

# Menopause...the fourth phase of a woman's journey

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## In 5 minutes with....

Brenda Rogers discusses the physical, emotional, mental and spiritual aspects to supporting menopause.

## Brenda's details...

Clinical naturopath, Certified Life Coach, Certified Clinical Aromatherapist, Yoga, Meditation & Spiritual Teacher.

**As a clinician, what is your approach to menopause?** We have been trained to think that menopause is a bunch of symptoms like hot flushes, night sweats, joint pain, sleep disturbances, which is a part of it, however, if you look at the ancient women's mysteries and the blood mysteries relating to the menstrual cycle, menopause is a rite of passage, similar to menarche, becoming a mother and dying. These are the rites of passage for women.

Menopause is still poorly understood. We are one of the few animals on the planet that experiences the menopause. The only other ones are certain species of whales. There are 4 types of whales known to have menopause – Beluga whales, narwals, killer whales and short finned pilot whales.

So we have a current narrative that can focus on the negative – the message is it's all about decline and decay and this can be pervasive in our culture! Yet there are some missing beautiful perspectives here that are very refreshing for a woman, especially those of us who may be afraid

of menopause or aging. You're not declining and decaying. On the contrary, you're stepping into wisdom and intuition and leadership. Our 50s and 60s can be the most magnificent couple of decades where we are the most productive, the most empowered, the most energetic. Then in our seventies, we step into this wise elder, the grey, wise or crone woman. There's this beautiful 'Maga' phase, in our fifties and sixties. We used to have just the maiden, mother, crone metaphor for a woman's life, but recently 'Maga' has been added for this powerful age in our 50s and 60s as the fourth phase. The 'Maga' phase is often described as the 'autumn of a woman's life'. It is said to be a time where a woman becomes a new version of herself.

The beautiful thing that I've noticed is that so many women at this age some women want to become healers! They discover nutrition, Bach flowers and Reiki and I think it's wonderful. I see and help many women step into the healer archetype, the wise grandmother mother archetype in their fifties and sixties. However, menopause is an endocrine challenge for all women. It's a course correction for our lives.

It's important to honour these impulses to step into our desires for authentic change. If we don't, we feel the stress of misalignment and that manifests as symptoms in our bodies. In many cases, we're stuck in a job that we don't like, or in a relationship we don't like, or we don't like our bodies, or we're looking after too many people, and women can completely lose themselves. They don't know who they are. This is stressful! Or women may be caring for their elderly parents, looking after teenagers. Then add in all the hormonal and biological changes and you have a huge endocrine challenge. As practitioners we need to support women through that.

**It's a holistic approach, mentally, physically, emotionally and spiritually isn't it?** Yes, we don't view the client just from a hormone or physical perspective. As you've mentioned, it's also the spiritual, mental, emotional, which I think is so important to cover with a holistic approach.

In my practice, I also do life coaching in addition to naturopathic medicine; we must be holistic. We do need to think of the mind, body and heart/spirit. If you read the principles of naturopathic medicine, we're not just a body with symptoms, we're part of environments; our social environment, our physical environment and so on. So, our spiritual and religious beliefs are all part of wellness and wellbeing. It's very easy to focus on supplements and diet, but sometimes, in my experience in working with people, it's not any of that, sometimes it's going to the beach and having the wind in your hair.

**It's also one of the principal's of naturopathic medicine – treating the individual....** Yes, it's an individual approach. We have this toolkit of wonderful modalities and various approaches.

**What can a woman do to prepare herself for menopause?** Adrenals, adrenals, adrenals, that's because menopause is an endocrine challenge no matter how healthy you are.

So you must have adequate cholesterol in the diet. Many women are trying to lose weight, and they may take fats and animal foods out of their diet, which I discourage because you need good amounts of cholesterol, not just for your oestrogen and progesterone, but for cortisol.

Then, of course, if there is stress going on and the adrenals aren't working optimally, you've got all that thyroid impact as well. When you've got sluggish, low functioning thyroid, you can have high cholesterol, depression, constipation and weight gain, and these can be very typical menopausal symptoms.

A lot of symptoms of menopause get blamed on hormones when there is also the need to address adrenal health and liver health.

So having a really nice, clean liver is important! Good digestive and pancreatic function is important, particularly because so many women can be carbohydrate addicted. Many women I see in clinic have glucose tolerance issues and subclinical diabetes or hyperglycaemia. Another very typical symptom is women waking up at 3:00 am which can also be liver from a Chinese medicine perspective. The liver is a very hot organ. It's a very busy, active organ, especially if it's trying to detoxify us.

**From a clinical perspective, do you have your main go-to herbs, foods and or nutrients for support during menopause?** I look for the underlying drivers and in my experience it's mostly excessive refined carbohydrates, vegetable oils and insufficient protein in the diet. I'm a big fan of dairy but I know that pasteurised and modernised processed dairy is very inflammatory and congestive in the body, so I suggest fermented dairy.

I also use herbs that support pancreatic health, like a fennel or fenugreek. And liver herbs are amazing: dandelion, chelidonium, St Mary's, are all helpful. Then of course the adrenal herbs. So licorice, if they don't have high blood pressure. Withania is a fabulous adrenal menopausal support herb. Siberian ginseng is one of my other favourites because it supports immune function as well. If you think about herbs and their personalities, some of them have a feminine aspect to them and Siberian ginseng definitely has that in my experience.

I try not to give laxatives for constipation but get curious about what's the underlying problem. Maybe there's not enough bile coming through the gallbladder. Maybe they're not eating enough fat. Maybe they're not drinking enough water, and actually, dehydration is a big factor with hot flushes as well because fluids regulate our temperature.

**I know you've got a bit of a tool kit that you use in your clinical practice such as yoga, are there any specific movements, postures that you could recommend?** Not really anything specific. I recommend women do any type of yoga. Go regularly and fall in love with it, like I did. Do some gentle yin yoga too as it teaches you how to surrender which is good for the adrenals.

The 5 Tibetan rites are pretty amazing as a morning ritual or just do the moon or sun salutation for calming and relaxing. Join a class so you get to be led and can really enjoy it.

**Thanks for sharing your experience and wisdom Brenda.** My pleasure, thank you for the opportunity Jacqui, I appreciate it.

