Menopause Herbal Program

By Geoff D'Arcy, Lic.Ac., D.O.M.

Menopause Facts:

- 75% of all women will experience sudden, brief, periodic increases in their body temperature. Usually hot flashes start before a woman’s last period.
- For 80% of women, hot flashes last for two years or less; 20–30% of women describe them as severe.
- Half of all women who have hot flashes will begin feeling them while they are still menstruating normally, starting as early as age 40.
- Thinner women tend to experience more severe and frequent hot flashes than do women with more adipose tissue, probably due to the ability of adipose tissue to transform androstenedione to estrone and estradiol.
- Between the ages of 42 and 55, five to ten years prior to menopause, the ovaries become less sensitive to hormonal signals which stimulate estrogen and progesterone. And although there are still about 10,000 immature follicles left in the ovaries, they fail to mature. Because the ovaries do not produce consistent amounts of hormones, the menstrual cycle becomes irregular.

Eventually, the ovaries stop producing enough of the estrogen hormone, periods cease, and menopause arrives, with symptoms such as:

- Hot flashes
- Vaginal dryness and atrophy
- Water retention
- Fat and weight gain, esp. hips, thighs, and abdomen
- Sleep disturbances (insomnia, less REM-time sleep)
- Decreased libido
- Mood swings, depression, irritability
- Short-term memory lapses
- Lack of concentration
- Dry, thin, wrinkly skin
- Thinning of scalp hair
- Some increase of facial hair
- Bone mineral loss (osteoporosis)
- Diffuse body aches and pains

What about estrogen? Though currently in vogue, the risks and potential side-effects of Hormone Replacement Therapy (HRT) can include:

- Vaginal bleeding (starting or returning)
- Breast tenderness (which often goes away after three months)
- Nausea (which may resolve spontaneously)
- Fluid retention, changes in the shape of the eye (sometimes leading to contact lens intolerance)
- Headache
- Dizziness
- Depression
- an increased risk for reduced tolerance to sugar and other carbohydrates, and
- an increased risk for gallbladder disease
- In some women, HRT causes water retention, and thus temporary weight increase.
- Some scientists have pointed out that there is an increased risk of breast or uterine cancer with HRT, especially when used without progesterone. Estrogen is also consistently associated with 30% increase in the risk of breast cancer in women who are currently using it and have taken it for 5-10 years or longer.

An alternative is to use natural supplementation:

Supplementation Program:

1. **Meno-Peace Formula**: 2 capsules, 3 times daily.
2. **Vitamin E**: 1 capsule, twice daily.
3. **Calcium / Magnesium 1001**: with Vitamin D & Boron 1 capsule, 3 times daily.

Modifications:

- Add **Cool Flare Formula**: 2 capsules, 3 times daily, for hot flashes.
- Add **Support Bone Formula**: 2 capsules, 3 times daily, for increased osteoporosis risk.
- Add **Heart Ease Formula**: 2 capsules, 3 times daily, for increased cardiovascular Risk.
- Add **Green Power Formula**: 4-8 capsules daily, or 2 scoops powder for additional nutritional support.
- Add **Chol Clr Formula**: 2 capsules, 3 times daily, for high cholesterol.
- Add **Ginkgo**: 1 capsule, three times daily, for foggy, unclear thinking.

Description of Supplements:

**Meno-Peace Formula**

For many women, there is no peace during menopause. Often the change of life comes with having to weigh the risks of “medicalized” menopause. Many plant foods present a safe way to help normalize hormonal activity. *Er Xian Tang*, a modern formula from Shanghai, strengthens the yang and uses herbs to nourish the yin, along with other herbs to drain the fire of hot flashes. *Vitex*, an important herb for regulating hormonal activity, was well known in ancient Europe. A recent German study indicates that *vitex* has a progesterogenic effect and is as important as those that support estrogen.

Meno-Peace supports both yin and yang dimensions. The whole fruit contains several different components thought to be medicinally active.¹ *Vitex*, as it is commonly known, does not contain hormones. Its benefits come from its action on the pituitary gland and the production of estrogen and progesterone. *Vitex* increases the hormone levels to help balance and regulate the menstrual cycle.²

*Dong Quai Root*, or *Chinese Angelica*, is used in TCM for menopause. A Japanese study showed that *Dong Quai* increased both estrogen and progesterone levels in women with insufficient ovarian function.³ *Black Cohosh Root*, *Cimicifuga Racemosa*, was shown to be 80% effective in relieving the symptoms of menopause when taken for four weeks or longer, it increases vaginal lubrication as effectively as estrogen replacement therapy.⁴ *Black Cohosh* was used by Native Americans and colonists to treat gynecological and menopausal complaints, was confirmed in a 1995 German study along with *St. John’s Wort* to effectively treat hot flashes.
Black Cohosh Root also relieves headaches and muscle pain and stops irregular bleeding. Traditional Chinese and Japanese herbal medicines classify this herb as cold, as it relieves the symptoms of heat during menopause. Black Cohosh is considered a leading phytoestrogen for menopausal problems by some authors. Clinical studies from Germany demonstrate that Black Cohosh decreases luteinizing hormone (LH), which can be responsible for hot flashes and other menopausal and perimenopausal problems. A review of eight human studies on the effectiveness of Black Cohosh for the symptoms of menopause concludes it is a safe and effective alternative to estrogen. Black Cohosh has demonstrated its ability to provide balance and prevent nervousness, hot flashes, depressed moods and vaginal dryness associated with menopause. A recent study suggests that Black Cohosh actually protects animals from osteoporosis.

**Cool Flare Formula:**

**Key Ingredients:** *Rehmannia Six Formula* was studied recently in China and Japan for its use in treating menopausal problems, there is some evidence from animal studies that *Rehmannia Six* and *Rehmannia Eight*, may have a positive, preventive effect for osteoporosis as well as the hot flashes of menopause. The preventive effects produced by traditional Chinese medicines, *Hachimi-jio-gan,* *Rehmannia Eight,* which has two more ingredients than *Rokumi jio gan,* *Rehmannia Six,* on the progress of bone loss induced by ovariectomy in rats were investigated by studying the bone mineral density of the tibia in ovariectomized rats. The results of this study strongly suggest that the gynecological Chinese herbal medicines are as effective as 17 beta-estradiol in preventing the development of bone loss induced by ovariectomy in rats.

The side effects and dangers associated with Hormone Replacement Therapy (HRT) have led millions of peri-menopausal and menopausal women to search for herbal alternatives. Patients often question their medical doctors about these issues.

Two thousand years ago, physicians of Traditional Chinese Medicine began looking for botanical answers and documenting their findings. *Cool Flare* is an herbal formula with a TCM base and is formulated to treat the hot flashes of peri-menopause and menopausal crises. This formula is often used in conjunction with another formula, *Meno-Peace* for treatment of severe menopausal crises.

The "hot flash" (HF), or vasomotor instability, is experienced by 75% of peri-menopausal and menopausal women in the United States. The experience for some women is minor, yet, for others, the HF is an extremely unpleasant sensation that is disruptive to their sleep patterns and daily living. The HF is believed to be triggered by a number of external and internal stimuli including anxiety, stress, high temperatures, caffeine, and alcohol. Thinner women tend to experience more severe and frequent HFs than do women with more adipose tissue, probably due to the ability of adipose tissue to transform androstenedione to estrone and estradiol. Smoking history also tends to be associated with the experience of HFs at an earlier age. The etiology of HFs in the pattern of decreasing estrogen levels is related to the downward resetting of the hypothalamic thermo-regulating mechanism, probably by the action of norepinephrine, which is usually modulated by estrogen. The body attempts to dissipate unwanted body heat via vaso-dilation thereby causing the sensation of the HF.

The risks and potential side effects of Hormone Replacement Therapy (HRT) can include: vaginal bleeding (starting or returning), breast tenderness (which often goes away after three months), nausea (which goes away after your body adjusts), fluid retention (bloating), changes in the shape of the eye (sometimes leading to contact lens intolerance), headache, dizziness, depression, an increased risk for reduced tolerance to sugar and other carbohydrates, and an increased risk for gallbladder disease. Studies have not confirmed that estrogen causes weight gain, yet, in some women, HRT causes water retention, resulting in bloating and thus
temporary weight increase from the water in the tissues. Some scientists have pointed out that there is an increased risk of breast or uterine cancer with HRT, especially when used without progesterone.

These side effects and risks associated with Hormone Replacement Therapy (HRT) have led millions of premenopausal and menopausal women to seek out herbal alternatives. Robert Rister, in his book, *Japanese Herbal Medicine*, reports that in Japan, the usefulness of herbal medicine is growing rapidly among conventionally trained medical doctors. In 1976 only 42 herbal formulas had been approved by the Japanese FDA, with only 19.2% of Japanese medical doctors utilizing herbal medicine.\(^2\)\(^5\) In 1996, 148 formulas had been approved by the Japanese FDA, and it is estimated today that almost 77% of Japanese medical doctors, who have every method of modern medicine available to them, (unlike Chinese MDs) use herbal formulas.\(^2\)\(^3\)

This increased use of herbal medicine has been driven by hundreds of scientific studies validating the effectiveness of herbal formulas. Sixty percent of these Japanese doctors consider herbal formulas to be the first choice for some diseases.\(^4\) Rister reports, “In cases where standard medications deliver predictable results without side effects, Japanese doctors prefer synthetic drugs to Kampo (herbal medicine). These doctors, however, note seven situations for which Kampo (herbal formulas) are especially suitable, and menopause is most definitely one of them.”

**Rehmannia Six Formula** (Chinese name: Liu Wei Di Huang; Japanese name: Rokumi-Jio-Gan). This is a classic women’s formula, dating back to the 12th century in China, which is a combination of six herbs commonly used in Traditional Chinese Medicine (TCM) and Japanese (Kampo). This formula is classified as enriching the yin and nourishing the Kidneys. The traditional concept of the kidneys (in TCM) is that they nourish marrow and the strength of bones. When the Kidney yin fails to nourish and contain the Liver energies, fire spreads upward, resulting in hot flashes, night sweats, heat in the palms and chest, spontaneous sweating, headache, sore hot dry throat. This condition can go on to create whole body dryness, vaginal dryness, etc.

The Rehmannia Six formula makes up one third of the Cool Flare formula and modern science is starting to verify some of its ancient anecdotal results. Studied recently in China and Japan for its use in treating menopausal problems,\(^2\)\(^3\) there is some evidence from animal studies that this formula, plus a derivative, may have a positive, preventive effect for osteoporosis as well as the hot flashes of menopause.\(^1\)\(^4\)

In another study, after a relatively long-term injection of hydrocortisone into rats, the strength of bone (anti-stress capacity) reduced evidently, while the rigidity (anti-deformity capacity) increased markedly (i.e., bone fragility elevated). At the same time, the content of serum 25(OH) D3 decreased remarkably. After oral administration of Rehmannia Six, the anti-stress capability of bone increased evidently and its anti-deformity capability returned to normal; however, there was no elevation of serum 25(OH) D3 content. The experiments suggests that Rehmannia Six is beneficial to preventing and curing osteoporosis, but no correlation between its mechanism and the metabolism of 25(OH) D3 was demonstrated.\(^4\)

In another study, Rehmannia Six, demonstrated not only increased plasma estradiol levels, but also increases the leucocytic ER levels. The number of estrogen receptors (ER) in human peripheral leucocytes in 22 women with climacteric syndrome, were measured by radioligand method. The results were compared with those of 12 normal child-bearing aged women and showed that the contents of leucocytic ER in climacteric syndrome patients were significantly lower than those of normal child-bearing aged women. The authors used a Chinese prescription, Rehmannia Six, to treat the patients for 2 months. The numbers of leucocytic ER were significantly increased after treatment. The data indicate that decrease of ER levels in cells may involve in the pathogenesis of climacteric syndrome, Rehmannia Six not only increases plasma estradiol levels, but also increases the
leucocytic ER levels. This may be the basis of the therapeutic effect on the disease.⁵

**Dong Quai Root**, or **Chinese Angelica**. This well-known herb increases circulation, protects the heart, and increases the effectiveness of other herbs in the formula. It has been used for thousands of years by Traditional Chinese Medicine and has long been considered the women’s ginseng. It is rarely used singularly and most often used in formula prescriptions for menstrual and menopausal problems. It may be effective for PMS through its antispasmodic action especially on smooth muscle.⁵ Traditionally used in formulas for hot flashes with peri-menopause, it also has a record in the treatment of cardiovascular disease, including high blood pressure and circulation for men and women.⁴

One review of the literature indicates **Dong Quai** may have some efficacy for PMS in traditional Chinese formulas. For relief of menopausal symptoms, **Black Cohosh root** and **Dong Quai** have good safety profiles, but only **Black Cohosh** has demonstrated efficacy for this.¹

The Chinese people discovered **Dong Quai** and used it as a tonic and spice. Women especially have used **Dong Quai** to protect their health generation after generation. The pharmacological effect, toxicity and dosage formula of **Dong Quai**, is based on the modern research.²

**Black Cohosh Root**, *Cimicifuga racemosa*. Considered 80% effective in relieving the symptoms of menopause when taken for four weeks or longer, it increases vaginal lubrication as effectively as estrogen replacement therapy.⁸ ⁹ It also relieves headaches and muscle pain and stops irregular bleeding.⁴

Traditional Chinese and Japanese herbal medicines classify this herb as cold to relieve the symptoms of heat during menopause. **Black Cohosh** is considered a leading phytoestrogen for menopausal problems by some authors. Clinical studies out of Germany demonstrate **Black Cohosh** decreases LH, the luteinizing hormone secretions that can be responsible for hot flashes and other menopausal and perimenopausal problems.⁴ A review of eight human studies on the effectiveness of *Cimicifuga racemosa* (**Black Cohosh**) for the symptoms of menopause concludes it is a safe and effective alternative to estrogen.¹

Menopausal women taking *Cimicifuga* ethanol extract for 8 weeks had lower LH & unchanged FSH. Fractions tested showed both competitive binding at estrogen receptors and reduction of LH secretion.² In another study, sixty hysterectomy menopausal women randomized to *Cimicifuga* or 3 types of estrogen all had lower Kupperman-Index but no significant differences in serum FSH & LH.³

**Black Cohosh** may be debunked as a phytoestrogen at least in animal studies (as has **Dong Quai**) its actions may lie in two mechanisms: 1) Compounds bind to receptor sites in the reproductive tract, brain and other organs that otherwise would receive estrogen. Therefore reducing overall estrogen activity when estrogen levels are high. 2) These compounds block the formation of Luteinizing Hormone (LH), which stimulates a surge of estrogen production during the first fourteen days of the menstrual cycle. This stimulates estrogen production when levels are low, thus giving a dual stabilizing action of the body’s estrogen fluctuations and the problems they cause.⁵ **Black Cohosh** has demonstrated its ability to provide balance and prevent nervousness, hot flashes, depressed moods and vaginal dryness associated with menopause.⁶ A recent study suggests that **Black Cohosh** actually protects animals from osteoporosis.⁷ Human studies have not yet confirmed this action.

**Chaste Tree Berry**, a.k.a. *Vitex, Agnus-castus* The whole fruit contains several different components thought to be medicinally active.¹ *Vitex* as it’s commonly known, does not contain hormones. Its benefits come from its actions on the pituitary gland and its action upon the production of estrogen and progesterone. *Vitex* increases
the hormone levels to help balance and regulate the menstrual cycle.\(^2\)

The actions of the minor herbs have a huge lineage of anecdotal evidence yet more scientific investigation into their actions is needed.

**Cool Flare: Interactions with Conventional Medicines:**

Reports are suggestive of interaction between warfarin and *Dong Quai*.

**DOSAGE:** Adults: 2 capsules, three times daily, on an empty stomach with warm water. Take at least two hours after any medication. When results are achieved and held for two weeks drop to a maintenance dosage of 1 capsule three times daily, on an empty stomach with warm water.

**Support Bone Formula:**

**Key Ingredients:** *Alfalfa*, long-used for bone disorders, contains silica and other minerals and enzymes to help digestive assimilation. *Chlorella*, a micro-algae, contains more than double the chlorophyll of any land plant. Chlorophyll (photosynthesized sunshine, the life blood of plants) performs like the vitamin D of the plant world to regulate calcium. It is rich in phosphorus and vitamins A & C, all recognized important co-factors in calcium absorption. *Kelp*, a seaweed, is one the richest sources of calcium in the plant world, and limits prostaglandin PGE2 that upsets the feminine hormone system. *Black Cohosh* has been shown to increase bone density in recent animal studies. *Suma*, stimulates a safe source of estrogenic activity because of sitosterol, a compound that helps increase estrogenic activity, yet does not stimulate an excess. *Eucommia*’s effect of strengthening bones and muscles may be related to increased collagen synthesis through its compounds of geniposidic acid and acubin. Japanese studies are confirming it has a major ability, to prevent bone loss. The effect of eucommia on strengthening bones and muscles may be related to increased collagen synthesis through its compounds of geniposidic acid and acubin. Combined with *Asian ginseng*, they find it synergistically prevents protein metabolism, thereby slowing the aging process and reducing joint damage.\(^1\,\,^2\)

**Calcium / Magnesium:** Magnesium is a cofactor in over 300 enzymatic reactions in human physiology. It participates in neuromuscular activity, including excitation-contraction coupling, and energy production through carbohydrate metabolism. Magnesium enhances calcium uptake, is necessary for hormone production, and protects the heart. Magnesium may actually increase bone density. Calcium’s (calcium citrate or aspartate 1,000 to 1,500 mg. per day) physiologic role include coupling of excitation-contraction within muscle cells, generation of trans membrane action potentials in cardiac pacemaker and conducting fibers, and transmission of impulses by nerve fibers. It supports bones and is considered to have a cooling calming influence in the Body-Mind. Boron (0.5 to 3 mg. per day) helps calcium absorption. Women at high risk for breast cancer should use boron with caution. Vitamin D fixes the calcium in the body.

**DIETARY GUIDELINES:**

- Substitute red meats with fish and white meat
- use soy based alternatives, decrease the number of eggs per week, try egg beaters or tofu
- Use low fat dairy products
- Substitute vegetable oils for butter, lard and other saturated fats
- Eat lots of fresh, organic fruits and vegetables daily - at least 5 servings daily.
- Cut down on all refined sugar and flour products
- Use no or low salt, substitute Bragg’s Liquid Aminos
- Drink herbal teas, green tea, or vegetable juices instead of soft drinks and coffee
- Eat more cold water fish and take 1 tablespoon of flaxseed oil daily. Salmon, mackerel, herring, halibut are good sources of omega-3 fatty acids. Flaxseed oil is a good source of alpha linoleic acid, an omega-3 oil that the body can convert to eicosapentaenoic acid (EPA)
- Numerous studies show that a diet high in carotene rich and flavonoid rich fruits and vegetables reduces the risk of heart disease and strokes. Green leafy vegetables, yellow-orange colored fruits and vegetables, such as carrots, apricots, mangoes, yams and squash. Red and purple vegetables and fruits such as tomatoes, red cabbage, berries, and plums. Legumes, grains and seeds are rich sources of carotenoids. Good sources of flavonoids include: citrus fruits, berries, onions, parsley, legumes, green tea and red wine
- Increase the intake of fiber and complex carbohydrates by eating 6 or more servings per day of whole grain breads, cereals, and legumes

**Eat foods rich in calcium.** The chart below lists relative amounts of calcium per serving of various foods.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Calcium in Milligrams</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Hijiki* 1,400</td>
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<tr>
<td>Wakame* 1,300</td>
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<tr>
<td>Kelp* 1,099</td>
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<tr>
<td>Kombu* 800</td>
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<tr>
<td>Brick cheese 682</td>
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<tr>
<td>Dried wheat grass . or barley grass 514</td>
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<tr>
<td>Sardines 443</td>
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<tr>
<td>Agar-agar* 400</td>
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<tr>
<td>Nori* 260</td>
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<tr>
<td>Almonds 233</td>
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<tr>
<td>Amaranth grain 222</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hazelnuts 209</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parsley 203</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Turnip greens 191</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Brazil nuts 186</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*These sea vegetables are now available in most whole-food stores

**Calcium Leechers:**

- Soft drinks are loaded with phosphorus, which is an essential and widely available nutrient. The problem is that too much phosphorus itself causes calcium to be lost from the bones.
- **Excess salt.** Too much salt is another component of the average diet and a bone-killer as well.
- **Excess sugar.** Americans ingest approximately 139 pounds of refined sugar each year, about 41 teaspoons of sugar per day, or 19% of all of the calories we consume.
- A diet high in animal protein. When over 85,000 American women were followed for twelve years, those
who ate the most animal protein (meat, poultry, and dairy) had a significantly higher risk of osteoporotic fractures. Higher protein intake correlates with increased hip fracture in studies comparing different cultures. When dietary protein increases, so does the loss of calcium in urine, (though this extra calcium loss is not always statistically significant).  

- Many nutritionally oriented doctors recommend a move toward vegetarian diets for people wishing to avoid osteoporosis or those already diagnosed with it.
- **Smoking.** Women who smoke generally experience menopause up to a year and a half earlier than nonsmokers, and thus face a longer period of estrogen deficiency and accompanying bone loss. Smoking also hampers efficient processing of calcium.
- **Alcohol.** Consuming more than two alcoholic drinks daily can decrease calcium absorption. It also interferes with the vitamin D synthesis that helps the bones absorb calcium.
- **Lactose intolerance.** This problem is caused by the deficiency of the enzyme, lactase, which aids in the digestion of milk products. Less milk means less calcium. Sixty percent of women with osteoporosis (but only 15 percent of the general population) are lactose intolerant.
- **Medications.** Commonly prescribed steroids like cortisone and prednisone, thyroid for hypothyroidism, and phenobarbital or phenytoin (Dilantin) for seizures all interfere with the body's ability to absorb calcium from food or calcium supplements.
- **Medical conditions.** Women with anorexia, Celiac disease, (an intolerance of certain grain products), diabetes, chronic diarrhea, kidney, or liver disease are all more likely to develop osteoporosis.

(See a more detailed paper with references under Articles, http://www.darcynat.com/Article.asp?stresessionguid=58E04278-5301-4C56-A714-B17E614B49BE&fArticleID=20

**References**

**Meno-Peace Formula**

Cool Flare Formula


Calcium Leechers


Cool Flare additional footnotes


Rehmannia Six Formula (Chinese; Liu Wei Di Huang, Japanese; Rokumi-Jio-Gan)


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Black Cohosh

Chaste Tree Berry, (Vitex), Agnus-castus