

The Effects of Essential Oils on Menopausal Women

By Aleigha Long

This paper gives a brief synopsis of what menopause is as well as its symptoms and possible treatment options to assist with the symptoms cited, along with a few recipes and the results of one blend, followed by a list of precautions with the essential oils used. My intention in writing this paper is to create awareness of women everywhere that there are natural alternatives right from Mother Nature Herself that work to assist us in this monumental transition in our lives.

Menopause is not is a disease, although sometimes we feel like it. Throughout history menopause has been known as a natural part of a woman's life and there were natural herbs found in nature to help with the transition. Some in our society might call it a "mid-life" crisis and as women, we have the right to shift gears, take more time for ourselves and change our direction in life. Most of us have been so focused on taking care of our families and others that we've had little time for ourselves. This is our time and how we deal with it mentally and emotionally makes all the difference in the world, so enjoy it!

When we do begin the process of menopause, our ovaries begin making less estrogen and progesterone. Most women have erratic menstrual cycles until they are no longer able to produce eggs, but some continue a regular cycle until they miss one or a few and they never have another. Technically speaking, during the times between the first symptoms begin to appear until one year after the last menstrual cycle is considered peri-menopause. After that, it's called post-menopause. Vaginal atrophy or atrophic vaginitis is one symptom of post-menopause and is defined as "thinning and inflammation of the vaginal walls due to a decline in estrogen...most often after menopause, but can occur anytime the estrogen levels drop". (Mayo Clinic) However, Worwood reports that "this could leave the vagina exposed to infection", so it's not something to take lightly. There are progesterone creams and lubricants on the market but they don't always take care of the problem, depending on your particular hormone levels. Some of the symptoms that can occur in peri-menopause are hot flashes, sweating, water retention and circulatory problems to name a few.

Generally speaking, when a woman begins experiencing the symptoms of menopause in this day and age, most doctors recommend hormone replacement therapy (HRT), and for good reason. It works! The problem is that HRT is associated with breast cancer, plus these synthetic hormones can block our natural hormones! (Hill)

Not all women experience the symptoms of menopause, other than the freedom of having no menstrual cycle. My mother was one of them. One of the reasons many women today experience them is because of chronic stress in today's women, which produces increased levels of adrenaline in the bloodstream. "Excess adrenaline blocks the cell receptor sites so that progesterone cannot be transported past the cell membrane into the cells, where it is needed. This means that, even if you have a balance of hormones, it won't feel like it, because they are functionally out-of-balance." (Hill) This membrane is a barrier put in place by our bodies, to prevent harmful substances from entering into the brain tissue and cerebrospinal fluid. (Dechen) "Most of the symptoms associated with menopause are the result of estrogen dominance... caused by a number of factors, primarily stress and toxicity" from our environment and food. There are 4 factors in balancing hormones but the main 2 are stress and the immune system. (Hill)

Some helpful recommendations are regular exercise, taking vitamins and eating a healthier diet, including cold pressed oils and evening primrose oil. Also deep breathing, yoga, meditation, hot baths, massages, and of course essential oils can help.

How can essential oils help? Hill and Dechen both look to essential oils to help with the stress and immune factors. Why? According to Dechen, "The molecules of essential oils are so small that they can easily penetrate the skin and pass the blood-brain barrier". The hypothalamus stimulates the autonomic nervous system which is basically a balancing act for our nervous system to keep everything running smoothly the way it's meant to. That includes the endocrine system and hormones, which help balance menopausal symptoms. Once we sniff an essential oil, it only takes 20 seconds for that scent to calm our nerves and lower our stress level. No wonder essential oils are so effective! Additionally, modern science is finally proving that how we feel (our emotions) changes our immune system and our hormonal balance, among other things! (Dechen) So, here are some formulas to help with some basics.

Stress reducing Formula

One of Dr. Hill's Stress Formulas is to mix Frankincense, Bergamot and Roman Chamomile together, one drop each and apply to the temples, back of the neck and behind the ears.

Blending them with organic, cold-pressed carrier oils allows for a synergistic blend that can be massaged into the skin for better absorption and less irritation. Plus the massage helps to soothe the nerves.

Immune Booster from Joys of Lavender

3/4 cup baking soda and 18 drops of Lavender essential oil. Mix and store in a tight jar.

Use 1/4 cup per bath.

There are several essential oils specifically related to menopause and the list varies, depending on your source. Worwood's Menopausal lists consist of: Clary-sage, Geranium, Jasmine, Bois de rose, Nutmeg, Sage, Rose Maroc, Bergamot, Coriander and Red thyme. Plus she has several essential oil recipes, one of which I am using successfully for myself. For Hot Flashes she recommends avoiding stimulants such as coffee, tea and alcohol and some women respond well to evening primrose.

Hot Flash Formula

Clary-sage	10 drops	Geranium	11 drops
Lemon	7 drops	Sage	2 drops

*Dilute in 2TBS cold pressed vegetable oil. Or make a synergistic blend of 5 drops of essential oils to 1tsp as massage oil for all over the body. If you spread it thin it should cover and soak in well. If you want, use 5 drops of the synergistic blend in bath water.

Day and Night Sweats Formula

Grapefruit	10 drops	Lime	10 drops
Sage	5 drops	Thyme	5 drops

*Use the same dilution as the Hot Flash Formula. Or massage entire body with the synergistic blend and use the synergistic blend in a daily bath.

Bloating and Water Retention Formula

Fennel	5 drops	Juniper	5 drops
Lemon	15 drops	Peppermint	5 drops

*Use the same dilution as the Hot Flash Formula. Or massage in abdominal area and lower back every day with a synergistic blend and use 5 drops of the synergistic blend in a bath every day.

Circulatory Problems Formula

Geranium	10 drops	Rose Maroc	10 drops
Peppermint	5 drops	Patchouli	5 drops

*Use the same dilution as the Hot Flash Formula. Or a daily massage with a synergistic blend in the direction of the heart in the areas that are affected. If the whole body is affected, massage front and back of the torso and use 5 drops of the synergistic blend in a bath daily.

Atrophic Vaginitis - Oil Method

German Chamomile	5 drops	Dilute in 2 TBS hazelnut, safflower or sweet almond oil using at least 2tsp per day on a tampon or massage.
Lavender	5 drops	
Clary-sage	5 drops	

Results

Above is the blend I am using on myself currently. Several years ago the only relief I got was from a steroid cream which my doctor warned was only a temporary solution and not safe to use for long periods of time. This time I was at the end of my rope as my groin area was so chapped and raw! I found this recipe and it looked like my issue. A few days after I started using it with Sweet Almond oil, massaging around the affected area, I felt better and I could see the chapping begin to recede. Then I tried using it directly on the affected area and began using it in place of my anti-itch cream. The following week the itching became fierce. Maybe due to the salt in my taco salad, but I put a tsp. of this formula in my bath water with 2 TBS each of sea salt and baking soda and the itching stopped immediately. At the end of the first week using the formula I saw a marked improvement in the chapping and this week, 2 weeks after the initial experiment, only the most chapped areas remain with the whole area either returned to normal or close to normal skin color.

Finally, I'd like to share a list of precautions from the essential oils listed here. Of course, as a general precaution, always use organic, therapeutic grade essential oils if you're going to apply them to your skin or bath water. Also, most of you won't be getting pregnant since you're in menopause but if you should become pregnant, there are other precautions you'll need to look at regarding essential oils.

Precautions (Dechen)

Estrogen-dependent cancer: Clary-sage, Geranium, Roman Chamomile (nor for long-term use)

Increased effects of alcohol: Clary-sage

Allergies: Chamomile (ragweed only)

Hyper-sensitive skin: Geranium, Bergamot, Grapefruit, Lemon, Lime, Peppermint, Rose, Thyme

Phototoxicity: (avoid with sunlight on the skin or history of skin cancer): Bergamot, Grapefruit, Lemon and Lime

Not for use in the Bath: (may irritate the skin): Lemon, Sage, Peppermint, Thyme

Not with Epilepsy: Fennel, Sage

Homeopathic: (These oils can neutralize the remedy): Peppermint

Blood Pressure: Thyme (don't use with HBP) /Clary-sage, Lavender (don't use with LBP)

Not for use with Kidney disease: Juniper

References:

Mayo Clinic – mayoclinic.com/health/menopause

Health Essentials.info (Based on notes taken of a live webinar with Dr. David Hill

Hormones and Essential Oils, Part 1, Tue, Feb 23, 2010.

Dechen, Shanti, *Clinical Aromatherapy, Level 1*

Worwood, Valerie Ann, *The Complete Book of Essential Oils and Aromatherapy*

Joys of Lavender, www.joys-of-lavender.com/baking-soda-bath