

[IMAGE]

## **Deal With Menopause Naturally**

By Julie T. Chen, MD

On any given day at my clinic, I usually will see at least one woman who is going through menopause with the typical symptoms of fatigue, hotflashes, vaginal dryness, low sex drive, mood lability, and insomnia. Because these symptoms are common and women go through this sometimes unfortunately without guidance and support, let's take the time to go over the key concepts of what to expect and how we can naturally treat it if we needed to.

I want to start off by mentioning to you that even though menopause seems like a common occurrence, it is far from being a topic that is insignificant and you should have a discussion with your doctor if you are going through it and are having symptoms. What most women are not thinking about above and beyond the symptoms of menopause is that the changes in hormone in our body may start to affect our level of daily functioning, interpersonal relationships, our thyroid functioning, heart health, and muscle and bone health.

You may notice that you feel more irritable, have less energy, have more trouble falling asleep or maintaining sleep, feel weaker and less able to recover from sports activities, and discomfort with sex or lack of desire for sex. These are potentially common symptoms of menopause...but common doesn't mean you should have to deal with it and suffer without support.

The first thing you should do is see your doctor about it and make sure it isn't something else besides menopause. These can be non-specific symptoms of other issues such as thyroid disease or depression, just to give an example of other potential health concerns. When you see your doctor, you should ask for your hormone levels to be checked along with your thyroid levels and your adrenal functioning levels. If you are deemed to be going through menopause, there are a few things you can do naturally to help your body ease into the changing conditions of your body.

One of my top suggestions for you to try is maintain exercise on most days and eat an anti-inflammatory diet that is mostly plant-based. Certain foods like soy and the lignans on flaxseed shells act as plant estrogen to help give your body some support as your own levels start to drop. However, you should not eat more than 1-2 servings per day since we shouldn't be artificially elevating our hormone levels, even with plants,

in older women when that is not the natural intended state of our body later in life. There is some concern that even with excess phytoestrogens you may be placing your body at an unnecessarily elevated risk for breast cancer...so keep all foods in moderation.

Another thing to keep in mind is that processed foods with chemicals may contain xenoestrogens, which are chemical compounds that our body reads like a hormone. This is disruptive to our body and should be avoided during a time in our life when our own hormonal state is trying to settle into a new equilibrium. So try to eat organic and avoid processed foods and sugars when you are going through menopause. This should help mitigate some of the symptom severity as well.

Finally, there are supplement options like black cohosh, chasteberry, fish oil, wild yam, and isoflavones, just to name a few options, to help with hormone issues. I've only mentioned the more benign versions but keep in mind that even with the mild therapy options, you should still have your physician monitor your symptoms, kidney function, and your liver function to make sure you are not having issues with these supplements. If you have an integrative physician or naturopath you see regularly, you should ask them about your adrenal functioning and having them help you to optimize it to help your symptoms during this peri-menopausal time in your life.

So, while menopause is a natural and common occurrence we encounter frequently in our circle of friends and family, you should not view the symptoms of menopause as insignificant and unworthy of medical attention. Its impacts to your life and happiness can be significant, so let's start with just having that conversation with your physician...and hopefully we can finish the menopausal process with a sense of wellness and happiness that only a well-balanced healthy body can bring us.

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**Dr. Julie T. Chen** is board-certified in internal medicine and fellowship-trained and board-certified in integrative medicine. She has her own medical practice in San Jose, Calif. She is the medical director of corporation wellness at several Silicon Valley-based corporations, is on several medical expert panels of Web sites and nonprofit organizations, is a recurring monthly columnist for several national magazines, and has been featured in radio, newspaper, and magazine interviews. She incorporates various healing modalities into her practice including, but is not limited to, medical acupuncture, Chinese scalp acupuncture, clinical hypnotherapy, strain-counterstrain osteopathic manipulations, and biofeedback. To learn more, visit [www.makinghealthyez.com](http://www.makinghealthyez.com).

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