

Natural Alternatives to HRT

Based on the book by Dr Marilyn Glenville,

1. Eat more phytoestrogens.

I recommend that you eat phytoestrogens on a regular basis. Just changing 10 percent of your diet to include more of these phytoestrogenic foods makes a big difference. In Asian cultures, such as in Japan, women tend to eat more phytoestrogens, and many doctors and nutritional therapists (myself included) believe that this is a directly contributing factor to the lower rates of menopausal symptoms (and breast cancer) in Asian countries, when compared with the West. Certain phytoestrogens, including legumes such as soya, chickpeas, lentils and so on, contain isoflavones, which seem to work like the menopause drugs in that they stimulate certain oestrogen receptors and block others. Soya, in particular, contains two main isoflavones (genistein and daidzein), which are thought to have the most significant effect on menopausal symptoms. The strongest and most effective forms of soya are miso and tofu, which have been fermented. The overall result is that phytoestrogens can help balance hormones and reduce symptoms such as hot flushes and vaginal dryness. (However soya milk is to be avoided as it is often highly processed and can contribute to low thyroid conditions – use nut milks instead).

2. Stabilise your blood sugar to ease mood swings.

During menopause it is more crucial than ever that you keep your blood sugar stable. As your ovaries produce less oestrogen, your adrenal glands will take over, pumping out an alternative form of oestrogen for your body. If you are on a blood-sugar rollercoaster, your adrenal glands will have to work harder, tiring them out from their crucial work. Mood swings and bouts of irritability may occur during the menopause and some experts believe it may be caused by centres in your brain being affected by declining levels of oestrogen. In my opinion and in my experience by far the most common cause of mood swings and feelings of irritability during the menopause is caused by blood sugar imbalances.

3. Don't go hungry

One of the classic symptoms of blood sugar imbalances are mood swings and blood sugar imbalances are caused by a poor diet so the best advice if you are prone to this symptom during the menopause is to eat healthy and nutritious meals and healthy snacks (such as oatcakes and humous or small amounts of fresh fruit and seeds) throughout the day. Don't go for long periods without food because if you do your blood sugar levels will fall too low and you will feel irritable and tired. And avoid caffeine and foods packed with sugar as all these will give you an instant sugar high, followed by a long low when you feel shaky, moody and hungry so you are more likely to reach for another high sugar food and the vicious cycle continues.

4. Why Magnesium Matters

The mineral magnesium is important for every organ in your body, particularly your heart, muscles, and kidneys. It also contributes to the composition of your teeth and bones. Most

importantly, it activates enzymes, contributes to energy production, and helps regulate calcium levels as well as copper, zinc, potassium, vitamin D, and other important nutrients in the body.

In addition, magnesium levels seem to diminish during the menopause at the same time that oestrogen levels start to drop. Oestrogen enhances magnesium utilisation and uptake by soft tissues and bone and this could explain the resistance of young women to heart disease and osteoporosis -- as well as the increased prevalence of these diseases when oestrogen production ceases. For this reason, topping up your magnesium during the menopause may help to relieve some menopausal symptoms such as hot flushes and insomnia and decrease your increased risk of osteoporosis and heart disease.

5) Herbs that can ease the transition

Because they tend to work gently without severe side effects, natural menopause herbal supplements have been on the rise, and many women have found relief from their menopause symptoms by using them. The main herbs used to treat symptoms of menopause are called adaptogens which means that if you have a low level of one hormone or have an excess of another the herb will have a balancing effect on your hormones and your body.

Agnus Castus

One of the most important herbs you can take at the menopause, especially at the perimenopause, because it works as an adaptogen, which means it helps to balance your hormones. It appears to stimulate and normalise the function of the pituitary gland which controls and regulates the hormones in the body and is a potent remedy for mood swings and hot flushes.

Black Cohosh

Black cohosh is an herbal remedy that has been used for centuries in helping to alleviate menopause symptoms, especially hot flushes, night sweats and vaginal dryness.

Dong quai

This is actually a Chinese herb but it is widely available. It can be used for long periods of time because it is a tonic herb. It nourishes the liver and is said to help ease menopausal symptoms, such as hot flushes and vaginal dryness. It is widely used among Chinese women because of its reputation as a libido and energy booster and has been dubbed "the female ginseng."

Milk thistle

At menopause milk thistle can be an important herb because it helps boost liver function and makes sure old hormones are being excreted efficiently.

Aswaganda

Ashwaganda is another adaptogen which seems to have a wide range of hormonal balancing effects. This is an ayurvedic medicine which is available from online health stores. It can be added to smoothies and cereals as the flavour is a little bitter.

All these herbs may be used to help with conditions such as fibroids and endometriosis that are similarly a result of toxicity and poor liver function.