

Menopause

Using herbs to help you through the menopause

by Alison Cullen



How to Use Herbal Remedies Safely

This guidebook is not intended to replace medical advice. You should consult a Healthcare Professional if you have any condition which is of concern. For best results when taking herbal remedies, follow the guidelines below.

If the product you have has an in-pack leaflet then you should follow the instructions and advice on the leaflet and product packaging.

If the product does not come with an in-pack leaflet then you should follow the instructions and advice on the product packaging. The following general advice also applies to products with no in-pack leaflet.

- If there is any doubt as to the nature of the problem please consult your Doctor for a diagnosis.
- Do not use when pregnant or breastfeeding unless under the supervision of a Healthcare Professional.
- Do not use for children under 2 years of age unless under the supervision of a Healthcare Professional.
- Do not exceed stated doses.
- Do not use alongside medication with the same action eg. a tranquillizing herb alongside tranquillizing medication.
- Do not take more than 3 herbal remedies concurrently.
- Stop taking herbal remedies 14 days before surgery.



One of the key symptoms experienced by women as they move through the menopausal years is a hot flush. During the day these cause physical discomfort and emotional distress, undermining confidence and interfering with social and business activities. During the night, sweats can range from being mildly disturbing to making uninterrupted sleep very difficult.

As the menopause is already a time of challenge and change, reducing the practical disruptions it causes to everyday life is important. Minimising its impact on sleep is vital, as lack of sleep prevents the body repairing and regenerating, and causes both fatigue and a mental fogginess that makes everything harder to cope with.

One of the traditional ways of dealing with hot flushes and night sweats is with remedies based on the herb **Sage**. This herb is well known for its culinary usefulness, but it is also traditionally thought to possess the handy ability to rebalance the sweat-regulating mechanism in the brain. This means that however wobbly your hormones are and however much they are throwing out your temperature regulation, Sage can help to bring it back into line.

In folklore, **Sage** symbolised domestic virtue, and was said to grow properly only in gardens where the woman ruled the household! The Latin root of its name means 'to save', and its medicinal history goes back aeons, with Romans considering it sacred, and the Chinese trading tea in order to get supplies of sage to use medicinally.

Using **Sage** extracts is very straightforward, and you can choose to take it either during the day to help reduce daytime flushing, or before you go to bed if night sweats are the real problem. Users of sage extract should begin to notice an improvement within the first couple of weeks, and the flushes are generally found to decrease further the longer you use it. If eventually they disappear altogether, you can discontinue it and wait to see if they return. If they do, simply go back to the **Sage** extract.

Sage extracts should not be used at the same time as medicines acting via GABA receptors (e.g. barbiturates and benzodiazepines) or if you are hypersensitive to **Sage**. It doesn't have any hormonal action so can be taken with HRT if necessary. Many women find it a pleasant alternative to HRT and there are no reported side effects. **Sage** is very specific for the flushing and sweating, which are often the key symptoms women are tackling.

Some relatively recent research has shown that **Sage** extracts can reduce anxiety and increase alertness, calmness and contentedness.⁽¹⁾ This is a great potential bonus on top of the anti-sweating action!

Histamine Hint

Some women's flushes are triggered more by histamine surges than by hormonal changes. Histamine is a chemical produced in response to stress and the ingestion of foods or drinks to which you are sensitive. If you drink a great deal of tea or coffee, or eat large quantities of junk food, or have a stressful lifestyle, then you are likely to have high histamine levels and flush more easily. You may also find that you react dramatically to bites and stings and get prickly heat quite easily, as these are also linked to high histamine levels. If this is the case, take **Nettle** tincture, and drink nettle tea, plus regular doses of vitamin C (no more than 100mg at a time to avoid wasting it), as these are both used as natural antihistamine remedies.

The menopause? It ain't heavy...

At the start of the menopause, some women find their periods are coming closer together and are extremely heavy. If this is the case, try taking an extract of **Agnus castus**, which is used to help slow and lighten the load. Bear in mind that the menopause is a constant process of change, so as your periods become more spaced out and lighter, **Agnus castus** will no longer be needed.

The menopause? Take it easy



Menopausal women tend to have so much on their plates already that dealing with hormonal changes seems a challenge too far. Irritability, anxiety, nervous tension, and even mild depression are often the result of trying to deal with physical and emotional symptoms whilst juggling the usual load of responsibilities and demands. Try taking an extract of **Avena sativa**. Made from oats and full of calming, soothing nutrients, this gentle herb works gradually to help build up resistance to stress and a more relaxed frame of mind. It can be taken with other medication and is suitable for long-term use.



Hypericum is a lovely remedy to turn to for help if your mood is low. Known as the Sunshine Herb, it is used to support the spirits whilst calming tension. You should begin to notice an improvement in about 3 weeks, however it shouldn't be taken for more than a few months at a time. If you're on any medication, including hormonal contraceptives, check that **Hypericum** is suitable as it has quite a few contraindications.



If sleep is evasive, try a mixture of **Valerian** and **Hops** extracts which combine beautifully to help promote peaceful, refreshing sleep. These herbs can be taken long-term, but don't take them if you're already on sleeping medication.

To assist your body to cope with all the demands without frazzling your nerves to pieces, reduce or remove caffeine from your diet, and drink plenty of water. Exercise triggers the production of happy chemicals called endorphins in your body, so try a 10-minute walk every day to keep those endorphins flowing.



The menopause? Slow down but don't stop

Calming down and taking it easier are excellent strategies, but feeling too worn out to do anything is another matter. Feeling fatigued is often the result of low iron levels, especially if your periods have been quite heavy. Taking a natural **iron tonic** will increase your energy levels without causing constipation or digestive turmoil. Keep caffeine and wheat intake low, as they both inhibit iron absorption, and eat dried fruit in place of foods full of refined sugar, as they contain useful quantities of iron. Staying well hydrated helps with energy levels too.



The menopause? Forget it!



Many women find that increased forgetfulness is a clue that the menopause is upon them. Taking **Ginkgo biloba** extract is thought to increase the blood flow to the brain and so help memory and concentration. Bear in mind, though, that many women are carrying huge amounts of information and extremely long To-Do lists in their heads, and it's not surprising that sometimes a fact or two slips through the net. Be considerate to yourself and get enough sleep to allow your brain to work efficiently.

The menopause? Hairy moments!



Some women find that the condition of their hair, skin and nails is a concern during the menopausal years. It is often the case that minor nutritional deficiencies culminate in poor supplies being available for the outer layers that are so important to us cosmetically. Eating a healthy diet is obviously helpful, but eating it calmly, sitting down and relaxing rather than on the run in a panic is important, as it's hard for the body to absorb nutrients efficiently if it's under a lot of strain.

Low iron levels can affect hair and nails, and lack of silica can contribute to thinning hair, brittle, peeling nails, and poor skin tone. Take a natural iron tonic, and use a colloidal **silica** supplement to provide easily absorbed silica.

The menopause? Feast yourself fit

As periods become less frequent during the menopause, the body loses one of its exit routes for toxins. The more toxins there are in the body, the more likely are skin problems, digestive disorders, arthritic complaints, etc. To keep toxin levels low, stick to these guidelines:

- Drink at least 1.5 litres of still, plain water daily
- Cut out coffee and take a maximum of 2 cups of tea daily (herbal teas are fine)
- Make sure that your bowel moves every day without fail
- Eat regularly and calmly
- Reduce refined carbohydrates – refined sugar, white bread, white pasta and white rice, and things containing heaps of syrup or sucrose
- Eat more phyto-oestrogenic foods (see box)
- Eat more non-dairy calcium-containing foods (see box)
- Exercise daily, if only a 10-minute walk every day

Phyto-oestrogenic Foods

Almonds, apples, bananas, broccoli, cabbage, carrots, cashews, cauliflower, celery, cucumber, green beans, oats, parsnips, parsley, peas, sprouted seeds, sunflower, sesame and pumpkin seeds, and tofu

Calcium-containing Foods

Almonds, brazils, brown rice, figs, kidney beans, oats, pine kernels, salmon, sardines, sunflower, sesame and pumpkin seeds, tofu, watercress and white cabbage



The menopause? We can fix it!

The menopause isn't an ailment; it's a natural process through which all women eventually pass. There are herbal remedies to assist with most symptoms – use them to your benefit and have the best menopause you can.

References

(1) Kennedy D et al. *Neuropsychopharmacology* 2006; 31: 845-852



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