

A Nutritional Approach to the Management of The Menopause



The Menopause occurs when ovulation stops & menstruation ceases over a period of 6-12 months. This signals the end of fertility and the average age of onset is 50 years although it can occur between the ages of 40 and 55 years. Some women go through the menopause with few or no symptoms whilst others experience symptoms which can range from mild to severe. Symptoms include hot flushes, night sweats, headaches, frequent urinary tract infections, cold hands & feet, forgetfulness & poor concentration, vaginal dryness, mood swings, fatigue, dizziness, anxiety, depression & insomnia. In developed countries it is common for women to view the onset of the menopause negatively, perhaps because we have medicalised this natural phase of life & have come to regard it as an oestrogen deficiency disease instead of a natural stage in women's lives. Women from many other cultures embrace its arrival because it signifies the wisdom, experience & respect associated with increased age. Japanese women for example view the menopause positively & experience few if any of the symptoms associated with it, including osteoporosis which is very rare in Japan. Researchers believe that this is due at least in part to the fact that the menopause has not become a medicalised condition in Japan plus there is a much higher dietary intake of phytoestrogens which boost declining oestrogen levels so few symptoms occur during this stage of life & therefore negative associations are not made.

WHAT HAPPENS DURING THE MENOPAUSE?

When ovulation stops the ovaries largely cease to produce oestrogen & progesterone. These hormones do not only function as sex hormones but also influence many different organs in the body in a variety of ways which is why a large range of symptoms can occur during the menopause. Cells in the bladder, bones, breasts, skin, arteries, heart, vagina, liver & brain all contain oestrogen receptors & require oestrogen to function optimally. For example oestrogen is needed to keep the skin smooth & to maintain healthy hydration. It is also needed along with progesterone for bone formation & maintenance, and for keeping arteries clear of atherosclerosis. Although hormone levels drop dramatically during & after the menopause, small amounts are manufactured in fat cells especially in the hips & thighs & in the adrenal glands.

We can boost our levels of oestrogen before during and after the menopause through increasing our intake of phytoestrogen foods such as soya products ie soya beans, tofu, miso, tempeh, soya live bio yoghurts, and through foods such as rhubarb, pomegranates, dates, apples, celery, fennel, flaxseeds, nuts & wholegrains.

Phytoestrogens are weaker than oestrogen made by the body but phytoestrogens will still bind to spare oestrogen receptor sites throughout the body & exhibit an oestrogenic effect & therefore boost the body's oestrogen levels. As a guide, one cup of soya beans for example provides 300mg of Isoflavone which is the equivalent to 1 Premarin tablet or 0.45mg of oestrogen.

The Benefits & Risks Associated with Hormone Replacement Therapy -HRT

Benefits of Combined Eoestrogen & Progestogen HRT

Relief from Hot Flushes
Slowing Rate of Bone Loss
Reducing Risk of Heart Disease & Strokes (in those with no pre-existing atherosclerosis)
However, improved diet, modification to negative lifestyle factors & exercise can achieve the same benefits without the risk of side-effects

Risks Associated with Combined Eoestrogen & Progestogen HRT

Short-term HRT only provides temporary relief /postpones the inevitable - not a cure
Long-term therapy is not justified in many women because the risks outweigh the benefits for them, ie risk of: breast cancer; liver disorders; heart disease; gallstones; blood clots; enlargement of fibroids; adult onset asthma, poor blood sugar regulation

SOME DIET RECOMMENDATIONS

INCREASE INTAKE OF FOODS RICH IN PHYTOESTROGENS
(see below left)

ENSURE THE DIET INCLUDES 50% RAW ENZYME RICH FOODS, IE SALADS, FRUIT, VEG, NUTS, SEEDS, SPROUTED MUNG-BEANS ECT.

AVOID DAIRY PRODUCTS & RED MEAT SINCE THESE CONTRIBUTE TO HOT FLUSHES & RISK OF OSTEOPOROSIS

REPLACE DAIRY PRODUCTS WITH SOYA, RICE, OAT MILK FOR EXAMPLE, SOYA CHEESE & YOGHURTS ETC.

INCREASE INTAKE OF OILY FISH SUCH AS SALMON, TROUT, HERRING, MACKEREL, SARDINES FOR OMEGA 3 FATTY ACIDS WHICH HELP ALLEVIATE HOT FLUSHES & OTHER SYMPTOMS

REDUCE SALT INTAKE AS SALT INCREASES URINARY EXCRETION OF CALCIUM

AVOID ALCOHOL, CAFFEINE, SUGAR, SPICY FOOD, HOT DRINKS & SOUPS SINCE THESE CAN TRIGGER HOT FLUSHES, WORSTEN FREQUENCY OF URINATION, INTENSIFY MOOD SWINGS, IMPAIR BLOOD SUGAR REGULATION, & INCREASE THE RISK & DEGREE OF OSTEOPOROSIS

STRESS CONTROL IS VITAL TO MINIMISING SYMPTOMS SINCE RAISED CORTISOL LEVELS IMPAIR PROGESTERONE ACTION & THEREFORE THYROID FUNCTION

EXERCISE HELPS REDUCE BONE LOSS & HOT FLUSHES

YOUR NUTRITIONIST WILL ADVISE YOU OF A SUPPLEMENT PROGRAMME TO HELP YOU THROUGH THE MENOPAUSE

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