

# Menopause

## Effective treatments for the change of life

The average Australian woman reaches menopause at 51 years of age- with a normal range from 40-55. Contrary to the popular concept, the female body does not become depleted of eggs at this time, but the remaining follicles become less and less responsive to hormonal stimulation.

Premature menopause is defined as cessation of ovarian function prior to 40 years of age. About 1% of women will experience menopause before 40. The approach of menopause is signalled by rising LH and FSH levels as the pituitary attempts to prompt a response by the ovaries.

The menopause signals the permanent end of most ovarian function and hence the menstrual cycle in a woman's life. Sex hormones don't only influence reproductive tissues but also have a multitude of other functions including effects on bone and mineral metabolism, cardiovascular function, memory and cognition, effects on the breast and genitourinary system as well as nutrient absorption.

There are a variety of symptoms which are believed to be due to reduced oestrogen levels and approximately 85% of women will experience some of these symptoms to a greater or lesser degree. These symptoms can be summarised as:

**Vasomotor symptoms-** (these tend to be early onset):-Hot flushes ( or "flashes" as they are called in USA literature), Night sweats, Formication ( a particularly unpleasant sensation likened to ants crawling under the skin – "formica" is latin for ant)

**Urogenital Symptoms-** (tend to occur about 3-4 years after menopause):-Dry Vagina, Change in vaginal pH, Atrophic vaginitis/altered vaginal discharge, Dyspareunia, Urinary frequency/dysuria/aggravation of stress incontinence

**Associated physical changes-**these are partly the result of the normal ageing process, but may be accelerated by declining oestrogen levels. These may include decreased fitness and flexibility, changes in distribution of body fat, changes in sleep patterns

**Loss of elasticity of skin and support tissues** (may result in):- Worsening of uterine prolapsed, Loss of glandular breast tissue (breast size and texture changes), Skin changes and wrinkling, Less nipple sensitivity and erectile potential, Joint and muscle pain, Skin dryness

**Emotional and psychological changes-** it is sometimes difficult to separate the hormonal from the personality-driven and situational as the cause for these symptoms, but women at the menopause may complain of such symptoms as:-Anxiety and/or depression, Insomnia, Lack of concentration and poor memory

**Effects on Bone-** (these effects may not become apparent until some years after menopause) :- Osteopenia/osteoporosis, Fracture and bone pain

There are other symptoms which have been ascribed to declining androgen levels, though the evidence is less clear-cut. These may include such symptoms as:

**Change of body shape** – increasing fat deposition around abdomen, less at buttocks and thighs

**Loss of libido:** - Many libido issues are caused by emotional issues and changes to lifestyle rather than being a hormonal issue

**Change in body hair distribution-** Pubic hair thins, hair on the head may thin or if woman carries the gene for male-pattern baldness may recede at temples and crown. Facial hair may increase.

The main cause of people seeking treatment for the menopause is for relief from vasomotor symptoms, the main one being hot flushes or night sweats.

Chinese medicine has been treating gynaecological issues and issues such as menopause for thousands of years very effectively. The key to Chinese medicine treatment is that we assess and treat each person individually, not with the one treatment to fix all plans. We aren't all the same, so why should we all be given the same treatment.

It must be noted that up until recent times the Chinese did not have a word for Menopause and that very few women experienced any of the symptoms of menopause. The only ones that did seem to were the rich and those of noble heritage, who ate very rich and luxurious diets. This does show that diet and lifestyle factors do affect menopausal symptoms. Many used to believe that the Chinese didn't get menopause because of their higher consumption of phytoestrogens such as soy. There is no substantiated link between soy products and menopausal symptoms; however adherence to a diet and lifestyle program has been shown to effectively reduce symptoms.

At Shen Therapies we can effectively help you manage menopause and its related symptoms using Chinese herbs, diet, nutritional supplements and lifestyle therapy.