

SUMMIT

Naturopathic News

Surviving Menopause

Kim Nearpass, ND

My years 18 years of education, internship and practice working with female patients have taught me many important lessons, including this: no woman's experience of menopause is the same.

The practice of medicine would be greatly simplified if every patient read the textbooks, had the same symptoms and "followed the rules". But, there are no rules. That's what makes my job so challenging, exciting and diverse. As a Naturopathic Doctor, I have the fortune and luxury of spending time with each patient. I listen to the stories, the frustrations, the emotions, and sometimes, the pain. This allows for the greatest reward: the creation of customized treatments, designed to fit each woman's values and unique experience of menopause.

The experience of menopause is as varied as the number of American women who are in, or close to, the "change" (technically called perimenopause). That's more than 37 million women.

Perimenopause is not a disease, but rather a normal life transition. It's a movement from the reproductive years, to the menopausal years when a woman can no longer reproduce. Many cultures view this phase of life as a time of looking inward. It's a reward for women who have worked hard throughout life and the childbearing years (whether she has had children or not). It's an opportunity for a woman to focus on and take care of herself.

Physiologically, ovulation occurs less frequently and eventually ceases. Both estrogen and progesterone levels decrease significantly and dramatically. For some women, the transition is sudden and simple. For others, it can be years of turmoil. Because estrogen and progesterone have receptors on cells all over the body (including the blood vessels, brain, heart and skin), noticeable and often uncomfortable symptoms may develop as the hormone levels change. Women may need support for some of the common complaints, which include insomnia, hot flashes and night sweats, fatigue, forgetfulness, anxiety, decreased libido, weight gain (especially in the belly), irregular or heavy menses, irritability and vaginal dryness. None of these symptoms are life-threatening, but they are no fun. The good news is that with proper support and treatment, no perimenopausal woman has to be miserable.

Hormone replacement therapy is often the standard medical treatment for menopausal symptoms. Although some perimenopausal women feel great on hormones, their use comes with some degree of risk, and this cookie-cutter approach doesn't work for everyone.

Fortunately, many other safe options are available. When we consider the vast options that natural medicine provides, the possible solutions are as numerous as the potential problems. For some women, a cleansing diet and regular exercise is enough to improve their quality of life. Others respond positively to a combination of herbal remedies and nutritional supplementation. While other women may need to eliminate food sensitivities, balance the detoxification, digestive or immune systems, or support the thyroid or adrenal glands.

It can be overwhelming and confusing for a woman to navigate the wide variety of herbs, homeopathic remedies, nutritional supplements, dietary modifications, essential oils and other natural therapies available. Taking the time to meet with a trained practitioner of Naturopathic medicine provides an individualized evaluation for each woman in her unique perimenopausal experience, and is an efficient way to find the best combination of therapies to feel her best during this transitory journey.