

Herbal Preparations

For some women, HRT is not advisable or not their preferred option. It is important to tell the health care professional who is considering prescribing any medication (not just HRT) if you are taking any herbal products.

Common mood changes that menopausal women experience include irritability, anxiety and depression. These mood changes often go hand-in-hand with poor sleep and fatigue, it has been shown that some herbal therapies have been found to benefit these symptoms.

- Phytoestrogens also known as 'plant isoflavones' are the most well-known products tried by women to manage their symptoms. They include products like soy, tofu, linseed, nuts, whole-grains, beans and cruciferous vegetables (broccoli and sprouts). Phytoestrogens work by mimicking oestrogen within the body. There is limited evidence of how effective they are, and the response seems to be very dependant on the women using them, the amount she takes and her main symptoms.
- Korean ginseng is traditionally used to help improve fatigue, physical exhaustion and loss of physical stamina. It may also increase vitality and improve your concentration. It is one of the most commonly self-prescribed herbs for menopausal symptoms because of its female hormonal (oestrogenic) properties and its ability to help you cope with stress. It is important to note that there is limited evidence in large trials to show its effectiveness, but some women say it helps.
- Chamomile is a gentle sedative, and its relaxing action may be useful for aiding sleep and anxiety. It has been traditionally used to treat anxiety, stress and associated insomnia. Lemon balm, valerian and passionflower can aid sleep and reduce anxiety too.
- St John's wort is used traditionally for mild to moderate anxiety, irritability and depressed mood so women suffering from these symptoms associated with menopause may try these to see if they help. There is limited evidence that they can help but often women need to be on a high dose for at least 6 months to assess the effect it has on them.
- Black cohosh, taken orally (by mouth) or topically (as a cream or pessary), may be useful for treating vaginal dryness.
- Linseed (flaxseed) oil has been shown to reduce vaginal dryness by a mildly oestrogenic action of 'plumping up' the vaginal cells.
- Red clover have blood-thinning properties, which keeps blood clots from forming. It is believed to help reduce symptoms of menopause, such as hot flashes and night sweats, because of their estrogen-like effects.

Low Libido (sex drive)

Many cultures use herbs with a reputation for increasing libido. It is not clear whether these herbs actually stimulate your sexual urge or have a hormonal effect. They possibly act as general tonics to increase energy and vitality and support your steady emotional state to help improve your sexual desire.

Many factors influence your libido, including your relationship with your partner, medications, general health and wellbeing, body image and vaginal dryness causing painful sex. Some of the herbs used for treating low libido include Korean ginseng, Tribulus and Maca.

- Korean ginseng may improve sexual function and arousal in menopausal women. In a very small study of 45 postmenopausal women with low libido.
- Tribulus was shown to reduce pain and improve sexual desire, arousal, lubrication and ability to achieve orgasm, compared to placebo.
- Maca has a reputation for improving sexual function and is one of the most popular herbs sought for this. However, again, there is limited evidence to support these claims.