

Celebrating Menopause Guide

An Ayurvedic Guide to Making a Graceful Transition



Menopause rings the bell, welcoming and celebrating the beginning of a radiant period of wisdom and grace. This is an exciting transition. That is, *IF* you can enter it with perspective and preparation, such that vata gently blows a breath of insight and discovery, instead of rushing in a whirlwind of change and instability. You lived a childhood full of growth and building. These were your kapha years. Your body was in a growth period, as was your mind. You took in anything from your environment for your own evolution. The ancient Vedic texts called this period the *brahmacharya ashram*. You then transitioned into *grihastha ashram*, a period of achievement. Your adulthood, the pitta years, provided a sense of accomplishment. These were the years of the ego and its intrinsic need to do, no matter what that doing consisted of. Now you enter the third, life-altering, *vanaprastha ashram*. This marks a period of letting go of the need to do and achieve. As a vata-dominated period of your life, clairvoyance allows for insight and wisdom to grow from deep reflection and contemplation on the life lived thus far. Vata also has a dispersing nature, giving the inspiration to then share this wisdom with all loved ones and society, at large.¹ Fulfillment of this period completely allows you then to transition to the last stage of life, *sannyasa ashram*, with a sense of contentment and peace. This final stage is a period of complete inward meditation, remembering who we ultimately are, a pure soul. Until now, there has barely been enough free time to even take a deep breath. But, now that your major responsibilities are taken care of, we can shift our awareness more inward, giving us the opportunity to truly know life's other dimension—the inner dimension. We realize what our true essence is, even after we leave this body, and by giving space to experience that essence, we are able to shower the world with compassion and wisdom.



A Complete, Ayurvedic Bird's Eye View of Menopause Hormones: An Ayurvedic Perspective

As we grow into menopause, our ovaries are released from their role as centers for egg maturation and hormone production. The levels of estrogen and progesterone, the two dominant female hormones, drop. We can look at hormones as providing two subtle, yet vital roles in our body:

1. *Ojas*—Ojas is a superfine substance that is responsible for **building immunity, stability, and nourishment**. As such, it can be seen as a very subtle and refined form of **kapha**. The very end product of nutrition in our body, after it passes through all of the seven layers of tissues, including the final layer of our reproductive organs, is ojas. Our immune system gives us the ability to **tolerate** our external environment, as well as changes to our internal ecosystem. So it happens that those with low ojas are more prone to imbalances and illnesses. For instance, you will see that with hot flashes, the lack of hormones narrows the temperature zone in which there is comfort. This makes it difficult to remain within a comfortable temperature range.
2. *Tejas*—As ojas is a refined version of kapha, tejas is a refined version of **pitta**. Tejas helps **direct pitta**; it is an intelligence that every cell in our body has. It is **each cell's understanding of what to do and when to do it**. Without tejas, there is no guidance as to where pitta and heat should flow to so it can serve its purpose. In its ideal states, the mind and body by this point in the life cycle have built enough intelligence to continue with these functions without necessarily needing hormones to guide it. Since hormones serve vital pitta and kapha functions, it is very important that these two doshas, specifically, are balanced to a very healthy level when entering menopause. Pitta should primarily reside in its home in the core, providing a solid source of agni, our digestive fire. Kapha should not be depleted, as it nourishes all tissues so that they are not whisked away with the slightest change.

The Loss of Hormones

During menopause, we are low on ojas, and so we have a lessened ability to maintain balance, even in the same environment and with the same stressors. Couple that with the erratic nature of vata, unchecked, and our body shifts into a sympathetic overdrive. Our nervous system is a delicate balance of the sympathetic nervous system, a stress-oriented system that exists for self-preservation, and the parasympathetic nervous system, which functions to relax and renew. These two branches work as opposing, yet complementary, systems. Because of low ojas, menopause becomes a state of high sympathetic nervous system—cortisol levels increase, blood pressure increases, heart rate increases.² This state of stress drives high pitta throughout the body, ready to attack any threat. Further this with the cessation of the monthly blood release. The menstrual cycle can be seen as a therapeutic *rakta moksha*. This is a therapy used in traditional *panchakarma*, where blood is let out for the purpose of releasing excess pitta. In the ideal, healthy state of the menopausal woman, we shift away from pitta predominance, mentally and physically, to vata predominance. Normally, the female body would transition just fine. But with persistent pitta activities and constant activation of the hot and sharp sympathetic system, pitta remains trapped in the body. In the end, we are left with the following process:



1. Elevated, ungrounded vata disperses throughout the body, carrying your core digestive fire, *agni*, away from its home in the stomach and intestines. This leads to difficulty with digestion and overall nutrition.
2. The heat traveling in the circulatory system gives rise to hot flashes, insomnia, and heart disease.
3. High vata also flows downward, drying out the vagina.
4. High vata in the colon and other deeper tissues, eventually creates conditions such as osteoporosis.
5. Superfine tejas, also decreased, leads to troubles with memory and concentration and a higher predisposition to cancers.



Goals

We want to go back to that luminous, graceful menopause that the sage women have lived from time immemorial. To attain this state of health, we have the following goals, and this article's objective, to help you find ways in which you can achieve these goals successfully.

- **Increase juiciness.** Some kapha during menopause is a great thing, as long as it is not unbalanced—particularly, with the sticky and dense qualities that can lead to heart disease.
- **Be calm.** Bring vata and pitta back to its core by **calming the sympathetic nervous system.**
- **Strengthen your agni.** When your agni functions optimally, your whole body functions optimally because it is well nourished and has the intelligence it needs.



Doshic Differences in Menopause

As with all of Ayurveda, there is no one way that any disease will manifest. The interplay of all doshas and subdoshas add different layers of diversity. Use this table to understand what flavor your menopausal transition has or will have. Knowing this will help you see what doshas may be out of balance so that you can adjust your diet and lifestyle accordingly.

Vata	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Mood swings• Dry skin or mucous membranes (including the vagina)• Scanty bleeding during perimenopause• Constipation or irritable bowel• Insomnia• Anxiety, worry, fear• Decreased concentration due to spaciness• Reduced libido• Bone loss
Pitta	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Hot flashes• Irritability• Heavy bleeding during perimenopause• Skin rashes and diseases• Anger, irritation, jealousy, criticism, competitiveness• High blood pressure and heart disease
Kapha	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Weight gain• Overweight• Fluid retention, edema• Depression, sadness, greed• Decreased concentration due to dullness• High cholesterol or triglycerides

Adapted from Lonsdorf, Nancy, et al. A Woman's Best Medicine. Jeremy P Tarcher/Penguin, New York. 1995. Pp 271-272.

The Path to a Graceful Menopause

While most studies are small or preliminary, there is a growing body of evidence and exciting initial findings to support an alternative approach to menopause that embodies nourishment, contentment, and balance. There is also growing support for herbalists and alternative practitioners and their care for women.⁴ A holistic approach not only eases many of the challenges that many menopausal women face, but also empowers them to live with more joy and fulfillment. Keep in mind the broad goals we reviewed previously as you make your way through the basic pointers outlined below. Remember the aggravating qualities of menopause—**dry, rough, mobile, subtle, spreading, cold or hot**—and see the opposing qualities come to life in the recommendations.





Make Peace with the Past and Create Acceptance of the Present and Future

This is the one, most important element of your transition. There is nothing that drives our stress like anger, resentment, and irritations—especially from the past.

- Take time and make space to make peace with yourself, all those that you have crossed paths with, and your life at large.

Monthly Cleanse

- Take two tablespoons of [ghee](#) with two tablets of [Blood Cleanse](#) twice daily for four days each month as you go through the transition, especially if you are experiencing lots of heat and high pitta.
- Eating an easy to digest [kitchari](#) diet and doing a daily *abhyanga* during these four days will support the cleansing process.

Bring Juice to Life: *Rasayana*

Rasayana literally means increasing juice. Dryness is probably the most important quality that is in excess in the menopausal body.

- [Abhyanga](#): Not only does the practice of self-massage literally oleate the body, but it also is one of the most effective ways of **calming vata and also the nervous system**. Study after study has shown massage as effective in easing anxiety and stress.^{5,6,7} It can also be very effective at helping with uncomfortable **joints**.⁸



- **Shirodhara**: The slow pouring of oils on the third eye is a classic therapy for **calming and balancing the mind**.⁹ Find an Ayurvedic therapist that can support you with this therapy.
- Hydration: Your body is 75% water and requires this fluid for **nutrition and elimination of wastes**. Drink plenty of water and have sufficient electrolytes and essential fatty acids to help maintain the quality and quantity of your waters.
- **Chyavanprash**: Chyavanprash is one of the most classic rejuvenating formulas used in Ayurveda. It was created to build nutrition and ojas. It also has natural antioxidant properties, as amalaki is its primary ingredient.¹⁰

Eat a Diet That is **Vata-Pacifying** but Not Pitta-Aggravating

This consists of warm, well cooked foods, cooked with spices that aid in digestion, such as **cumin**, **fennel**, **coriander**, saffron, **turmeric**, and **hingvastak**.

Support Your Agni

- Have a teaspoon of grated ginger with lime and a pinch of salt before and after meals.
- Drink **tea** made of **cumin**, **coriander**, and **fennel** seeds throughout the day.

Pranayama and Yoga

Learn the art of breathing slowly and deeply and use yoga to calm your nervous system, decrease stress, and help with menopausal symptoms.^{12, 13}

- Practice **nadi shodhana** daily for twenty minutes.

Yoga Nidra

Also known as yogic sleep, yoga nidra is a meditative process while lying on your back or a similar comfortable position. Take at least ten minutes every afternoon to practice this restful process to ease your mind.^{14, 15}

Moon Bath

Spend summer nights moon bathing on your back porch. The direct lumination from the moon was used as a therapy to increase ojas, and bring coolness to the body. Even just fifteen minutes, a few times a week, can make a difference.

Herbs

The **Women's Natural Transition** formula has the perfect blend of herbs that nourish and calm vata, while at the same time cooling pitta.



Tips for 5 Main Concerns of Menopause

While all of the recommendations discussed are amazingly beneficial for overall menopausal wellness, there are specific things that women want particular guidance for. In the following section, we will review the top five concerns that menopausal women have.

Hot Flashes

Up to 80% of menopausal women suffer from hot flashes. It is important, not only as a cause of unease, but also as a sign of significant pitta running havoc throughout the bloodstream. Those who have significant hot flashes are more likely to have other risk factors for heart disease.¹³ Like most other menopausal symptoms, it is a signal to take rest and relax; your sympathetic nervous system is on high.²



Pranayama

- **Nadi shodhana** for up to twenty minutes daily will decrease your level of stress and calm your nervous system.
- **Sheetali** pranayama is extremely cooling and can be used during a hot flash, itself.¹⁶



Diet

- Reduce caffeine and alcohol intake.
- Eat healthy kapha foods, such as flaxseed oil, which also have an anti-inflammatory effect.¹⁷

Pomegranate Juice and Fresh Lime or Peppermint Tea

These cooling drinks can cool and cleanse the blood of natural toxins and excess heat.

Weight Loss

Excess weight can serve as an insulating layer, making the body hotter.^{18, 19} But be careful—if you are underweight, losing further weight will once again create stress on the body.

Meditation

The ability to maintain inner peace despite external circumstances can serve all of us well. A daily dose of meditation and other ways of achieving mindfulness can go a long way with hot flashes.²⁰

Herbs

Healthy Pitta will do just the trick, and as mentioned previously, **Blood Cleanse** will help remove excess pitta from the blood, specifically.

Poor Sleep

To bring more restful sleep, increase heaviness, especially before nighttime. As most cases of sleep disturbance are caused by hot flashes, the above recommendations will also help.

Milk Before Bedtime

- Drink hot, boiled milk with some nutmeg.
- If you are still having difficulty with sleep, drink milk that has been boiled with two cloves of garlic.
- With either of the above recipes, adding a pinch of **turmeric** will make the milk easier to digest.

Take Time to Meditate Before Sleep

Take five minutes to shut the mind off with your breath or a meditation technique.²¹ Those five minutes are worth an hour of sleep.



Sleep Hygiene

- Sleep at a set time and wake at a set time.
- Get sufficient sleep! We often underestimate the amount of sleep we need. The average adult needs 7-8 hours of sleep.
- Avoid naps during the day time.
- Go to sleep with the T.V. off.

Herbs

- **Ashwagandha** calms the mind and shakes stress off of the body, thereby bringing a sense of rest to the overtaxed.²² Try a couple of tablets daily or add a half teaspoon of the powder to your cup of milk.
- A couple tablets of **I Sleep Soundly**, which has ashwagandha and valerian among other soothing herbs, may do just the trick.

Vaginal Dryness

Dryness in the vagina affects sexual function for so many women. This is a simple problem with potentially significant effects, affecting 10-40% of women at least once in their lifetime. This is clearly the result of high vata in the pelvis, as narrowing and shortening of the vagina and a loss of fat in the labia accompany it.

Ghee

Lubricants and moisturizers, aside from hormonal creams, can provide much relief to vaginal dryness.²³ Ayurveda's natural lubricants, ghee or sesame oil, can potentially serve you equally well.

Hydrate

Oppose the dry quality with fluids, such as tulsi tea or even just plain water.

- A rule of thumb is to drink in ounces the number that you get when you half your weight in pounds. For an example, if you weigh 120 pounds, drink 60 ounces daily.

Care for Your Heart

Cleanse your body of excess heat and strengthen your digestive fire to metabolize excess kapha that may create blockages. These are key ingredients for a healthy heart.

Mental Relaxation

Meditation and other calming practices, such as Tai Chi, all decrease your risk of having poor heart health by keeping stress levels at bay and decreasing your heart's work load.²



Exercise

- A daily yoga practice not only keeps your body free of stagnation, but it also is successful at balancing the mind.²
- Take a healthy walk daily for thirty minutes.

Herbs

Arjuna is an herb gaining press for great effects on the heart.^{24, 25} It is the primary herb in **Heart Formula**, which is well formulated for supporting proper function of the heart.

Bone Health

Your bones grow most around the age of twenty. Around the age of 35, you begin to slowly lose bone mass with the greatest bone loss occurring in the years around your very last menstrual period.²⁶ Thus, your bones are a dynamic tissue and the sooner you start supporting your bones, the better.

Keep Your Colon Clean

The wisdom of Ayurveda has long seen the *dhara kala*, or membrane, of the colon as being intimately connected to the *dhara kala* of the bones. So it is no surprise when we find that bowel diseases, such as Crohn's disease or Ulcerative Colitis, are significant risk factors for osteoporosis.^{27, 28} Even colon disorders without structural lesions, such as irritable bowel syndrome, have links to osteoporosis.^{29, 30}

- Strive for healthy bowel movements. Be sure not to have long periods of constipation or diarrhea. Ayurveda encourages having bowel movements 1-2 times a day.
- Drink plenty of water.
- Eat an adequate amount of fiber from fruits and vegetables.
- Take a dose of **Triphala** every night before bed. This three-herb blend is not only cleansing to the colon, but is also rejuvenative.
- As per your doshic imbalance, try **Vata Digest**, **Pitta Digest**, or **Kapha Digest** for healthy digestion.
- **Calcium** intake is very important. What studies are finding, however, is that there may be differences in need, depending on your diet. For instance, the protein-dominated diet of the West may require more dietary calcium as protein can decrease the absorption of calcium.^{3, 31, 32}
- Eat high fiber vegetables that are also a good source of calcium, such as leafy green vegetables, in balance with proteins.
- Sesame seeds and dairy are also excellent calcium sources.

Daily Dose of Vitamin D

There are an array of supplements, but the best, most nourishing source is the sun when it interacts with your skin. Ideal times are non peak times early in the morning or late in the evening, and during late spring through early fall, when the sun has its greatest impact. Be careful not to burn.



Yoga

A gentle, yet effective practice to prevent bone loss that is appropriate for any age.³³ Daily practice will not only help decrease bone loss, but will also help with balance and stamina, both very important factors in preventing bone fractures.

- Yoga postures focusing on **opening the hips** and **strengthening the pelvis and core**, such as lunges (**Warrior I** and **II**, **Extended Side Angle Pose**), **Bound Angle Pose**, and **Wide-Legged Forward Bend**, will root vata and activate the root of the boney tissue, the pelvis and sacrum.

Herbs

Healthy Bones helps support bone strength and support bone density, as does **Ashwagandha**, which is particularly good for supporting healthy joints.²²

A Call to ALL: the Young and the Wise

The most successful approach to achieving a graceful menopause is to start NOW—no matter what age you are. Menopause is just another transition in a woman's life, just like puberty and pregnancy. In fact, the classical texts do not refer to it as a disorder. Menopause, as a disease, has been known to be relatively uncommon in the East, particularly in non-urbanized areas, until recently as westernization of the East grows rapidly. For this reason, many refer to it as a disease of the West.³⁵ But menopause is simply a transition, and like any other transition, disarray and discomfort arise simply because of imbalance. Let us join together in great health, and dispel the discouraging negative connotations of menopause that send most women in our society into this phase feeling defeated before they even begin. To that end, follow the general guidelines in this article as a way of life, starting even in the earlier years of a woman's life. Enjoy the transition. Enjoy the inner intelligence and clarity that grows within every day. The greatest thing you can offer to your family and community is that knowledge through your words and actions. I hope that this article will support you in doing just that.



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