



Arizona Natural Medicine ®, L.L.C.

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## **MENOPAUSE: THE ROAD TO HARMONY**

by

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Have you been feeling like your emotions are out of control lately? Do you feel irritable one minute, snapping impatiently at your family members or friends and then breaking down into tears the next minute? Does it always seem like you're the only one in the room that feels like the heater just turned up 20 degrees, breaking out into a sweat while everyone around you wonders what's wrong with you?

Well, guess what? You're not alone! You may be experiencing a natural, yet sometimes unpleasant, transition into menopause. In a culture so obsessed with the preservation of youth at whatever cost, it might seem like a daunting thought that you are starting a new phase of life that emphasizes different priorities. It is a brand new phase of life where having children and all the joys and responsibilities that come along with that part of your life are now in the distant past. Rather than viewing it as a negative process, many women view it as a gift and a chance for a new and renewed phase of life. You can take this opportunity to re-connect with your passions and re-learn how to focus on yourself and realize your dreams and ambitions that once seemed unattainable with all the hectic "busy-ness" of raising children. We believe this transition into menopause is an opportunity to create a new and revitalized you! We want to help you with this transition to make it as easy as possible.

### **What is Menopause and how is it different from Perimenopause?**

Menopause is a natural process that occurs in women as they age. During this process there is a decrease in egg production in the ovaries and levels of estrogen and progesterone start to decline. With this decrease in hormones a woman may start to experience menopausal symptoms. Perimenopause is the phase where a woman still has menses (periods), which may be regular or irregular, along with the typical symptoms of menopause. Perimenopause can start up to 10 years prior to menopause. A thorough medical history and hormone tests can evaluate if a woman is in Perimenopause. Eventually



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hormone levels drop to the point where menses cease completely. A woman is officially menopausal after 12 consecutive months without menses.

### **What is the difference between perimenopause and menopause?**

Menopause occurs after the absence of your menses (period) for 12 consecutive months. Perimenopause is everything that leads up to that point. Perimenopause can start up to a decade before menopause. One of the first symptoms of perimenopause is irregular menses. The menstrual cycle can be longer or shorter, sometimes coming every 2 weeks or skipping entire months. The flow may also change, becoming very light or more often very heavy. Many women find this irregularity in menses to be challenging as it is hard to know what to expect from one month to the next until eventually the menses stop completely.

Hormones changes can cause a variety of symptoms. Common symptoms of menopause include: hot flashes, night sweats, vaginal dryness, mood swings and insomnia. Other symptoms may occur such as low libido, heart palpitations, forgetfulness or “brain fog” and headaches.

### **How long will I have these symptoms?**

Perimenopause can last for as little as a few months to as long as 6 years or more. Every woman is unique in her experience. Some of the things that can impact the length of time you experience symptoms of perimenopause are: genetics (what was your mother’s experience like?), adrenal health (adrenal dysfunction can cause more symptoms), diet and other life-style choices (ingesting alcohol, caffeine, sugar and lack of exercise can be a trigger).

### **When should I see a doctor to treat my symptoms?**

It is never too early to see your doctor. In fact we encourage women to see their doctor even before any symptoms begin so they can be educated and prepare ahead for this transition by optimizing their health. If your symptoms are mild and don’t impact your quality of life then emphasizing a healthy life-style may be adequate during this important transition. However, for many



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women, symptoms are severe enough to seek treatment. If your symptoms are moderate or severe then it would be advisable to make an appointment with a physician.

### **How are the physicians at Arizona Natural Medicine different from my “regular” doctor in their approach to treating menopause?**

The physicians at Arizona Natural Medicine are Naturopathic medical doctors, trained in conventional medicine and natural integrative therapies that address the whole person and provides individualized care. We are experts in natural and preventative medicines. Naturopathic medicine is the perfect form of medicine to successfully treat women who are experiencing symptoms of menopause. One of it’s greatest strengths is that it emphasizes individualized care that focuses on healthy life-style choices and treatments that are appropriate according to your individual needs.

Another advantage is that we have a wide variety of treatments to utilize which greatly increases the chances of success. We may use Acupuncture to restore balance, increase energy and moderate stress; herbal medicines to reduce hot flashes and night sweats; targeted supplements to optimize nutrition and help with energy and sleep; homeopathy to balance your emotions or Bioidentical Hormone Replacement Therapy (HRT) to treat both physical and emotional symptoms. We don’t believe in a “one size fits all” approach to treating menopause like most conventional medical doctors. We listen, address your concerns and choose the therapies that are the best fit for you, supporting your physical, mental, emotional and psychosocial needs.

### **How can you help me feel better?**

If you are suffering with symptoms of menopause then it is important to schedule an appointment with a physician at Arizona Natural Medicine. We want to know about what you are experiencing. We will listen to you. We care. Our physicians will ask you about your symptoms and concerns in detail and work with you to create an individualized plan not only to alleviate your menopausal symptoms but also to optimize health in all areas of your life.



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To get a jump start on feeling better, creating healthy life-style habits is a vital step towards feeling better and having the best possible transition into menopause. These should include:

- Eat a healthy diet that focuses on whole, unprocessed, organic (when possible) foods with an emphasis on fruits, vegetables, healthy proteins (lean meats, eggs, soy) and whole grains.
  - Drink plenty of water: half your body weight in ounces is what is generally recommended. (e.g. A 140 lb. person should drink 70 oz per day).
  - Get regular exercise: this helps to relieve stress and optimize the health of your body and mind.
0. Make sure you're getting plenty of sleep. If not then it is especially important to schedule an appointment with your Naturopathic doctor. Good quality sleep is the foundation for a healthy body and mind because it is the time that your body is able to repair and rejuvenate.

### **Do I have to use hormones to get relief?**

This is determined by your doctor and you. The decision to use hormones or not depends on the severity of your symptoms, personal and family history of female cancers and personal preference. Often it is not necessary to use hormones because your Naturopathic doctor can use other treatments that alleviate your symptoms just as effectively as hormone treatment. Specific herbs can be used, some have estrogen-like activity in the body and help reduce symptoms without the associated risk for cancer. Chinese herb combinations are also used alone or in conjunction with Acupuncture to create balance in the body and decrease symptoms. The most appropriate treatment is determined by you and your physician after taking a very thorough medical history and learning about your goals and desires. Then a plan of action is created so that you can start to feel better and appreciate this new phase of life.

### **What are Bioidentical Hormones and what are the advantages to using them instead of conventional HRT?**



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The **Women's Health Initiative (WHI)** was a study initiated by the U.S. National Institutes of Health (NIH) in 1991. The objective of this women's health research initiative was to conduct medical research into some of the major health problems of older women. In particular, randomized, placebo controlled studies were designed that address cardiovascular disease, cancer and osteoporosis. The study was ended early, in 2002 because the group in the study that were receiving treatment with estrogen (Premarin) and synthetic progesterone (Provera) compared with placebo experienced increased risk of heart attack, stroke, blood clots and breast cancer. When the results of this study came out women and even their conventional doctors were afraid and unsure what to do and how to proceed with treatment of menopausal symptoms. Many women chose to stop using hormones and just suffer with their symptoms. Fortunately, during this difficult time many women decided to see a Naturopathic doctor and learned that not only are there non-hormone treatments that can help but also Bioidentical hormones that are much safer to use and carry less risk for cancer.

Bioidentical hormone replacement therapy (HRT) uses hormones that are identical to what your body naturally produces. These are derived from natural sources. It is easier for your body to utilize and metabolize these hormones, compared to synthetic or non-bioidentical ones (eg. Premarin and Provera). There are 3 main forms of estrogen: Estrone (E1), Estradiol (E2) and Estriol (E3). Estradiol (E2) is the strongest estrogen and carries the highest risk for cancer. Estriol (E3) is 1000 times weaker than Estradiol (E2) but is still effective in treating hot flashes, night sweats and vaginal dryness. Naturopathic physicians use a compounding pharmacy to create a hormone formulation that is individualize depending on the patient's needs. Typically a "Biest" is used which contains 80% Estriol (E3), (the safest form of estrogen) and only 20% Estradiol (E2). This greatly decreases the risk for cancer. Natural progesterone is used and studies have shown that it does it not carry an increased risk for cancer like synthetic progesterone (that was used in the study) but it is actually potentially protective against cancer. In conventional HRT only Estradiol, the strongest estrogen is used and if a woman has had a hysterectomy then progesterone isn't used at all. Conventional medical doctors using HRT only consider progesterone important to oppose estrogen and protect against uterine cancer. However, Naturopathic doctors recognize that progesterone



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has many health benefits and is important in treating insomnia and mood issues associated with menopause. Sometimes testosterone is also included in the formula if levels are found to be low or low libido is a concern. We do not have studies to support the idea that Bioidentical HRT is not completely without risk, however, studies do suggest that it is a much safer option than conventional, synthetic HRT.

It is important for your Naturopathic doctor to evaluate if you are a good candidate for treatment with Bioidentical Hormone Replacement Therapy.

### **Can I feel Better Now?**

Aren't you relieved to know that you no longer have to suffer with these terrible symptoms? There are simple and effective treatments available to help you feel better so you can enjoy your transition into menopause and take full advantage of all the amazing gifts it will bring. Don't wait another minute. Make an appointment with a doctor at Arizona Natural Medicine today and start your journey toward better health.