Complete – and Natural – Menopause Relief

KEY WORDS
menopause, hot flashes, night sweats, irritability, hops, Humulus lupulus, hop cone, pomegranate, Punica granatum, black cohosh, Cimicifuga racemosa, hormones, HRT, bone density, breast cancer, skin health, cartilage

Whether you call it “the change” or just menopause, it is a challenging time, and the symptoms can make life feel a little out of control. There are days when it can feel like menopause – and not you – is in charge.

This inevitable fact of life brings with it a host of symptoms – sometimes severe, and sometimes not – that need to be addressed in order to keep a healthy, vibrant life and a positive perspective. Unfortunately, many of the conventional choices available bring with them the risk of serious consequences, including the increased risk of breast cancer.

For women in menopause – or their supportive partners, family members, or friends – there is a natural way to fight the mood swings, night sweats, hot flashes, and other symptoms that don’t involve using risky hormone replacement therapy (HRT).

In this Terry Talks Nutrition®, we’ll look at ingredients that can help make a big difference without risking bone density loss, heart health, or developing breast cancer.

First, Menopause is NOT a Disease!
I think this point is most important, and often lost on most people. Menopause is natural. Women going through menopause hardly need a primer from me telling them what it’s all about, but for those who aren’t yet in menopause, or those who live with someone who is, we’ll look at a few basics.

Menopause “officially” begins when a woman has gone for 12 consecutive months without menstruating, and on average it occurs at 50 years old. Of course, that doesn’t mean that she can’t experience some menopausal symptoms beforehand. In fact, some women in their late 30s and early 40s may have hot flashes, night sweats, or other symptoms that could be called “perimenopause”, but still have regular monthly periods.

Major Signs and Symptoms of Menopause
Hot flashes and night sweats: Hot flashes and night sweats are common, occurring in 75% to 85% of all women during menopause.

Irritability: The unpredictability of fluctuating hormone levels, the discomfort of hot flashes, and a lack of sleep (brought on by night sweats) make irritability one of the common symptoms of menopause.

Loss of libido: Whenever there’s added stress, loss of libido is an understandable result. During menopause, some of the reasons can have very common physical causes, such as vaginal dryness, with associated itching and irritation. If this applies to your own experience of menopause, I would recommend my article about sea buckthorn. Sea buckthorn is an amazing botanical that can hydrate the mucous membranes throughout the body – including the vagina – and can be very helpful during this time.

For a long time, hormone replacement therapy (HRT) was considered standard conventional treatment. Then, in 2002, a clinical trial known as the Women’s Health Initiative spotted a correlation between combined hormone therapy and the increased risk of heart disease, stroke, and breast cancer. This was a shock to many, because HRT had generally been thought to actually have heart and bone health benefits by many in the medical community. As a result of these findings, many women experiencing menopause are looking for a natural alternative that works with the body, and without the risk. Fortunately, there are natural ingredients that can help.

Hop Cone Extract (Humulus lupulus):
Most people have heard of the hop plant’s ability to promote sleep – which is certainly important for anyone dealing with night sweats – but this plant provides other benefits, too.

First, hops contain naturally-occurring phytoestrogens that have mild estrogenic effects and are extremely safe. The most active estrogenic compound is called 8-prenylnaringenin (8-PN) and is probably the most responsible for the reduction in hot flashes and night sweats seen during clinical trials.

In one double-blind, placebo controlled clinical study, 67 post-menopausal women were evaluated. Menopausal symptoms were scored by physicians, and after only six weeks, hop cone extract reduced the general menopausal symptoms by more than 200% compared to the placebo group. Of the symptoms, hot flashes were reduced in the group using hop cone extract by 400% compared to the placebo. These results were so astounding that a second double-blind, placebo-controlled crossover clinical study was conducted to confirm the results.

In this second clinical trial, 36 women were selected to take the patented hop cone extract during eight weeks before or after a placebo treatment. As in the first study, a significant treatment effect on general menopausal symptoms was observed in both group 1 and 2, when supplemented with hop cone extract, as compared to the baseline.

In both clinical studies, scientifically validated participant questionnaires were used. These served as a self-evaluating instrument to measure the menopause related quality of life in relation to discomforts reported by the women in the studies. Not surprisingly, results showed that the participants feel much better when supplemented with hop cone extract daily. And they reported a strong tendency to the total reduction of menopausal discomforts.

When all the parameters are studied, women noticed 300% fewer hot flashes and 200% less night sweats than those taking a placebo. Based on many studies done in Europe, hop cone extract has consistently been shown to be safe and effective.

Hop cone extract is a natural solution for all menopausal symptoms and is also suitable for those who have trouble sleeping and need natural support. Better sleep, combined with the fact that hop cone extract also helps stabilize mood swings, enhances concentration, and decreases irritability, takes care of a lot of the stress of menopause. Hop cone extract is also a strong antioxidant, so it can reduce the natural oxidative damage that is simply a part of everyday life. Look for a patented process hop cone extract with a high flavonoid content standardized for 8-prenylnaringenin (8-PN).

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Black cohosh (Cimicifuga racemosa):
As an herbal ingredient, black cohosh stands as one of the best known. It was used as a medicinal plant by the Native Americans, and has been the focus of research (and real life use) for over 50 years.

Black cohosh is an interesting botanical because even though it doesn’t appear to have phytoestrogen content (at one time researchers thought that it did), it does appear to have estrogenic effects, and over the course of decades of study and use has been shown to relieve hot flashes, night sweats and other symptoms.

One of the best things about black cohosh is that it is very well tolerated by the body, and may provide some protection against the development of breast cancer cells because of its influence on hormonal balance as a selective estrogen receptor modulator (SERM). In a scientific study, black cohosh inhibited breast cancer cells (MCF-7). In fact, for this reason, it has been considered an excellent intervention for breast cancer survivors who need to reduce menopause symptoms, but don’t want to deal with the risks of standard hormone therapy. In one 12-month clinical trial, 46% of the women taking black cohosh were free of hot flashes. None in the placebo group were.

I think black cohosh is a great ingredient. It’s safe and effective. But not all women experience relief by using black cohosh alone, which is why I recommend it in combination with other botanicals like hop cone and pomegranate extract.

Pomegranate (Punica granatum):
The pomegranate fruit has become popular in recent years, especially as a juice ingredient, and with good reason. Clinical and scientific research shows that this amazingly strong antioxidant supports the cardiovascular system, reduces inflammation, protects joint cartilage, and for individuals with diabetes, raised levels of glutathione (the body’s own natural antioxidant) by 141%.

There is also some mild estrogenic activity attributed to pomegranate. In a laboratory study, pomegranate extract showed that it may relieve some of the symptoms of depression and bone loss associated with menopause. It’s an exciting reason to include a pomegranate extract in a natural menopause regimen, but by no means is it the only one, as you’ll see.

Polyphenols (important compounds found in pomegranate and other fruits) from fermented and fresh pomegranate juice were tested against breast cancer cell lines in vitro. Interestingly, polyphenols from fermented juice showed twice the antiproliferative effect as fresh juice. In another study, pomegranate seed oil showed a 90% inhibition of MCF-7 breast cancer cells. Other tests have shown similar results – pomegranate oil and fermented pomegranate juice seem to have the strongest effects on breast cancer cell growth.

Get the Right Pomegranate Extract!
This is one reason why I recommend a strong pomegranate extract standardized to contain 60% (or higher) polyphenol content as part of the menopause regimen. Breast cancer is an unfortunate reality for many women as they approach menopause, due in part to dramatic changes in hormone levels.

Another factor to look for in pomegranate extracts is one that has a very high ORAC (Oxygen Radical Absorbance Capacity) value. ORAC values are typically presented as a way of determining the free-radical fighting power of a given fruit or vegetable. While there’s no way of duplicating the complex structure and synergy of a food, there are improved ways of taking some of the best components of fruits and vegetables and concentrating to the point where you see extremely high ORAC values. The pomegranate extract I recommend has an amazing ORAC value of 13,000 – the highest I’ve seen yet!

Finally, one more recommendation. Most pomegranate extracts include plant compounds called “free” ellagic acids, which are not water soluble, and are actually not naturally present in pomegranate fruits. These free forms of ellagic acids are formed as a result of the pomegranate extraction process, and are harder for the body to assimilate and use. The extract I recommend is completely water soluble with no free ellagic acids, and therefore much more bioavailable. This is why it is so important to get the right extract as part of your natural menopause relief regimen.

Other Reasons to Add a Strong Pomegranate Extract
Beyond its value as a cellular health defender, pomegranate can keep the joints healthy, acting as an anti-inflammatory and preventing damage to cartilage and joint structure. Pomegranate has very strong antibacterial power as well. In fact, studies have shown that pomegranate extract could even help fight E. coli bacteria. Pomegranate’s free-radical fighting power is a must for keeping skin looking younger and more vibrant, too. Laboratory studies show that pomegranate helps protect skin cells against UV radiation and can actually promote wound healing. Of course, preventing free radical damage isn’t just about keeping healthy skin. Oxidative stress can cause heart and artery damaging inflammation and lead to heart disease.

Pomegranate juice has been shown to decrease LDL cholesterol aggregation, lower blood pressure, and boost the activity of enzymes that protect LDL from oxidation. This is good news for anyone, but especially to women nearing or in menopause who may have heart concerns as well.

Be Smart About Your Approach to Menopause
I believe that this combination of hop cone extract, pomegranate extract, and black cohosh can provide a very complete supplemental approach to dealing with the symptoms of menopause and the additional health concerns faced by many women during that challenging time of life. While each is a strong contender to help overcome symptoms, I think they are much stronger together. Even so, I would recommend that any women entering menopause make an appointment for a complete physical to rule out any unknown complications that might be taken as symptoms. I also believe that this is the time for friends and family members to show consideration and understanding.

Menopause can be a difficult time for some, but if you’re going through it, I encourage you to give these powerful ingredients a chance to reduce symptoms so that you – and not menopause – can be in charge of your life.

Pomegranate (Punica granatum) Extract standardized to contain > 60% polyphenols, patented Hop Cone (Humulus lupulus L.) Extract standardized for 8-prenylnaringenin, Black Cohosh (Cimicifuga racemosa) Root and Rhizome Extract standardized to contain 2.5% triterpene glycosides.