



## Easing the Journey-Treating Depression in Perimenopausal Women By Dr. Frank Ervolino

There is a saying from ancient Greek times: Psyche, Soma, Viscera. This means that there is a triangle between the mind, the muscles and the organs. What happens in the mind can actually affect the physical body and vice versa. Dr Salomon showed at UCLA in the 1970's that giving someone a very hard time actually caused a drop in the amount of white blood cells within two hours! Our conventional medical system is based on the ancient teachings of Hippocrates yet it lags Natural medicine and the Chinese medical systems in utilizing this link. To be fair, conventional medicine is trying to catch up and it does a great job at what is called heroic medicine which is saving someone who is close to death. Many of us suffer from chronic conditions that do not respond or are outside the scope of the conventional pharmaceutical therapy. Many times the pharmaceuticals have harsh side effects which makes the risk not worth the reward. That is where the Natural medicine and Chinese medical systems come in by offering gentler, natural solutions to our chronic health problems. There have been two recent studies out recently that evaluated the onset of depression in women who are transitioning into menopause. These studies findings provide useful information in relieving depression during perimenopause.

The first study looked at 486 women without a history of depression for a period of eight years. During studies such as this the final numbers are often less than those at the start due to incomplete data, changes in health status and various other reasons. In this study one hundred sixteen women experienced depressed mood or mood swings and 59 actually developed signs of clinical depression. One hundred and eight women experienced no change in mental status. The second study was done at Harvard looking at 460 women in the metropolitan Boston area ages 36 to 45. Significant findings of these studies were:

- Women were 2.5 times more likely to develop depression during perimenopause than menopause
- PMS experienced during a woman's reproductive years was a significant predictor of depression during perimenopause
- Higher serum estradiol estrogen levels, higher body weight and increased hot flashes are associated with depression
- The risk of new depression doubled in Perimenopausal women when compared to premenopausal women

Keep in mind, a large percentage of women who experience perimenopause have no mental/emotional symptoms, but for the percentage that do many face perplexing paths to a solution for their problem.

Anti-depressants are often prescribed by doctors as a solution for Perimenopausal depression and they do work well. Some women find the side effects undesirable or feel that a more natural solution to their problem is called for. For women who have not yet entered perimenopause,

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but feel they are at risk and want to prevent it the systems of Natural medicine and Traditional Chinese medicine offer the most options. Traditional Chinese medicine has been helping women prevent and treat perimenopause and menopausal symptoms for 2000 years. The Chinese herbal system has herbal formulas that have been formulated of periods as long as 800 years to treat the root causes of PMS, hot flashes, depression, mood swings, cloudy thinking and other conditions related to the prevention or treatment of perimenopause and menopause. In Chinese medicine hot flashes are often linked to a deficiency of Yin energy or Chi as they call it. Yin energy is the female cooling, calming and nurturing energy that was lost when the woman stops making eggs or follicles. There are herbal formulas that increase the Yin as well as acupuncture treatments, foods and exercises that are all geared towards increasing Yin and decreasing symptoms. Women with PMS are often found to be having a hard time processing their hormones in the liver. This becomes a problem right before their flow when they have the greatest amount of hormones in their blood that needs to be flushed from the body. The liver's p-450 enzyme system cannot handle the hormones so the liver uses a beta-reductase pathway to break down the hormones. The only problem with this is that the beta-reductase pathway has a toxic by-product associated with breaking down the hormones this way and that toxic by-product is what brings on PMS. In Chinese medicine we say that the woman has stuck liver chi if she experiences pain before flow and irritability. I use very common and effective herbal formulas plus acupuncture and dietary changes to remedy this. The Main formula for this condition is call Xiao Yao Wan or in English "Free and Easy Wanderer". Acupuncture can also help with depression, mood swings, hot flashes and insomnia. Acupuncture when administered properly is a gentle, pain free and very relaxing therapy. Bioidentical hormones can also be used to ease the journey into menopause. Bioidentical hormones are hormones derived from natural substances and with the case of estrogen it is broken down into the three estrogens found in the body: estrone, estriol and estradiol. The advantage of this is that the three estrogens can be combined into custom formulations by a compounding pharmacist to fit each woman's estrogen needs. For example, the estriol can be compounded into a transdermal cream that can be applied to the inner thigh to help with changes in skin and vaginal tissue. This is not available in pharmaceutical hormone replacement therapy. By using the weak estrogen called estriol you can have the estrogen needed to control hot flashes and menopausal symptoms without the risk of cancer and dementia found in conventional estrogen therapy. There is also evidence that estriol helps maintain bone density. I prefer subdermal hormone pellets to creams to ensure consistent hormone delivery.

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### Study citations

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