

HERBCLIP

FILE: · Menstrual disorders
· PMS
· Menopause
· Estrogenic herbs
· Hormone replacement therapy (HRT)

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RE: **Herbal Therapies for Menstrual Disorders
and Menopause**

Murray, Michael T. May 1996. Herbs for Her. *Let's Live*, pp. 35-37.

Herbal remedies provide relief from a variety of hormone-induced problems in women. Some remedies work by altering the release of pituitary hormones (follicle-stimulating hormone, luteinizing hormone, and prolactin) or by mimicking estrogen. Many herbal remedies work as tonics to tone the female glandular system and organs "rather than exert drug-like effects." Michael Murray, a naturopathic doctor, explains herbal therapy for female specific problems.

Amenorrhea, the absence of menses, can be caused by pregnancy, menopause, or a hormonal imbalance, among other things. Herbal therapy will depend upon the cause. Standardized extract of chaste tree berries (*Vitex agnus-castus*) is one of the most commonly used remedies. It most likely restores ovulation and menses by altering the release of hormones by the pituitary. Chaste berry extract may take several months to work; the usual dosage is 175 to 225 mg per day.

Dysmenorrhea, painful menstruation, may be remedied with a tonic such as dong quai (*Angelica sinensis*). Dong quai acts like an estrogen to improve uterine tone. It is also useful in treating or preventing menopausal symptoms, amenorrhea, metrorrhea (abnormal menstruation) and for promoting healthy pregnancy. Dosages are 1 to 2 g of powdered root or 4 ml of tincture (1:5).

Menorrhagia, excessive menstrual bleeding, may be due to a number of different underlying problems such as hypothyroidism, iron or vitamin A deficiencies, intrauterine devices, endometriosis [the aberrant occurrence of tissue which more or less perfectly resembles the endometrium, in various locations in the pelvic cavity], uterine fibroids, or salpingitis [inflammation of the uterine tube], among other problems. Herbs which may be used, in addition to correction of the primary cause, include dong quai and

shepherd's purse (*Capsella bursa-pastoris*), among others. Shepherd's purse has demonstrated effectiveness in clinical studies at the dosage of 1,000 mg of the dried herb three times a day.

Premenstrual syndrome (PMS) is a common condition amenable to treatment with herbs. PMS consists of a variety of symptoms including: diminished vitality, tension, depression, irritability, headache, breast pain, backache, abdominal bloating, and altered sex drive. Women who suffer from PMS (approximately one third of all women between the ages of 30 to 40 years old) share the common hormonal pattern of elevated plasma estrogen and decreased plasma progesterone levels shortly before the menses appears. PMS can be effectively managed with dong quai, chaste berry, licorice (*Glycyrrhiza glabra*), and black cohosh (*Cimicifuga racemosa*). The two latter plants contain phytoestrogens (which act like estrogen in the body), thought to have a tonic effect on the uterus. Licorice is believed to lower estrogen while raising the level of progesterone by "inhibiting the breakdown of progesterone by the liver."

Menopause, the cessation of menstruation after the childbearing years, typically occurs between 45 to 50 years of age. Symptoms of menopause include hot flashes, thinning of the vaginal lining, depression, anxiety, and forgetfulness. Typical medical treatment for menopause involves the use of hormone replacement therapy (HRT), usually a combination of estrogen and progesterone. As with most pharmacological approaches to hormonal problems, HRT is not without side effects (breast tenderness, overall swelling, nausea, headaches, weight gain, and depression). HRT is not recommended if a woman has a history of breast or ovarian cancer, endometriosis, uterine fibroids, liver or gall bladder disease, or unexplained uterine bleeding. Chaste berry and dong quai may relieve some of the symptoms of menopause, but the most successful results have been obtained with the standardized extract of black cohosh. The efficacy of black cohosh has been well documented and in several clinical studies it produced better results than HRT, without the side effects of HRT. —*Leela Devi, MSN, RN*

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