

**Menopause**  
**By**  
**Marianne Marchese, ND**

Menopause is a normal part of the aging process that affects women in their 40's and 50's. Thanks to medical advances, the life expectancy for women has gradually risen and now women are expected to live years beyond menopause. In the United States there are nearly 30 million postmenopausal women and that number is going to rise.

The definition of menopause is the cessation of the menstrual cycle. It is not a disease condition, although it is often thought of and treated as a disease. A woman becomes postmenopausal after going an entire year without a menstrual cycle. However, a woman may experience signs and symptoms of menopause years before the menstrual cycle actually stops. This period of time is known as perimenopause.

The Naturopathic medical approach to the treatment of menopause is to decrease common symptoms such as hot flashes, vaginal dryness, mood changes, dry skin and hair, decreased concentration and memory, low libido, insomnia and joint pain. Naturopathic medicine also addresses other components of menopause such as the prevention of osteoporosis, heart disease, and other conditions associated with lower estrogen levels. These goals are accomplished with natural treatments that don't increase the risk of other life threatening conditions such as stroke and breast cancer.

A comprehensive individualized treatment program starts with a thorough health history. It is important to identify risk factors for osteoporosis, stroke, heart disease, and breast cancer. Next comes identifying symptoms related to menopause and determine if the symptoms are not related to an overlooked health condition. Conventional medicine may offer hormone replacement therapy and other drugs to address symptoms and prevent disease. A naturopathic treatment plan will utilize natural treatment options that address the whole person. An individualized approach must be embraced by both the patient and doctor.

Categories of naturopathic treatment intervention include:

1. Diet and nutrition
2. Lifestyle
3. Exercise
4. Stress management
5. Botanical medicine
6. Homeopathy
7. Nutritional supplements
8. Bio-identical natural hormone therapy

The naturopathic treatment interventions address the whole person treating not only symptoms of menopause but also prevent diseases associated with menopause. Naturopathic treatments are safe and effective in relieving hot flashes, vaginal dryness, mood changes, dry skin and hair, decreased concentration and memory, low libido, insomnia and joint pain. Due to the complex nature of bio-identical hormone replacement therapy, herb-herb interactions and drug-herb interactions, it is recommended that menopausal women seek the expertise of a naturopathic doctor and not treat symptoms themselves with over-the-counter supplements.