

Making the Right Choice to Treat Menopause Symptoms

Women in mid-life want to look and feel good, remain productive and active during the thirty years or so after menopause. They are looking for safe and effective options for handling this natural life change to help them achieve their goals.

Starting around age 40, women may begin to have symptoms from hormone changes. Menopausal symptoms include hot flashes, mood changes, vaginal dryness, depression, bone loss, heavy and irregular periods, tender breasts, fluid retention, fatigue, thickening waistlines, reduced sex drive, mental dullness, and just not feeling like their selves. There are so many things out there to select for these symptoms. It's difficult to identify what will work best and if it's safe.

Traditional Hormone Replacement Therapy (HRT): For years, physicians obligingly prescribed strong prescription hormones to help reduce menopausal symptoms. Most often Premarin and Provera were prescribed. Premarin (made from pregnant horse urine) is many times stronger than human estrogens. Provera (synthetic progesterone substitute) does not protect the breast the way natural progesterone does. Recent research has shown that taking hormones can increase the risk of breast cancer. Many women have simply stopped taking hormones and may be experiencing unpleasant and unnecessary side effects.

Natural Options that Work

Bio-Identical HRT: Natural female hormones include a combination of three estrogens and one progesterone. The estrogens are E1, estrone; E2, estradiol; and E3, estriol. When creating a bio-identical hormone replacement, Mexican wild yam or soy provides the ring structures that are then completed in the lab to the same identical molecules the body produces.

Balanced human hormones speak to receptors in harmony with nature while artificial substitutes are unbalanced and send different and often harmful messages.

Biest is a bio-identical hormone that is made from a combination of estradiol and estriol this is balanced with progesterone. Often other hormones are used, including testosterone, DHEA, and pregnenolone. Individual needs vary widely and risk factors need to be evaluated whenever hormones are used. A key part to managing hormone therapy is routine hormone testing. This helps identify when one of the many hormones is out of balance – which will present symptoms.

The safest way to use bio-identical hormones is in a cream form. If estrogen is taken in capsule form orally, the liver can make a protein that can form blood clots.

Herbal Treatments: There are many herbal options available such as black cohosh, damiana, false unicorn root, vitex agnes casti, dong quai, blue cohosh, red clover, licorice root, red raspberry leaf, motherwort, maca or sage to help with menopausal symptoms. Many of these herbs are active at the estrogen and progesterone receptors, but they are much weaker than the actual hormones. Some women combine herbs with bio-identical hormones, a good choice for women in their 60s or 70s. Other women rely upon established homeopathic formulas such as pulsatilla or sepia to help with symptoms. Women have many good choices today!

If the variety of options seems overwhelming to sort out, seek out a physician who specializes in natural treatments for menopause and develop a partnership for your health that meets your needs – safely and effectively. Also look at other factors that affect menopause symptoms such as proper nutrition, exercise and stress reduction. But most of all be assured that the natural choices available today can provide satisfactory solutions for menopause symptom treatment.

By Laura Kovalcik, D.O., FACOI, Board-Certified Internal Medicine
Dr. Kovalcik is the owner of The Downing Clinic, an integrative internal medicine practice established in 1991 with a major focus on bio-identical hormones and natural menopause treatments. Clinic location: 5715 Bella Rose Blvd., Suite 100 Clarkston. Phone: 248-625-6677. Website: www.TheDowningClinic.com