

Traditional Chinese Medicine, Acupuncture and the Menopause

Menopause is in essence caused by the lack of sexual hormones. Above the age of about 40 years, the production of oestrogen and progesterone in women and testosterone in men gradually declines, giving rise to a variety of symptoms, which differ between women and men. In women menopause is defined as the total cessation of the menses for at least 6 months. It is generally preceded by a period of approx 5-7 years, known as the 'perimenopausal', during which time the periods may become gradually more irregular and some of the symptoms of menopause may start to become manifest in a variable way.

Symptoms in Women

- Absent monthly period for at least six months
- Hot flushes and night sweat
- Mood swings
- Depression
- Decreased vaginal secretion and thinned vaginal mucosa, giving cause to painful intercourse and vaginal infections
- Loss of libido
- Loss of pelvic muscle strength with impaired control of the bladder sphincter muscle.
- Recurrent urinary tract infections (UTI)
- Weight gain
- Decreased bone density

Symptoms in Men

- Sweating easily, feeling hot, night sweat
- Mood swings
- Depression
- Insomnia
- Loss of libido, impotence
- Fatigue
- Lack of concentration and forgetfulness
- Weight gain
- Decreased bone density
- Increased tendency to prostate enlargement and associated urinary dysfunction

Osteoporosis (decline in bone density) is more prominent in women, as their bone density is normally already lower than in men. With increasing age, women are generally more susceptible to bone fractures than men.

With increasing age and the onset of the menopause, both sexes are more susceptible to diabetes, high blood pressure and coronary artery disease, conditions linked to increased incidence of heart attack. The female sex hormone oestrogen normally offers some protection against this. With increasing age, and decreasing levels of oestrogen, this protective effect diminishes, so that menopausal women catch up with men in relation to the incidence of Hypertension and Coronary disease.

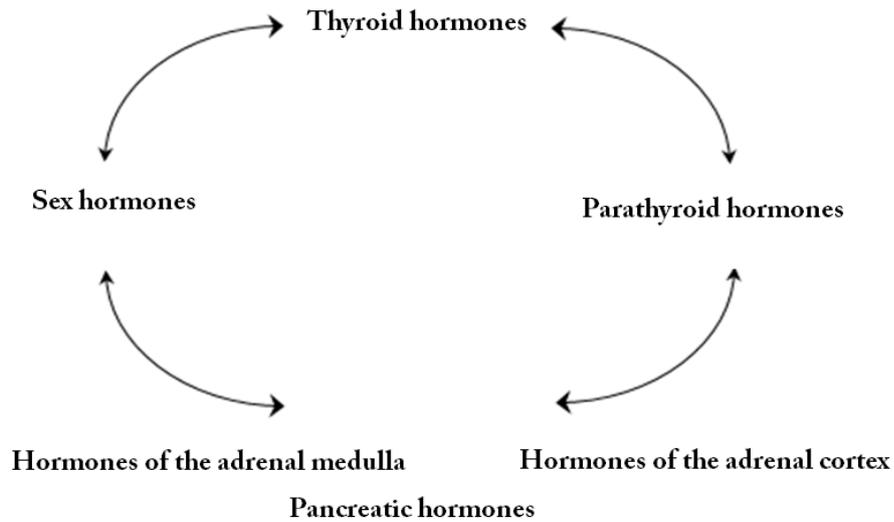
PNEI

Hormone levels are influenced by several factors, these influences can be described as:

- **P**ychological
- **N**eural
- **E**ndocrine
- **I**mmune system

Psychological events in the form of stress or other emotional events can influence thalamic and hypothalamic functions, causing an imbalance in their function by either increasing or decreasing their activity. This in turn has an impact on releasing neurotransmitters to influence endocrine organs, which again has an effect on the level of certain hormones. As hormone systems are intertwined, this has an impact on all hormone systems of the body. Commonly therefore during menopause, thyroid function can also be affected.

Thyroid hormones are produced by the thyroid gland, which is situated at the front of the neck in close proximity to the windpipe. Thyroid hormones are necessary for growth and proper metabolism and are vital to both genders. Women however, have a greater tendency than men to suffer from thyroid problems, especially hypo-(low)thyroid function. Many women experience underactive or hypothyroid issues during the time around the menopause, just as some do during adolescence or pregnancy, the two other stages in women's lives of tremendous hormonal flux.



Traditional Chinese Medicine (TCM)

According to Traditional Chinese Medicine, everyone is born with a predetermined amount of inherited “qi” (energy), called essence (“jing” energy). Prenatal “jing” determines basic constitution, strength, and vitality. It is stored in the kidney meridian, and therefore called “kidney energy”. It will reach a fixed maximum already determined at birth at the age of about 20 years. Due to this preset level, it cannot be added to, only conserved and used up over time. The speed, by which this kidney energy is being used up, is strongly influenced by lifestyle and other circumstances. A way to conserve prenatal “jing” is to be striving for balance in all life activities, meaning to be moderate in diet, work and rest balance, and with one’s sexual activities. Certain exercises help to conserve prenatal “jing”, like “Tai Chi”, “Qi Gong” and the likes.

Jing controls all major phases in the development of a human

1. During childhood, kidney energy controls the growth of the brain, bones, teeth, hair, and sexual maturation. With weak kidney energy, bones and teeth will be less strong, and the person may be mentally retarded.
2. During puberty, kidney energy controls reproductive function and fertility, and a normal development into adulthood. Weak kidney energy can be related to amenorrhoea.

3. Conception and pregnancy are controlled by kidney energy, thus weak kidney energy can result in infertility, repeated miscarriages, etc.

Between the ages of 16 to 21 years, the kidney energy will grow slower, and eventually comes to a standstill. After this energy peak, kidney energy will slowly start to decline, and after the age of about 30 years, this decline will pick up speed. At the onset of menopause, kidney energy levels are already so low that people start losing their hair, losing their teeth, getting tired much earlier and sooner than before, get hard of hearing, suffer from impotence, their bones becoming thinner, and their concentration/memory declining.

Next to this inherited “kidney energy”, after birth the body is acquiring energy from eating, drinking, and breathing. Lungs, spleen, and stomach begin functioning to acquire “qi” from the food it consumes, and the air it breathes. As this energy is derived from the stomach and distributed to the organs by the spleen meridian, it is called “stomach/spleen energy”. To a certain degree, it can replenish wasted kidney energy, but not to the full extent. Working/exercise etc. will first use acquired (stomach/spleen) energy, before using essential (kidney) energy.

According to Traditional Chinese Medicine, menopausal syndrome is not only associated with a decline in kidney energy, but in stomach/spleen energy as well. As a decline in flow of stomach/spleen energy throughout the body will affect the hormone producing organs as well, this will result in a drop of hormone production with all the known consequences of low hormone levels.

Not everyone will suffer from menopausal syndrome and its symptoms. Depending on individual lifestyle habits, the level of kidney energy can be longer preserved, so that the symptoms of the menopause may be moderated.

Therapy of the Menopausal Syndrome

In conventional medicine treatment for menopausal syndrome consists largely of substituting hormones in forms of patches, tablets etc. For those patients who do not want to take these drugs, or there is a contraindication to take them, e.g. breast cancer with positive hormone receptors, there are some alternatives listed below:

1. Change of lifestyle
 - a. Healthy diet – to include foods rich in phyto-nutrients and phyto-oestrogens.
 - b. Moderate exercise about 20-30 min per day for 5 days a week
 - c. Sleep / rest 7-8 hours per day

2. Stress reduction
 - a. Autogenic training
 - b. Meditation
 - c. Qi gong
3. Professional medical help if those points mentioned under 1 and 2 did not have any effect ie:
 - a. Substitution of herbal drugs (e.g. Phytoestriol), vitamins, minerals
 - b. Harmonisation of sympathetic-parasympathetic nervous system by means of complex homoeopathy
4. Acupuncture according to TCM

The aim of the acupuncture therapy is to alleviate the symptoms of the menopausal syndrome by re-establishing the PNEI axis, rebalancing the energy levels, and by harmonising the sympathetic-vagal nervous system balance.

A typical course of treatment would consist of 6-8 sessions, depending on the individual.

For more information about our Acupuncture at the Dove Clinic, please contact Reception on 01962 718000.