mother to enlightened and wise being.

Traditional Chinese Medicine does not recognize menopause as one particular syndrome. Instead, it aims to treat the specific symptoms that are unique to each individual using a variety of techniques such as Acupuncture, Chinese herbs, bodywork, lifestyle/dietary recommendations and energetic exercises to restore imbalances found in the body.

#### **The Acupuncture Treatment**

Acupuncture points to treat the emotional and physical effects of menopause are located all over the body. During the acupuncture treatment, tiny needles will be placed along your

legs, arms, shoulders, and perhaps even your little toe and ears.

There seems to be a little sensitivity to the insertion of acupuncture needles. They are so thin that several acupuncture needles can go into the middle of a hypodermic needle. Occasionally, there is a brief moment of discomfort as the needles are in place, most people relax and even fall asleep for the duration of the treatment.

The length, number or frequency of treatments will vary. Typical treatments last from five to 30 minutes, with the patient being treated one or two times a week. Some symptoms are relieved after the first treatment, while more severe or chronic ailments often require multiple treatments. The style of acupuncture that your acupuncturist has been trained in will play a roll in length of treatment, number points used and frequency of visits.

#### Dietary Therapy

A diet rich in minerals will prevent osteoporosis. Dark, leafy green been found to contain phyto-estrogen which is helpful in reducing hot flashes and night sweats and protecting against heart disease. Tofu, made from soy, has additional calcium, which is excellent for bone health.

A diet rich in essential fatty acids and omega 3 and 6 oils is important in preventing heart disease. In particular, taking a tablespoon of flax oil daily will help maintain elasticity of the blood vessels, increase tissue lubrication and protect against reproductive cancers.

Adequate protein is also important in providing ingredients for hormonal production in one's body. Chinese medicine believes that lamb is especially excellent for nourishing the hormone glands (endocrine system).

The most preferable foods to intake are: Spinach, collard greens, Swiss chard, kale, mustard greens, beet greens, lettuce, parsley, soy, black beans, lima beans, navy beans, mung beans, lentils, split peas, adzuki beans, Salmon, sea bass, halibut, tuna; nuts and seeds such as walnuts, sesame, pine nuts, sunflower seed and flax seed.

#### Herbal Therapy

Chinese medicine has within its arsenal close to 10,000 substances therapy are the lack of side effects and that it's time-tested and naturally effective in supporting body's normal functions.

The herbs contained in Chinese Herbal formula have been shown in studies form China and the West to be useful for the natural relief of symptoms of menopause.

#### Energy Exercise

Many women in Asia have used Tai Chi and other Qi (energy) Exercise to help them manage stress and restore vitality and normal functions before, during and after menopause with good success. Studies have shown that Taiji can promote balance, cardiovascular health and emotional well being.

In the seasons of ones; life, if the ending of the menstrual cycle means the winter of the woman's ability to bear children, then what comes after menopause is the second spring- the season of rebirth when she is empowered to live the way she dreamt.

There are infinite possibilities for creativity and personal growth. This can be both an exciting and challenging time in a woman's life.