

Supplements and alternative treatments for menopause

There are a wide range of supplements available which purport to help with menopausal symptoms although not all have adequate research and evidence to back up these claims. It is very much a personal choice along with some trial and error to establish what can help you.

It's vital that everyone checks with their pharmacist or GP before taking any supplements however 'natural' they may seem as many are contraindicated when taking other medication.

Isoflavones

These are types of phytoestrogens which are plant-derived substances which mimic oestrogen. Soy beans and soya products are the richest sources and isoflavones can be found in foods like soya milk, chickpeas and tofu. There is some evidence that taking them as dietary supplements can help with hot flushes.

Red Clover

This has four oestrogenic isoflavones and often comes in tablet form under the trade name Promensil. For women who cannot take HRT this is an alternative remedy to improve night sweats and hot flushes. Women with a history of breast cancer should speak to their doctor before taking this or any other isoflavone supplement.

Co-enzyme Q10

This is to help regulate cell metabolism. This should not be taken by those on blood thinning medication, have low blood pressure or are diabetic without medical advice.

Evening Primrose Oil

This is an omega 6 essential fatty acid. This should not be taken by anyone on blood thinning medication (including aspirin).

Black Cohosh

This is for night sweats and hot flushes. It has been widely researched but is not recommended for anyone with liver damage or has been advised against using HRT or those who have a family history of breast cancer. It can interact with other medications, so seek advice from GP first.

St John's Wort (or Hypericum)

This can help with low mood and mild to moderate depression. This may affect other medications or those taking Tamoxifen, so medical advice must be sought before taking this.

Ginkgo (or Maidenhair tree)

This is said to improve memory, concentration and mood. This should be avoided by those on blood thinning medication.

Ginseng

This may help to boost mood, wellbeing and libido. This should be avoided by those on blood thinning medication or who have diabetes.

Sage

This is used to reduce sweating as it contains oestrogenic substances which help to relieve hot flushes and night sweats, and offers an alternative for those who have tried Red Clover without success. However, it should not be taken by women who are trying to conceive during perimenopause as it instigates and strengthens periods.

Milk Thistle and Blessed Thistle

These are herbs which support the cells in the liver to expel waste more effectively.

Tribulus

This can help to increase levels of testosterone in women and men and may help to boost energy, strength and vitality.

Red Raspberry Leaf

This can be picked in gardens or bought at health food stores and used to make herbal tea. It can relieve cramping and painful periods during perimenopause.



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Marigold

This herb is traditionally used to improve circulation to the pelvic organs and can help to improve uterine tone, relieve cramps and normalise menstrual bleeding.

Dong Quai

This contains phytoestrogens and is traditionally used to treat heavy bleeding and premenstrual syndrome.

Clonidine

This is a prescription drug which is a non-hormonal treatment for hot flushes which is sometimes used for those at risk of breast cancer. Research shows it only has a small effect on menopausal symptoms.

Anti-depressants

Selective serotonin reuptake inhibitors (SSRIS) and Serotonin-norepinephrine reuptake inhibitors (SNRIS) are both used as anti-depressants for anxiety but have also been found to relieve hot flushes too.

Gabapentin

This is a prescription medicine often used to treat seizures and pain, it has been found to relieve hot flushes.

Cognitive Behavioural Therapy (CBT)

This has been found to be helpful for anxiety, stress, hot flushes, low mood, night sweats and fatigue. It's a non-medical approach designed to give practical ways of managing symptoms. Professor Hunter, a clinical psychologist with King's College London has pioneered a CBT approach specifically for menopausal symptoms, with a factsheet and self-help manual.

Acupuncture

Symptoms of the menopause can be treated with acupuncture. Treatment involves the insertion of very fine needles into specific points of the body to affect the flow of the body's 'qi', or vital energy. There have been very few studies into the effectiveness of acupuncture, but some find it helpful for treating hot flushes, anxiety and depression linked to menopause.



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Magnets

Some people find using a menopause magnet, (which is placed inside their knickers), can reduce symptoms of menopause such as hot flushes. This is said to work by reducing excessive sympathetic nervous system activity and increasing parasympathetic nervous system activity. There is no significant published research to prove or disprove the effects. Anyone with a pacemaker, insulin pump or other internal device should seek advice before using a magnet.



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