

# MANAGING MENOPAUSE

## Natural Plant Estrogens

**Menopause** is a transition in a woman's life that comes along with a plethora of physiological changes. This gives rise to physical symptoms like hot flashes, change in cognition/memory, insomnia, weight gain, loss of libido and emotional changes like feeling more irritable, down or anxious. This can be overwhelming to many women and the changes that occur can interfere with regular functioning. Stress management (exercise, walking), embracing this time of transition, and mindfulness strategies can be very helpful at this time (ex. yoga, meditation). It can be difficult to accept that one's body is changing, but cultures that embrace the time of menopause as something that is just part of the aging process actually were found to have less menopausal symptoms than North American women<sup>1</sup>. As naturopathic doctors we have many tools to help ease this transition such as botanicals, nutrition, acupuncture and homeopathy, which help support lifestyle changes. When people talk about menopause, hormones maybe what first comes to mind. There are a lot of "natural hormone" sources that are sold to aid in menopausal symptoms. Since there are many ways to support menopause, I'll focus on "natural plant estrogens", also known as phytoestrogens in helping to relieve menopausal symptoms.

**Phytoestrogens** are compounds called isoflavones and lignans - to name a few. These plant estrogens bind estrogen receptors in the body a lot weaker than estrogen that occurs in the human body, meaning that they are gentler. Since many menopausal symptoms are caused by a reduction in estrogen, boosting this can help women reduce their symptoms. A study looking at isoflavone supplementation in women between the ages of 45-60 years of age had a reduction in hot flashes and improved quality of life<sup>2</sup>. There has however been some concern about isoflavone supplements and increased breast cancer risk. Studies show that soy isoflavone intake both pre and post-menopausally did not show an association between intake and breast cancer risk<sup>3</sup>. One caution would be women either currently with or a history of breast cancer, should consume isoflavones in the food form as oppose to high dose supplementation. Personally, I believe that consuming these plant compounds through food is a good way to start as well. Dietary soy consumption was shown to show a

statistically significant improvement in hot flashes and urogenital symptoms (vaginal dryness), which was comparable to hormone replacement therapy<sup>4</sup>. Lignans can be found in ground flaxseed, and isoflavones can be found in soy products (tofu, tempeh, edemame, and miso). Start out by adding 1-2tbsp of ground flax seed to smoothies, oatmeal, cereal or salads! If soy is not a food sensitivity of yours, try introducing a few servings of soy products per week. Try to consume soy in its fermented form (tempeh, miso) as it will be easier to digest. Soymilks can be overly processed and may not be as beneficial.

There are many other ways that a naturopathic doctor can help you navigate menopause. Book an appointment at Healing Foundations Naturopathic Clinic if you'd like to learn more!

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Resources:

1. <http://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC2838208/>
2. <http://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pubmed/12851275>
3. <http://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC3930722/>
4. <http://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pubmed/20833488>
5. Wong (2015). Menopause. NPH305. Canadian College of Naturopathic Medicine

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