



## ALTERNATIVES FOR HORMONE REPLACEMENT THERAPY

According to the Women's Health Initiative, the following are alternatives for treating heart disease, osteoporosis, and the symptoms of menopause.

With increasing age, a woman's risk for heart disease begins to rise. Risk factors for heart disease include smoking, high blood pressure, high cholesterol, physical inactivity, overweight/obesity, and diabetes. It's important to follow a heart-healthy lifestyle – this means not smoking, eating a variety of foods low in saturated fat and cholesterol and moderate in total fat, limiting salt and alcohol intake, maintaining a healthy weight, and being physically active. Sometimes drugs are needed to control high blood pressure, high blood cholesterol, or diabetes. For those who already have heart disease, the same lifestyle measures can help keep the condition from worsening. Drugs may be needed to treat heart disease.

The risk of osteoporosis increases as women get older. To help prevent osteoporosis, one key step is to follow an eating plan that is rich in calcium and vitamin D. Moderate exposure to sunlight helps the body make vitamin D. Another key step is to engage in regular weight-bearing exercises. It is also important not to smoke and to limit alcohol. Smoking causes the body to make less estrogen, which protects bones. Too many alcoholic beverages can increase the risk for falls. Osteoporosis is treated by stopping bone loss through lifestyle changes and medication such as Fosamax, Actonel, and Evista.

Alternatives to hormone therapy exist for treating menopausal symptoms. Some botanical products contain or act like estrogens, such as soy and some herbs. Some antidepressants (SSRIs such as Prozac and Zoloft) also are used for the relief of hot flashes and mood swings. Although they have not been approved for this use, clinical trials have shown them to be moderately effective. Vitamin E can alleviate hot flashes. Lifestyle changes including reduction of stress, avoidance of spicy foods, alcohol and caffeine, enough sleep, and physical activity may also relieve mild symptoms.

Regular exercise and use of a fan may also offer relief from hot flashes. Over the counter vaginal lubricant, such as Astroglide, may help with vaginal dryness. Prescription estrogen replacement creams may help relieve vaginal dryness and painful intercourse. Sleep disturbances can be helped by avoiding alcohol, caffeine, large meals and working right before bed-times. Physical activity may also aid sleep, as well as avoiding napping during the day.

There are many herbal products for sale that claim to help menopausal symptoms. These products are not regulated through the same government system as drugs, so there is little research to back up their claims. In addition, most have to be taken routinely, are not covered by insurance, and can become costly over time. We have attached a table of those herbs frequently marketed to relieve symptoms of menopause. Click on the following link to view the herbal products table

Before taking an herbal products, discuss it with your physician. Some of the herbal products can have harmful interactions with other drugs. Make sure that you obtain the most pure form of each herbal medication because they are often mixed with inactive ingredients that may reduce the therapeutic effectiveness of the pure form.

### Also see:

Frequently asked questions about menopause - [www.4woman.gov](http://www.4woman.gov)

What you should know about herbal and dietary supplement use and anesthesia - [www.asahq.org/patientEducation/herPatient.pdf](http://www.asahq.org/patientEducation/herPatient.pdf)

National Center for Complementary and Alternative Medicine, Office of Dietary Supplements - <http://ods.od.nih.gov>

Fact sheets on complimentary and alternative medicine from Harvard Medical School - [www.intelihealth.com/IH/ihtIH/WSIHW000/8513/31402.html](http://www.intelihealth.com/IH/ihtIH/WSIHW000/8513/31402.html)

## HERBAL PRODUCTS FOR TREATING SYMPTOMS OF MENOPAUSE

This information is intended to provide reliable information only. It is not intended to encourage or discourage use.

Explore marketing claims – they do not necessarily have scientific basis, but are attempts to sell a product.

Please discuss potential use of these herbal products with your physician.

NAME	USES	SIDE EFFECTS	INTERACTIONS
Soy and isoflavones	May be helpful for hot flashes and night sweats, acting like selective estrogen receptor modulators, but seem more effective on cholesterol and bones.	High levels have been linked to increased risk of breast cancer.	This has not been rigorously studied.
Black cohosh	May be useful in the short-term treatment of hot flashes and night sweats.	Seems safe but studies have been small, brief and conflicting. Don't use if pregnant or have breast cancer.	This has not been rigorously studied.
Evening Primrose	Taken for breast pain, bladder symptoms and menopausal symptoms, but little or no evidence it works. The one high quality study of effects on hot flashes found it was no better than placebo.	People at risk of seizures should avoid using. Lowers blood pressure in animals. Headache, stomach pain, nausea and loose stool may occur.	May cause seizures when taken with drugs such as Thorazine, Mellaril, Stelazine, Prolixin, or anesthesia. May add to blood pressure-lowering effects of other drugs.
Dong quai	Taken for hot flashes, although found no better than placebo	Contains compounds that can thin the blood, causing excessive bleeding. Can make the skin more sensitive to sun and increase risk of skin cancer.	Not studied.
St. John's Wart	May be helpful for short-term treatment of mild to moderate depression. Widely prescribed in Europe for depression where studies show it was more effective than placebo with fewer side effects than standard antidepressants. (NIH study found it no more effective than placebo.) Varies greatly in chemical composition and quality.	Can cause skin sensitivity to the sun, dry mouth, dizziness, gastrointestinal symptoms, fatigue.	Interferes with prescription antidepressants. Interacts with drugs used to treat HIV, cancer, and drugs to prevent the body from rejecting transplanted organs. Also interacts with Digoxin, Theophyllin, oral contraceptives, blood thinning medication, blood pressure medications, and alcohol. May prolong the effects of anesthesia.
Ginseng	Taken for hot flashes, not supported by study. It did improve women's sense of well being. Taken to improve sexual function. Some products contain large amounts of caffeine or were tainted with pesticides or lead	May increase bleeding, especially if already taking anticoagulating medication. May increase heart rate or blood pressure. May cause bleeding in women after menopause or breast tenderness. May cause diarrhea, nausea, vomiting, throat irritation or loss of appetite, difficulty sleeping, nervousness, headache, fever, dizziness, blurred vision and drowsiness.	Interacts with blood thinners and antiplatelet drugs. May interfere with the way the liver breaks down certain drugs. May lower blood sugar levels, requiring dose adjustments of oral drugs for diabetics. May increase the effects of Digoxin
Chasteberry	Taken for symptoms of PMS. Used for female reproductive complaints since ancient Greece. Few studies in menopausal women.	Skin rash, increased acne, headaches, increased menstrual flow.	May counteract the effectiveness of birth control pills
Valerian Root	Traditionally used as sleep aid, but no support for its use.	Headache, hangover, restlessness and cardiac disturbances. Heart problems and delirium have been linked to suddenly stopping it.	May increase the effects of certain antiseizure medications or prolong the effects of certain anesthetic agents
Wild & Mexican Yam	Taken for menstrual cramps, hot flashes and headaches associated with menopause. These studies have been small, with flaws in their design.	Stomach discomfort or rash.	May decrease the anti-inflammatory effects of non steroidal anti-inflammatory drugs. May lower blood sugar levels. May alter effects of birth control pills or HRT. May interact with cholesterol lowering drugs