

Alternative Approaches to Midlife

With natural healing therapies, one should create an overall health plan of diet, exercise, relaxation and lifestyle that fits them. Keep it simple and slow if possible – slow changes are the easiest to make. Try one or two new things at a time and observe what happens. Trust your inner voices that will lead you to the “right” changes. Life can be a journey of adventure and exploration if we approach it with an attitude of openness.

The suggestions in this handout are only suggestions of different options. They have been obtained from various publications, practitioners and patient anecdotal experience. You should discuss them with your health care provider and work with someone who is knowledgeable in alternative therapies.

THIS INFORMATION IS NOT MEANT TO PRESCRIBE OR TREAT ILLNESS

ARTHRITIS

Dandelion, Chickweed, Yucca, Devil’s Claw, Burdock seeds, roots or leaves. These can be taken in capsules or infusions, mixed in any combination.

- *Alfalfa* - six tablets, or capsules 3 times/day.
- *Chickweed* added to bath water can offer relief from joint pain and sore muscles. Use 20-30 drops of tincture in the bath. Chickweed can also be eaten or used as a tea.

HOT FLUSHES

Divide various remedies into several doses a day.

- *Vitamin E* - 100-800 IU/day. Do not take above 100 IU/day if have high blood pressure, diabetes or rheumatic heart condition without consulting your practitioner.
- *Vitamin B-complex*- 50-100 mg 3/day. Helps effect of Vit. E.
- *Vitamin B5*- 100-500 mg 2-3/day. Aids adrenal function.
- *Bioflanonoids* (500-1 gram) combined with Vitamin C 1000-5000 mg daily. Break into 4 doses/day.
- Chinese, Panax or American cultivated Genseng, Chasteberry (vitex), Dong Quai, Evening Primrose Oil, Royal Jelly products, Wild yam root, black Cohash, Blue Cohosh, unicorn root, fennel, licorice.
- Change-O-Life herbal preparation by Dr. Christopher.
- Drink a tea of sage and mother-wort through the day.
- To help with stress from hot flushes: Try valerian as a pill or a liquid, or add 3-4 drops of tincture to a glass of water or juice. This should help in about 20 minutes. Repeat after an hour if needed. Start with valerian lightly and increase the dose until the problem is relieved.
- Ginseng Tea with honey and 2 tsp royal jelly daily.
- A mix of Dong Quai and Damiana Extract.
- Bee Pollen* and Royal Jelly. 3-7 ampules/week or 500 mg/day.

***Do not use Bee Pollen if allergic to bees!**

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HOT FLUSHES

- Mild Hot Flushes: St. John's Wort, Melissa, Sage.
- Severe Hot Flushes: Vitex, Lavender, Marigold, Hawthorn.
- Add Phytoestrogens to the diet: Soy products, such as tofu, soy milk, soy beans, soy cheese, soy flour, soy yogurt, miso, tempeh. Also yams, carrots, peas, whole wheat, cherries, brown rice, apples, peanuts, almonds, mung bean sprouts, wheat germ, oats.
- Lower intake of fat, coffee, sugar (including fruit, fruit juices), chocolate, alcohol, spicy foods. Garden Sage herb tea. Eat more grains. Eat calcium rich foods.
- Exercise, deep breathing exercises.
- Wear layered clothing
- Avoid triggers that might cause hot flushes: Spicy foods, alcohol, caffeine, hot liquids, chocolate, soft drinks, red meat, sugar, hot tubs and saunas, vigorous exercise on hot days.
- Sleep in cotton clothes, cotton sheets, in a cool room.

FATIGUE/DEPRESSION

- Chasteberry (vitex), B-complex vitamins, potassium-magnesium aspartate 200-250 mg, Vitamin E with Selenium, Siberian Ginseng, Oatstraw.
- Lethergy: Yerba mate infusion of a mix of Damiana, Gotu Kola, Rosemary, and Lavender.
- Nerves: Dandelion flower or leaf tea - add honey if you wish; Black Cohash - tea or capsules; Skullcap - 3oz of infusion 3 times/day; Blessed Thistle - tea or capsules; Kelp - 1 tsp powder/day or 1000 mg table/day.

- Stress - combine Comfrey Root, Alfalfa, Oat Straw, Irish Moss and Horsetail. Chamomile or Passion Flower Tea can be soothing.
- Mild Depression - Melissa, Motherwort
- Severe Depression - Vitex, rosemary, ginger
- Mild Anxiety - Melissa, Motherwort
- Severe Anxiety - Lavender, Hypericum, Lime Flowers, Skullcap
- Add any of these remedies gradually and do not suddenly stop prescription.
- Exercise
- Alcohol, hormones and refined sugar can deplete Vitamin B-6.

ENERGY

- Avena - Known as oats or oatstraw. Use a cup of avena infusion 1/week. This is thought to nourish your nerves and adrenal glands.
- Bee Pollen - This is not strictly an herb. Some persons are allergic to bee pollen, so try a small amount under the tongue before taking capsules.
- Gotu Kola - For stamina and energy. This can be combined with Cayenne and Siberian Ginseng. This is also thought to improve memory, and to stave off senility and promote longevity.
- Kelp or Seaweed - 1 tsp granules or 1 gram.
- Nettles - Thought to reduce fatigue by aiding the adrenals. 2 cups infusion/day.
- Licorice root - Do not take with high blood pressure.
- As a picker-upper, combine Cayenne Pepper, Siberian Ginseng Root, Gotu Kola in capsules.

HORMONAL BALANCE

- Remifemin- A Black Cohash derivative for psychological, vegetative and somatic disturbances.
- Dong Quai - Contains iron and Vitamin E. Known as the "female tonic."

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- Black Cohash - Contains natural precursor to estrogen. Use 4 capsules/day as a maximum dose. High doses may cause vertigo, nausea and vomiting. One study has shown Black Cohash may be no more effective than placebo (25%). Prolonged use may irritate the uterus. Do not use if have congestive heart failure or heart disease or if pregnant.
- Blessed Thistle - Helps promote the menstrual flow.
- Burdock Root - Aphrodisiac.
- Chasteberry (Vitex) - Thought to work wonders for many menopausal signs. Thought to work through the pituitary gland.
- Siberian Ginseng.
- Kelp or Seaweed - Eaten or taken daily.
- Nettles - Drunk as an infusion or eaten as a green vegetable - 2 cups/day.
- Licorice Root - Restorative and stimulant for the adrenal glands. Do not take with high blood pressure.
- Red Raspberry Leaf Tea - Tonic for uterus and cramps.

SLEEP DISTURBANCES (INSOMNIA)

- Valerian (prepared with teaspoon of dried root) or Chamomile tea, Chasteberry, peppermint, catnip, Hops, passion flower, violet leaves, Motherwort, yarrow, basil - any of these as capsules or teas.
- Valerian - Only when really needed. 200-300 mg. It does smell bad!!
- Lavender Oil drops on pillow. Aromatherapy
- Catnip tea - 1 cupful 2-3 times/day and before bedtime.
- Silent Night by Nature's Way - (Hops flowers, valerian root and skullcap) 2-6 capsules before bed.
- Combination of Comfrey, Alfalfa, Oatstraw, Horsetail, Irish Moss.
- Mild Insomnia - Melissa, Motherwort
- Severe Insomnia - Lavender, Lime Flowers, Skullcap. Take these about 1/2 hour before bed.
- Decrease alcohol, caffeine.
- Warm milk before bed (tryptophan). Can be eaten with small bowl cereal and banana.
- Exercise.
- Early evening bath with sage (relax muscles) or bay leaves (sore joint relief).

DECREASED LIBIDO

- Marigold and Lady's Mantle may help.
- Vitex may lower the libido.
- Oats (Aveno) - 30-60 tincture drops 3 times/day.
- Oats infusion 1 time/week.
- Damiana, False Unicorn, Fenugreek - Aphrodisiacs.
- Saw Palmetto - As a tincture with oats or by itself as a stimulant.
- Siberian Ginseng and Sarsaparilla.

*Yohimbe has been used by some for this problem, but this herb can have serious side effects and should not be used!

OSTEOPOROSIS

- Estrogenic herbs that discourage calcium loss from bones - Calendula, Ginseng, False Unicorn Root, Sage, Hops, Blue Cohash, Wild Yam, Licorice.
- Use herbs that are high in Calcium - Horsetail, Nettles, Oats and Oatstraw, Kelp, Seaweed, and Dandelion Leaves for Vitamin D.
- Horsetail - Contains silicon which improves calcium utilization, strengthens bones and is important in collagen production.
- Alfalfa - Good source minerals, vitamins and chlorophyll. As tea or tablets.
- Dandelion or Nettles - A source of calcium and magnesium. As greens, capsules or teas.
- Vinegar Tincture for Calcium - Collect eggshells from 1 dozen eggs (non-commercial best). Dry them (can be heated to eliminate bacteria). Remove membranes. Powder the shells and add to a pint of pure apple cider vinegar. This will bubble, so use a quart jar. Cap the jar immediately. 1 tbslp 3 times/day.

CAUTION: Some herbs and products such as Evening Primrose Oil, Ginseng and Black Cohosh have estrogen effects, so women with breast cancer history or other strong contraindications to estrogen should only use with caution! It is not known if there could be potential problems with their use.

According to the Mayo Clinic Health Letter of June 1994, avoid the following supplements because they can have serious side effects: Comfrey, Borage, Coltsfoot, Chaparral, Ma huang (Ephedra), Geranium and Yohimbe. Avoid Lobelia.

Remember: Herbs have medicinal qualities, so do not overdose. Discontinue if you have nausea, vomiting, diarrhea or other signs of intolerance. Even though herbs are considered "natural" one should be cautious with their use.

Bee Pollen: Some people suffer allergic reactions to bee pollen. The first time it is tried, take just a few grains to test for allergic reactions.

Do not use herbal remedies for serious illnesses like heart disease, cancer or arthritis. Tell your provider about all supplements to avoid interactions with other medications.

Vitamins: If you use supplements, do not overdo them. Most excesses will be excreted through your kidneys. Vitamins A, D, E are fat soluble and can build up in the body. Vitamin supplements should be taken with meals. Begin slowly and observe changes and how much works best for you.

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HERBAL THERAPY

Aims at gently aiding the immune system of the body to fight off infection as well as healing damaged tissue. Oriental herbalists believe that herbs assist the body's natural healing process by supplying what is missing from the patient's energy field. Herbs help bring about a balance of energies. Give herbs time to work - introduce them gradually, one or two at a time so the effect can be seen. Herbs take effect slowly, so the effects may not be noted for several weeks or months. They gently re-balance the body. Eliminate bad diet and other unhealthy habits to aid the body in detoxification and healing.

TYPES OF HERBS

NOURISHING HERBS: Safest of all herbs - side effects quite rare. Generally can be taken in any quantity for any period of time. They are a food and nutrient: alfalfa, calendula, chamomile, chickweed, cornsilk, elder blossoms or berries, fennel, fenugreek, lemon balm, mallows, nettles, oatstraw, plantain, raspberry, red clover, seaweeds, rose hips, slippery elm, and violet.

TONIFYING HERBS: Act slowly in the body - cumulative, rather than immediate, effect. Most beneficial when they are used in small quantities for extended periods of time. Side effects are slightly more common with tonics. The more bitter the tonic tastes, the less you need to take. Birch, black cohosh, blackstrap molasses, chaste tree, dandelion, Dong Quai/Dang Gui, echinacea, false unicorn, ginseng, hawthorn, horsetail, lady's mantle, motherwort, peony, sarsaparilla, spikenard, wild yam, yellow dock.

SEDATING/STIMULATING HERBS: Cause wide variety of usually rapid reactions - some unwanted. Long term use can lead to dependency. Best used in moderate doses for fairly short periods of time. Catnip, cinnamon, ginger, hops, licorice, myrrh, passion flower, poplar, primrose, sage, skullcap, uva ursi, valerian, vervain, wintergreen and willow.

TOXIC HERBS: Potential poisons and potent medicines. Take in small amounts for very short periods of time. Can have unexpected side effects. Cayenne, cotton root, goldenseal, liferoot, poke root, rue, sweet clover, wormseed.

Suggestions to help play it safe with herbal therapies:

- Before trying a supplement, consider changes to your diet or lifestyle that might accomplish your goal.
- Check with your health care provider before taking an herb or other supplement.
- Pregnant and nursing women and anyone with chronic and serious health problems should not take herbal supplements before checking with their health care provider.
- Check the warnings on packages and on related material. Start with small dose.
- Buy herbs that at least claim to be "standardized" so you have a better chance of consistent contents from pill to pill. These should have a certain percentage of the active herb in each pill.
- Stick to single herb products or several used synergistically, not multiple combinations, whose actions might be hard to sort out.
- Stop immediately if there is a problem. For instance, abdominal pain, darkened urine and jaundice can signal liver complications that an herb might have brought on.

Suggested Herbal Products: Remifemin, Gaia, MENO-fem, Zand, Vitamica Women's Phase II-Tori Hudson, Eclectic, Change-O-Life - Dr. Christopher, Metagenics, Changes for Women - Zand, Douglas, Fem Estero - Metagenics, Irwin Naturals, Women's Change - Ethical Nutrients, Phyto Pharmica, Woman Prime - Allergy Research Group, Susan Lark Products - Schiff Products.



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