

Menopausal Syndrome and Its Management with Ayurveda

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ABSTRACT

Menopause, a phenomenon unique to women and a unique experience for every woman, is the ending of a woman's monthly menstrual period and ovulation. It, alongside, forebodes several other changes in the body and mind, brought in due to a decline in the amount of the hormones estrogen and progesterone being produced by the body. Menopause is, occasionally, viewed as an end to youth and sexuality, making it a socially unacceptable occurrence. Moreover, menopause is not a disease either, but a natural and inevitable process in a woman's life. If it is viewed in the right perspective it heralds the dawn of a period of greater freedom and liberation from the restrictions of youth.

However, menopause, though, one of the important physical and mental milestones in a woman's life, many women lack concrete information about what is taking place and what are their options. As a mode of lifestyle and that of alternative therapy, Ayurveda entails a holistic physiological system based on balance, with its cardinal doctrine of human physiology being constituted by "vata", "pitta" and "kapha" and the natural components of earth, water, fire, air and ether. Ayurvedic lifestyle is essentially based on the principles of naturopathic lifestyle with a lot of insistence on discipline and control with medications consisting of herbs and mineral wealth; making use of techniques such as yogic means and massages. Generally there are two broad groups of treatment: measures calculated to maintain the health of healthy people; and measures which focus on the cure of specific disease. In menopause, lifestyle factors play an important role and positive lifestyle changes can have an enormous impact on conditions which involve the immune system and the endocrine system. A customized lifestyle modification strategy is therefore an essential component in a woman's approach to ameliorating the symptoms of menopause. This lifestyle choice includes nutrition, exercise, stress reduction, weight management and proper herbal supplementation. A detailed description of menopause is elaborated in the paper.

Keywords: Menopause, lifestyle, *panchakarma*, hormone

INTRODUCTION

Menopause is not a disease but a natural process in a woman's life. Menopause is one of the important physical milestones in a woman's life. Many women lack concrete information about what is taking place & what are their options regarding a proper diet, nutritional

supplements & exercise and simple knowledge & preparation that can enable one to embrace it and move on with grace.

Signs & Symptoms of early Menopause:

In case of early menopause, estrogen levels can rapidly decline, causing symptoms to appear suddenly, more severely and last longer. Several visible symptoms are:

- Age between 40-45
- Irregular periods for 12 months
- Suffering from common symptoms including hot flashes, headache, weight gain, depression, insomnia, mood swings, fuzzy thinking or fatigue. ⁽¹⁾

Cause of Early Menopause:

When many patients learn they are in premature menopause, anxiety related to its causes and its future implications seizes women. However, there is more to menopause than anxiety. Some of the common factors that cause early menopause are:

Genes – women with a family history of premature menopause are 60% more likely to experience it themselves. Also, events that occur in utero while female's ovaries are developing may result in a smaller number of egg producing cells which can then shorten a woman's reproductive life span.

Lifestyle Factors associated with Early Menopause:

- Poor nutrition & Poverty
- Smoking increases risk of early menopause
- Alcohol consumption may contribute to an early entering into the phase of menopause
- Medical treatments such as chemotherapy & radiation can initiate menopause earlier than usual
- Stress, strain & mental tension leads to early menopause.

Hormonal Issues: Estrogen, progesterone & testosterone levels consistently record a decline through one's life, a normal feature, but as the age increases, the fluctuations & ratios between these hormones, at times, becomes more extreme. When the body is unable to regulate these shifts in hormone levels, women can experience common symptoms of menopause that include night sweats, hot flashes, food cravings & fatigue. ⁽²⁾

Menopause is not a disease, but a normal part of life. Hormone replacement

therapy (HRT) has become simply hormone therapy (HT) in recognition of the fact that replacing estrogen is not natural & brings dangerous side effects.

For over 5000 years, Ayurveda has acknowledged menopause as a natural transition and not a mistake by mother Nature that requires hormone replacement therapy. Maharshi Ayurveda assures us that menopause can be health promoting, spiritually transforming & free of troubles or adverse symptoms.

Experts today are affirming these positive view of menopause, stating that it is a not natural to get weak bones, heart diseases & rapid ageing after menopause. rather, osteoporosis, heart disease & other chronic health problems develops. HRT (Hormone Replacement Therapy), once heavily promoted as the medical solution to these problems is no longer recommended for treatment & prevention.

According to Ayurveda, 45-55 years of age are a critical decade. They provide the foundation on which subsequent health is established. Degree of concern in this decade and consequent life style changes determine the grace of future life and its probability of being without the burden of chronic health problems.

Diagnostic Evaluation of Menopause

A diagnosis of menopause is usually made based on age, history of menstrual periods, symptoms, and the results of a pelvic exam. Additional exams and tests may be needed if symptoms are severe, other conditions are suspected and other concerns make diagnosis difficult. ^[3]

Ayurvedic physicians always observe a woman's posture as the first examination for early signs of osteoporotic compression of the spine as well as her gait, muscle tone, coordination, general nutritional status (i.e. dhatuksaya), flexibility, hearing, eyesight, and emotional status. Some studies show a decline in the number of anterior horn cells in the spinal cord after the age of fifty, which leads to muscle weakness, atrophy and loss of lean muscle mass.

Menopause is the one of the important physical milestones in a woman's life. Yet, many woman do not know about what is taking place and what their options are. Menopause can be minimized with a proper diet, nutritional supplements, exercise & simple lifestyle. Proper knowledge shall enable a person to step forward with grace & embrace it. [4]

Ayurvedic Symptoms of Menopause:

In Ayurveda, menopause is linked with ageing. Ageing is a vata predominant store of life. Thus the symptoms of menopause experienced by some women are similar to the symptoms seen when the *vata dosh* rises and upsets the normal balance of body. [5]

Treatment of menopause:

The type of treatment depends upon the *dosha* in which woman's menopause symptoms are manifesting. Here it is important to note that health problems at menopause represent imbalances in the body that were already growing in the body and are marked by the stress of shifting hormones. [6]

Vata Dosha Menopause:

Symptoms –Nervousness, anxiety, pain, mood swings, vaginal dryness, loss of skin tone, feeling cold, irregular periods, insomnia, mild hot flashes, constipation, palpitation, bloating and joint pain.

Treatment-

Diet -increase warm food and drinks. Take regular meals and use spices, fennel and cumin.

Decrease –caffeine and other stimulants, refined sugar cold drinks, cucumber, organic food, use spices and cumin and fennel. Avoid hot spicy foods, hot drinks and alcohol, no eating late at night.

Life Style- Early bed-time, oil massage, using almond and olive oil, meditation, yoga, regular exercise like walking.

Herbs- Anti vata herbs include ashwagandha, arjuna, astragalus, cardamom, comfrey root, garlic, ginseng, guggul, hawthorn berries, sandalwood and zizphus.

Pitta – type menopause

Symptoms- Prone to Hot temper, anger, irritability, feeling hot, hot flashes, night sweats, heavy periods, excessive bleeding, urinary tract infections, skin rashes and acne

Treatment:

Diet- Increase cooling foods, water intake, sweet juicy fruits (grapes pears, plums, mango, melons, apples), yellow squash cucumber, organic foods

Avoid hot spicy food, hot drinks and alcohol, no eating late at night

Life style: Go to bed at 10 pm, oil massage using coconut and sesame oil, use meditation & other techniques to reduce anger. Exercise & exposure to sun are limited.

Use Anti-Pitta Herbs: Aloe vera, arjuna, barberry, golden seed, saffron, sandalwood, shatavari.

Kapha type Menopause:

Symptoms- Weight gain, lethargy, fluid retention, laziness, depression, lacking motivation, slow digestion

Treatment- Prefer light, dry & warm food, consume fruits, whole grown vegetables, use spices such as black pepper, turmeric & ginger.

Avoid –Meat, cheese, sugar, cold foods & drinks.

Life style- Get up early (6am), Mustard oil recommended for massage.

Use Anti-Kapha Herbs: Bay berry, cayenne, guggulu, motormort, mustard. myrs. [7]

Understanding the difference in types of menopause

There are many terms to describe the different stages of the menopause cycle, which make it confusing for women who just want to understand why they are not feeling like themselves. These phases are all physiologically different, but the symptoms can feel similar.

Perimenopause is a transition easily confused with menopause that can last for several years. This phase presents similar symptoms to menopause that gradually increase, including fatigue, irritability,

mood swings, and weight gain. The difference is that women in perimenopause continue to have periods, although they may be irregular. When you do not have a period for 12 months, you have entered menopause.

Early menopause occurs in women between the ages of 40 and 45, and occurs naturally, in other words, is not medically or surgically initiated.

Surgical menopause is a result of a hysterectomy, oophorectomy (removal of ovaries,) and other pelvic surgeries. Ablations, procedures to remove the lining of the uterus, can mimic menopause by stopping menstrual periods.

Medical menopause may occur after medical treatments such as chemotherapy, radiation therapy, and during the course of various drug regimens. [8]

Weight Management

Ayurveda offers a program which combines general principles of hygienic living with specific individualized constitutional guidelines. Overweight conditions are effectively addressed by understanding these conditions for what they truly are--an accumulated toxin with both physical and mental roots which are unique for each person. The molecular structure of human fat which deposits in different individuals may be identical, but the unhealthy habits, attitudes, misconceptions, and stored emotional experiences which promulgate obesity are unique and singular. These weight loss measures are presented succinctly in *The Ayurvedic Approach To Diet and Weight Loss: The Sattva Program*, S. Gerson, 2002, Lotus Press. [9]

Panchakarma Chikitsa

Panchakarma ("five therapeutic actions") chikitsa ("treatment") are physical therapies that thoroughly cleanse and purify the physical and mental impurities from the body and mind. Normally the body has the innate ability to efficiently process and remove these waste materials, including the

vitiated doshas. However due to ones repeated dietary indiscretions, hormonal changes, poor exercise patterns, lifestyle, and genetic predisposition, the digestive enzymes, metabolic co-factors, hormones, and agnis which regulate the body's internal homeostasis become disorganized. This can lead to the accumulation and spread of toxins throughout the physiology-resulting in disease.

The general purpose of the Panchakarma Therapies is to loosen, liquefy, and remove the vitiated substances and doshas from their abnormal sites in peripheral tissues via their natural pathways of elimination. [10]

CONCLUSION

Health problems at menopause represent imbalances in the body that were already in growing in the body and diet plays a key role in balancing hormones during premenopause and in menopause. Eat a varied diet high in fruit, vegetables, whole grains and dried beans. It is a rich source of phyto estrogen. Variety and moderation are important because just as too much estrogen is unhealthy after menopause, too much phyto estrogen may also be dangerous. Ayurveda describes that these stubborn symptoms are due to the built up wastes and toxins, referred to as "ama" in the body tissue. In this case traditional Ayurvedic detoxification programme "panchakarma" may be needed to clear the body's channels and gain relief. Lifestyle management also plays a significant role in the time of menopause. Menopause symptoms are Nature's wake up call to paying more sincere attention to one's health.

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How to cite this article: Panda GK, Arya BC, Sharma MK et al. Menopausal syndrome and its management with ayurveda. Int J Health Sci Res. 2018; 8(5):337-341.
