

Menopause & Chinese Medicine

– by Prof. Shulan Tang

The menopause is something all women go through. It signals a change in the body and a transition into another stage of life. This is a difficult time both mentally and physically and many women suffer during this time, but there are things that can be done to ease them through this time to make it a little easier.

What is the menopause?

In women around the age of 50, the menstrual cycle occurs less regularly and finally stops altogether. This is known as the menopause. Some may notice such signs and symptoms as sensations of heat in the body, hot flushes, abnormal perspiration, night sweats, restlessness, irritability, palpitations, insomnia, dizziness, tinnitus, lumbar soreness, weakness of the knees, constipation, oedema, loose stools and abnormal emotions close to or after menopause.

The age at which the menopause occurs varies from woman to woman. However, it is usually between the ages of 45 and 55. Symptoms may last on average for up to 2 years but as many as 20% of women may experience symptoms more than 5 years after the menopause.

Why does it occur?

In terms of Traditional Chinese Medicine, the menopause is due to declining or exhaustion of kidney Qi, Tian Kui in the Chong and Ren channels. This breaks the balance of Yin and Yang and brings on disturbance of Qi and blood of the heart, liver, spleen and stomach.

In the case of deficiency of Kidney Yin, hyperactive fire of the heart and liver disturbs the mind. In the case of deficiency of kidney Yang, impaired function of the spleen and stomach in transportation and transformation can cause downward movement or overflowing of water and damp.

Treatment of the menopause

Hormone replacement therapy is a common treatment for menopause, but some women experience side effects when they take HRT. These include nausea, breast tenderness and weight gain. If you suffer from side effects from HRT or do not like taking HRT there is a natural way to help - Traditional Chinese Medicine, including Acupuncture and Chinese Herbs.

TCM treats the menopause with an emphasis on strengthening the kidney's function to balance the Yin and Yang of the body. It can also prevent osteoporosis. The basic theory of TCM says that "the kidney determines the condition of the bone and marrow." The kidney stores the essence of life, which can be transformed into bone marrow.

The bone marrow stored in the bone cavity nourishes the bone. This is known as "the condition of the kidney determining the condition of the bone" and "the kidney promoting the formation of bone marrow". The bone cavity will be full of bone marrow if the essence of life stored in the kidney is sufficient, and the bone will be solid and strong if it is fully nourished by bone marrow.

Not enough bone marrow is formed if the essence of life of the kidney is insufficient. An insufficiency of bone marrow cannot nourish the bone fully, often resulting in osteoporosis.

Differentiation

1. Deficiency of Kidney Yin

Clinical manifestations include irregular menstruation or a shortened menstrual cycle with profuse flow, hot flushes, heat sensations in the body, night sweats, abnormal perspiration, irritability, insomnia and dream-disturbed sleep.

There will also be soreness and weakness of the limbs and knees, dryness of the mouth, constipation, scanty and yellow urine, a red tongue with scanty coating and a thready, rapid pulse.

Treatment Method:

To nourish Yin, suppress Yang, soothe the heart and calm the mind.

Basic prescription:

Gou Teng, Sheng Di Huang, Shu Di Huang, Suan Zao Ren, Fu Ling, Fu Shen.

Typical Patent Medicines:

Qi Ju Di Huang Wan, Geng Nian Ping, Menopause Teabags.

2. Deficiency of Kidney Yang

Clinical manifestations include, irregular menstruation or a prolonged menstrual cycle with scanty flow, a feeling of suffocation, restlessness, irritability, poor sleep, a sallow complexion, loose stools, epigastric and abdominal distension, puffy oedema in the face and four limbs, frequent urination, a pale tongue with thin, white coating, and a deep, thready and weak pulse.

Treatment Method:

to warm kidney Yang, invigorate the spleen and soothe the heart.

Basic Prescription:

Xian Ling Pi, Xian Mao, Bai Zhu, Mu Xiang, Dang Shen, Gou Teng, Fu Ling, Fu Shen.

Typical Patent Medicines: Jin Kui Shen Qi Wan, Xiang Shao Yang Wei Wan.

Can the menopause be avoided?

The menopause is a natural event that every woman will experience. TCM can help you to avoid experiencing some of the most uncomfortable symptoms. It is a good idea to consult a TCM practitioner at around the age of 40 to have some herbal treatment to regulate the function of the kidney before the menopause starts. Younger women should have regular treatment to make sure that their menstruation is regular and treat PMT as soon as possible. If you suffer from PMT, you may suffer from severe menopausal symptoms in the future.