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## MENOPAUSE

### An Oriental Medicine Approach

by Corinna McFarlane & Jeff McMackin

**M**ore women are turning to Oriental Medicine for the treatment of menopausal symptoms, particularly after recent concerns regarding the safety of hormone replacement therapy (HRT). Natural menopause normally occurs in women between the ages of 45 and 56. During this transitional period, a variety of symptoms may be experienced, which cause varying degrees of distress. The most common of these are hot flashes, night sweats and vaginal dryness, in addition women may experience insomnia, anxiety, depression, fatigue, aches and pains, headaches, palpitations, and urinary problems.

Western and Oriental medical paradigms are quite parallel in the way they describe the menopausal process. One speaks through the language of hormones and their interaction with the reproductive organs; the latter uses the vocabulary of Essence and its relationship with the Kidney.

Western physicians define the problems associated with menopause as stemming from a hormonal imbalance. Whereas Oriental medicine views estrogen, along with other hormones, as part of a larger category of internal secretions known as Kidney Essence. Stored by the Kidney, this Essence is the origin of all Yin (blood and moisture) and Yang (Qi, or energy, and warmth) substances in the body.

During menopause this Essence becomes unbalanced. For instance, hot flashes, vaginal dryness and night sweating are a consequence of the inability of Yin (moisture) to restrain Yang (warmth), so heat flares upward uncontrollably. Other symptoms such as fatigue, fluid retention, indigestion and bloating are indicative of Yang depletion. Its inability to regulate circulation, metabolism, and provide warmth.

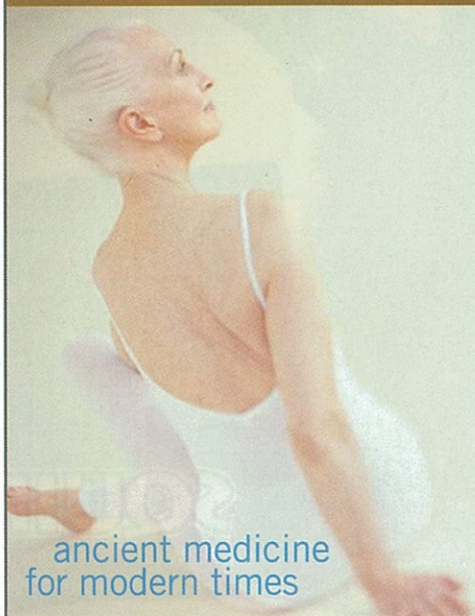
Medical literature dating back to 200 B.C. documents the use of Acupuncture and Chinese Herbal medicine for gynecology. More recently, one of the first studies to explore the effectiveness of acupuncture in alleviating hot flashes, insomnia and anxiety was conducted

from 1997-1999 by the University of Pittsburgh. The study found that during the course of acupuncture treatments, hot flashes decreased by 35% and insomnia decreased by 50%.

It is also interesting to note that a 2002 pilot study in England found that acupuncture reduced the frequency and severity of hot flashes in women being treated with tamoxifen (an anti-estrogen agent) for breast cancer.

With a history of clinical success, Acupuncture and Chinese Herbal medicine offer a safe alternative to HRT and can provide significant relief from the distressing symptoms associated with menopause.

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