

The Rocky Road to Menopause and How Essential Oils Can Help

Most women can agree that there was little information regarding women's hormonal changes when our mothers transitioned through menopause. Hot flashes were commonly the only thing addressed, which gave most of us the impression that menopause is a brief hot mess and then the menstrual cycle stops for good. Though this is the case for a small percentage of women, *perimenopause*—the period of time before the cessation of menstruation—is a challenging reality that can last 3-15 years before actual menopause.

Today, we have access to knowledge about our bodies that our mothers, aunts, and grandmothers were without. Now we know that gastro-intestinal distress, mild to severe anxiety, panic attacks, insomnia, itchy skin, depression, loss of libido, muscle pain, cold and hot flashes, fibroids, heavy monthly bleeding, tension and migraine headaches, heart palpitations, mood swings, irritable bladder and a host of other sometimes-frightening physical challenges are common symptoms of hormonal changes at midlife. Women who are unaware of the hormonal havoc their bodies are experiencing often rush to the doctor for cardiac tests when their hearts won't stop racing or get extensive gastrointestinal tests when heartburn, indigestion, or constipation become chronic. These tests show nothing abnormal most of the time, which only adds to the frustration factor.

Perimenopausal hormonal shifts can put the female body and psyche on a roller coaster, pumping too much estrogen one moment and too little the next. Progesterone can also drop dramatically or surge, and testosterone is often low enough to give many women a profound disinterest in sex despite healthy,

passionate relationships. The adrenals—the body's stress glands—work harder during perimenopause and take over for aging ovaries. This means that even individuals with healthy adrenal function will most likely be affected, and those with genetic or acquired adrenal fatigue will feel the changes of midlife even more strongly.

Hormone tests for perimenopause are often unreliable because of erratic hormonal surges; the results usually reflect hormonal status of the time they are taken and cannot accurately portray what is happening inside the body on a daily basis. Only during the later stages of perimenopause are these tests reliable, so many conventional doctors choose not to test hormones or fail to take their female patients seriously. Perimenopause can be the most challenging time of a woman's life, and the last thing she needs is a doctor who will not take hormonal changes into account.

Many women opt for hormonal replacement therapy (H.R.T.), but much relief can come from diet, herbal, and vitamin supplementation, and clinical aromatherapy. The latter can have profound effects on the nervous system, which in turn affects the endocrine system. Essential oils can be a great solace both physically and emotionally. Let's look at a few essential oils that could make the difference between barely functioning and feeling a whole lot better:

Geranium: Geranium is a gentle but effective essential oil that can be a woman's best friend during any time of life, especially perimenopause. It helps to tame wild surges of estrogen or progesterone and promotes harmony between not only these hormones but other hormones such as testosterone and stress hormones like cortisol and adrenalin. It fortifies the adrenals, reproductive organs, and nervous system in a way that can be felt almost immediately. It can be used for most symptoms including perimenopausal digestive distress, erratic mood swings, sore breasts, and weepiness. Geranium can be applied to the soles of the feet using 2 drops per sole 1-2

times a day. It can be mixed with evaporated sea salt or Epsom salts and added to a bath using up to 10 drops per bath. It is the essential oil to use daily, through ovulation right up to the onset of menstruation. Most women see less severity of symptoms, easier periods, and more stable emotions. Geranium's pleasant green, floral scent is usually enjoyed singularly or mixed with other oils such as lavender or ylang ylang. Lavender is a good choice, for its balancing effects work synergistically with geranium.

Vetiver: Vetiver is a deep, earth-scented essential oil that promotes balance between estrogen and progesterone. It is best used 2-7 days before the menstrual period begins and can have calming, harmonizing effects on the body and psyche. It soothes the nervous system, calms panic, eases worry, and encourages feelings of safety. It is best applied daily to the soles of the feet using 2 drops per sole. A drop on the hand can be inhaled to calm the nerves or prepare the body for sleep.

Clary Sage: Clary sage is a grassy, pleasant essential oil most valuable for hot flashes and other symptoms of waning estrogen. It also lifts depressive states, melancholy, and instills confidence when the spirits are low. Clary sage can boost libido in some women. It is best applied daily to the soles of the feet using 2 drops per sole. This essential oil is a lovely addition to a hot bath and can be combined with geranium or black spruce for added adrenal support. It can also be inhaled to bring harmony and positivity to the nervous system. **Caution:* women with estrogen dominance, breast cancer, or history of estrogen-dependent cancers should avoid dermal use (through the skin). Inhalation is okay.

Black Spruce: Black spruce is a wonderful evergreen oil that supports adrenal and kidney function. It is excellent to lower excessive cortisol and other stress hormones as well as restore a frazzled nervous system. It is best applied daily to the soles of the feet using 2-3 drops per sole, preferably in

the morning or at bedtime. It can be mixed with evaporated sea salt or Epsom salts and added to a bath using up to 10 drops per bath.

Rose Absolute: Rose absolute, even in diluted form, is a lovely oil that brings harmony and stability to the female body. It lifts the libido, balances hormones, and soothes the emotions. It can be added to unscented lotion and applied all over the body for a balancing moisturizer. Rose may also be helpful for premenstrual food cravings.

Neroli: Neroli, even in diluted form, is a powerful but gentle oil with sedative qualities. It is invaluable for heart palpitations, trembling, panic attacks, general anxiety, excessive worry, and insomnia related to hormonal shifts. A few drops on the palm of the hand help the body to find equilibrium almost immediately. Neroli works incredibly well with ylang ylang, especially for women who are awakened by adrenalin rushes in the middle of the night.

Ylang Ylang: A heady, floral essential oil, ylang ylang helps the body to balance its output of adrenalin. It is most valuable for heart flutters, intense outbursts and changes of mood, and the effects of stress. A few drops applied to the soles of the feet will help the body through stressful times and hormonal fluctuation. It can be mixed with evaporated sea salt or Epsom salts and added to a bath using up to 5 drops per bath. 1 drop of ylang ylang and 1 drop of neroli applied to the palm of the hand can bring immediate calm when inhaled.

Spearmint: Bright and sweet, spearmint is a wonderful essential oil for overall hormonal balance for women. It can be used for PMS to ease headaches, indigestion, discomfort from water gain, low energy and achy muscles. It can be applied daily to the soles of the feet using 2-3 drops per sole once, preferably in the morning. It can also be inhaled for a quick pick-me-up.

Perimenopause is a time of transition, and like all transitions, temporary. It is easy to forget this when we are in its grip, but essential oils can help ease the passage and bring many unexpected gifts of healing. Essential oils work with our physiological processes as well as the emotional and spiritual selves. They can be our greatest allies, reminding us to be gentle with ourselves and that the best years of our lives are truly ahead of us.

Sources:

- *The Power of Our Hormones and How To Balance Them*
- *Natural Remedies for PMS, Mood Swings, Bloating, Cramps, Etc.*
- *Multidimensional Aromatherapy* by Marlaina Donato, CA, CMT (Ekstasis Multimedia, 2015)
- *Perimenopause – Women to Women*