

Integrative Way: Hope for menopausal symptoms

June 27 2011, By Drs. Kay Judge and Maxine Barish-Wreden

As many women know, the Women's Health Initiative Study from 2002 showed that estrogen was not the dream treatment for menopausal symptoms that we once thought it was; estrogen treatment after menopause, especially when combined with a progesterone (needed for women with an intact uterus), increases a woman's risk of several diseases, including breast cancer, stroke, dementia, blood clots, and possibly lung cancer.

Estrogen alone, used for [women](#) who have had a hysterectomy, does seem to be a safer option, especially for women in their 50s, but many women still prefer to navigate the menopausal arena without prescription pills.

Thankfully, the results of some new research may provide women with a few more strategies for handling hot flashes and other [menopausal symptoms](#).

The first study, which was just published in the journal *Menopause*, examined the impact of mindfulness [meditation training](#) on menopausal symptoms. In this study, Dr. James Carmody at the University of Massachusetts Medical School randomized 110 women with significant hot flashes and night sweats into two groups.

One group attended the Mindfulness-Based Stress Reduction program, a renowned eight-week meditation training program developed by Dr. Jon Kabat-Zinn, also of the University of Massachusetts. These women

attended weekly 2.5-hour classes where they learned the basic skills of mindfulness meditation, as well as body awareness and gentle yoga.

The second group received no intervention. At the end of the eight weeks, the women receiving the meditation training reported a significant reduction in stress and anxiety, as well as a significant improvement in their sleep and overall quality of life. Interestingly though, their hot flash frequency did not change; what changed was their perception of stress and their perceived capacity to deal with whatever symptoms were arising in their body, which ultimately led to the improved quality of life.

The results were sustained for at least three months after the completion of the study.

Many women also try soy foods for menopausal symptoms, hoping that the isoflavones in soy might help to stem the steam of hot flashes.

The data has not always been positive for soy, but some researchers have speculated that it's because we haven't used a high enough dose of these isoflavones to show a benefit.

In an interesting study published in the journal *Menopause* in 2009, researchers looked at the benefit of the isoflavone genistein for menopausal symptoms in a group of about 240 women.

Half the women in this study were given 54 mg of genistein per day, and half were given a placebo. At the end of 12 months, there was a 56 percent reduction in the average number of [hot flashes](#) per day in the women taking the genestein. The genistein did not appear to have any negative effects on the lining of the uterus, suggesting that it is probably safe for women with [breast cancer](#).

Other studies also have suggested that it takes about 50 mg of isoflavones per day in order to reduce menopausal symptoms.

If you decide to give this a try, we recommend that you get your isoflavones from whole soy foods, and not from supplement pills. Any benefit should be apparent within six to eight weeks.

So there you have it - two more tips to help you navigate the menopausal years, and hopefully manage things without the need for prescription medications.

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