

Body, Mind & Spirit

NATURAL MANAGEMENT OF MENOPAUSE

BY MAUREEN O'CONNOR BARNHART, N.D.

Menopause is a normal, natural transition of life that every woman will pass through. It will occur for most women between the ages of 40 to 55, averaging 51-52. There are over 20 million women in the United States today that are experiencing menopause and this number will grow to around 60 million by the year 2010.

Menopause is defined as the loss of ovarian function which leads to the cessation of menstrual bleeding. It usually begins as a gradual process, termed perimenopause, which can occur for 3-10 years before the onset of menopause due to erratic fluctuations in hormonal levels. Menstrual periods become irregular and may be lengthened or shortened with diminished menstrual flow. This can be confusing to a woman, as it becomes difficult to determine whether she is actually in menopause or not.

The hormones (estrogen, progesterone and testosterone), are declining during this period. These hormonal changes lead to menopausal symptoms in 80% of women including hot flashes or night sweats, vaginal dryness and thinned vaginal tissue. Other symptoms of menopause include depression, mood swings, sleep disturbances, decreased libido, urinary problems and incontinence, vaginitis, decreased memory and concentration, hair loss, skin dryness, headaches, fatigue and weight gain.

Traditional doctors recommend conventional HRT (hormone replacement therapy) to most all women experiencing menopause. Few will advise a woman about natural alternatives including diet, nutritional supplements, herbs, exercise and other lifestyle changes.

The most common form of HRT is a synthetic estrogen called Premarin, made from the urine of pregnant mares. Associated risks include increased risk of uterine and breast cancer, increase risk of heart disease and stroke, increase in gallbladder and liver disease. HRT reduces the risk of osteoporosis, helps vaginal dryness, eliminates hot flashes and decreases the risk of heart disease. Because of these side effects, many women wish to avoid use of synthetic hormones.

A comprehensive naturopathic approach based upon a women's assessment of health and risk will prove to be

most effective in alleviating symptoms. Some basic choices include:

*Increase consumption of soy foods, rich in phytoestrogens having an estrogenic balancing effect.

*Eat plenty of green leafy vegetables daily, rich in nutrients such as calcium and antioxidants.

*Avoid dairy products, especially non-organic sources, since they may contain hormones.

*Avoid sodas, alcohol, nicotine, sugar and junk foods as they deplete minerals and are damaging to bone health.

*Avoid caffeine (coffee, tea, colas) because it may disrupt pH and worsen symptoms, in addition to depleting the body of needed minerals and vitamins.

*Reduce red meat and animal fat which may also contain hormones as well as deplete calcium levels in the body which are important for bone health.

*Drink plenty of bottled or filtered water.

Some nutritional considerations for hot flashes include:

*Vitamin E (800 to 1000 IU daily)

*Vitamin C (1,000 to 3,000 mg) and bioflavonoids, especially hesperidin (1,000 mg daily)

*A good multivitamin/mineral formula

Lifestyle habits include:

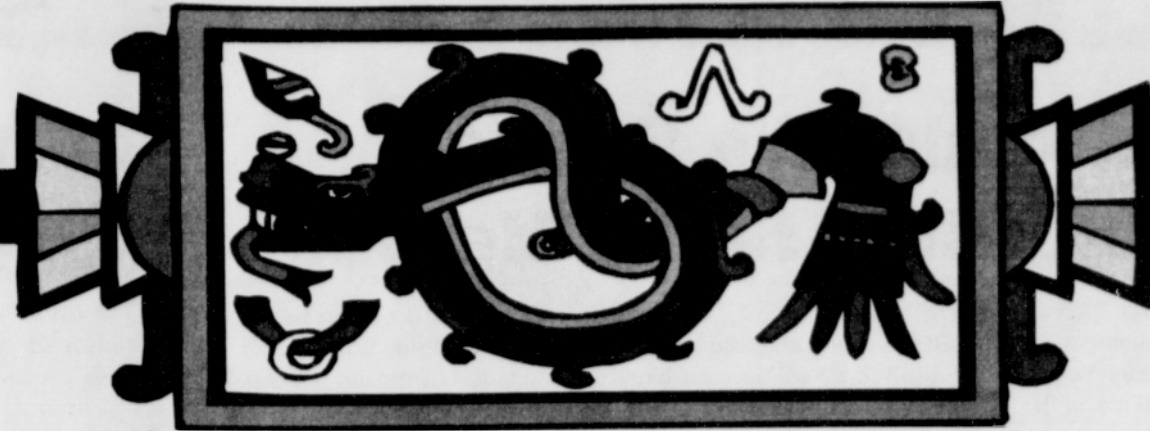
*Regular weight bearing exercise to increase bone density, improve circulation and control or reduce weight (30 minutes brisk walk more than 3 times weekly)

*Regular exposure to fresh air and sunshine to maximize Vitamin D production needed for bone health and a sense of well-being.

*Develop a positive attitude and reduce stress through relaxation, meditation, massage, etc.

It is important for you to become educated regarding all of your options regarding this normal life process. Naturopathic medicine offers a unique and successful approach to the management of menopause.

Dr. Barnhart is completing her second year residency in family practice at Natural Health Centers and provides the following services: general health concerns, women's health care, pediatrics, natural obstetrics and home and water births. She can be reached at NHC, Mt. Olivet Clinic. Call (503)255-7355 X147.



CHINESE HERBS Can Help

Women Live A Healthier Life

Wei Li has a unique perspective on how traditional Oriental medicine can benefit people in our community, particularly women.

At age 10, she began learning about Chinese medicine and herbs from her father, a doctor in China. Later, she completed medical school and became chief resident at the university hospital in Anhui Province.

After coming to the U.S., Dr. Li joined the faculty at the Oregon College of Oriental Medicine in Portland. Here she teaches Chinese herbal medicine and serves as a clinic supervisor.

"Traditional Oriental medicine works in a natural way to keep you healthy and enjoy a long life," she says. "The important thing is to be healthy and happy."

However, when she looks at many Americans, especially women, Dr. Li sees examples of poor health and premature aging. "Bad food, bad diet, bad lifestyle is a big problem here," she observes.

Too many Americans, Dr. Li believes, expect western medicine to cure them, to counteract the harm of unhealthy habits and lifestyles.

"Western medicine is appropriate when you have broken bones or a major problem like a heart attack," she explains. "The focus is on treating you when you are very sick, but not on keeping you well."

On the other hand, she says, traditional Oriental medicine "can help your body get back to normal, restore balance and help you to stay well." An important element in Chinese medicine is the use of herbs, a form of treatment that goes back thousands of years. Today, herbs are used to maintain health, to prevent illness and to treat ailments, particularly those suffered by women.

"Herbs are effective in helping women during pregnancy," Dr. Li says. "They also can be used in alleviating PMS and in treating serious problems like ovarian cysts." Dr. Li prefers to use bulk herbs, carefully mixing the correct formula



Dr. Wei Li, a practitioner and professor at the Oregon College of Oriental Medicine in Portland, prepares a formula in the college's herbal dispensary.

and instructing the patient to boil the mixture in a tea. "It may not taste good, but it has the best results," she explains.

The dispensary at the Oregon College of Oriental Medicine is filled with herbs, some exotic and some quite familiar to most of us, like mint, honeysuckle, dandelion and chrysanthemum. In most cases they are used in combination, often with 6 to 12 herbs in a formula.

For treating fatigue and lowered immunity, Dr. Li may prescribe a formula that includes ginseng and astragalus. To ward off the common cold, the formula can include perilla leaf, magnolia flowers or schizonepeta. To treat a

patient for hepatitis C she may select dried berries like cornus and rubi. Herbs are also available in granules and in pre-mixed patent formulas.

"The advantage of traditional Oriental medicine," Dr. Li says "is that we can prescribe a treatment, including herbs, that is specific to the patient's condition. That means there is likely to be a good result and the person will be restored to health."

As a practitioner of traditional Oriental medicine, Dr. Li believes strongly in promoting good health. The secret, she says, is "following a sensible lifestyle and maintaining harmony and balance in one's life."

AMRIT DARSHAN: MASTER JUICER

INTERVIEW BY JOY RAMOS

I met Amrit this summer and was struck by her youthfulness, grace and vibrancy. She exuded health in appearance and spirit. Amrit has experienced her own personal transformation from the regenerative power of drinking juices and eating raw fruits and vegetables. She encourages others to try it, even for a week.

Q: How did you get started on Juicing?

Amrit Darshan: I had a roommate who cured herself of Cancer by living on a diet of juices, raw fruits and vegetables and nutritional supplements. She had so much energy. I thought to myself, 'If this can do that for a person that's not been healthy, what would it do for a person already basically healthy?' That's how I got into juicing daily.

Q: Why is drinking fruit and vegetable juices good for the body?

Amrit Darshan: Everybody should have some form of raw fruits and vegetables. That's where enzymes come from. Enzymes are what your cells live on for nutrition. Drinking juices are like a transfusion by bringing nutrients to your body within a few minutes.

Once you start cooking foods (by broiling, frying, freezing, canning, grilling, microwaving or other means), you destroy enzymatic properties. It's really debatable how much nutrition you get from cooked foods. Too much processed foods weigh your body down and your body works so hard at digesting it.

Q: Are humans vegetarian by Nature?

Amrit Darshan: Yes. You can get protein from vegetable sources like soybeans. Meat is very difficult to digest. Carnivorous animals have a lot of stomach acid and short intestines for meat to go through them easily. Humans are designed just the opposite from Carnivores.

Q: You look very vibrant and energetic. What is your juicing regiment like?

Amrit Darshan: I drink several glasses (2-3 quarts) of purified water daily to flush out impurities in my system and drink fruit juices throughout the morning for Cleansing.

During the mid-day, I have my largest meal. After 1 PM, I drink vegetable juices for Regeneration (to build up the body). For dinner, I eat light and don't have any food 4 hours before sleeping. The idea of eating late at night is the worst thing because you go to bed with food in you that's partially digested. This can lead to weight gain. The food just lies there in the digestive tract and putrefies.

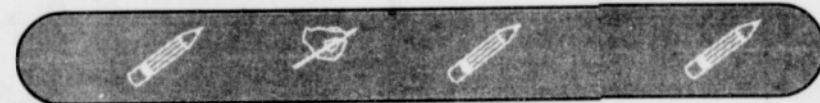
Q: What have you noticed in yourself and others from juicing and eating raw fruits and vegetables regularly?

Amrit Darshan: Juicing can lead to an increase in energy, awareness of one's Self and one's connection to God. You are eating food in its most natural, God-given state. And, when you do that, it's like you have a direct line to God. All of your cells are being nurtured and loved and cared for. It's an upliftment of the Soul. You feel more loving in your heart because you're lightening up inside.

When your body is trying to deal with processed foods and chemicals, you're depleting your body of its Life Source. Energy is spent more on digestion than towards Life. The more your body becomes clean and pure, the more you have energy for yourself and service to other people in a selfless way. That's part of being healthy.

Q: Any suggestions for someone wanting to try this lifestyle?

Amrit Darshan: Don't just jump into this. Juicing and eating raw fruits and vegetables have a cleansing effect. You don't want to put your body into shock. Work



Amrit is an avid juicer from NE, Portland.

on it slowly but surely with the idea that you add more raw foods and juices to your new diet.

If you would like to learn more about Juicing, Amrit Darshan is available for consultations. She hosts her own cable program call "Alive with Kundalini Yoga" which can be seen on channels 9, 11, 27 and 33. Call (503) 283-6166.

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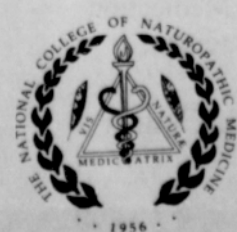
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