

Important Things to Know About Menopause



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The Context

By 2013 there will be 50 million menopausal women in the US. This is a force of energy, wisdom and power to be reckoned with and each of us, as we move into this profound transformation can make a choice about how we want that force to be directed on a personal and a planetary level. This period in our lives is about choice and intention. It is about choosing how we will meet the challenge of our changing bodies and changing roles. This change is about what we intend to do with our power.

As women, maidens, mothers and crones we generate our power from the archetypal and most primal source of all creation— female sexual energy. "With the help of Wise Woman Ways we can use this energy to resanctify ourselves, to re-wild ourselves, and to break free from the unnatural definitions of menopause that would domesticate and disempower us." (Sher Willis, p.xx forward of Menopausal Years by Susan Weed)

The age of menopause can occur between 35 and 60 and actually spans a broad period of time. It is commonly known as the Change of Life. This change is more like a metamorphosis, a transformation at the cellular level. The change typically has 3 phases which can be seen as a journey which begins with a stepping away from life as it has been - an isolating, inward phase. The second phase is like a journey through the underworld symbolically. It is the death of ourselves as the mother, caretaker, the death of our youth. The third phase is a phase of rebirth and reintegration into the world as something new and different, as a woman of wisdom, experience and power whose energy no longer needs to be focused on fulfilling the needs of others but now can be harnessed and directed in new ways for ourselves.

This is a brief pamphlet for women who want to know more about this incredible journey of transformation known as "The Change." The information provided here comes from several sources. Some of it is taken directly from the book listed above, Menopausal Years The Wise Woman Way by Susan Weed. This is a fantastic and thorough source book which I would urge all women to have a look at. Another source of information was a day long class on menopause taught by Gina McGarry, a well-known herbalist and teacher. The rest comes from my intensive herbal studies with Colette Gardiner during May to September of 2001. Within Colette's herbal course were classes in anatomy and physiology taught by Wendy Loren that complemented Colette's teaching during this herbal apprenticeship. All the information here is intended as educational material. I would encourage every woman to do some research, ask questions, discuss things with your physician and do only do what feels right for your body.

The Physical Change

Each phase of this profound change is different and has different needs and challenges. The first phase is called the pre or perimenopausal phase which usually lasts from 1-2 years. Signals of the onset of this are erratic menstrual cycles (more frequent, less frequent, scantier bleeding, heavier bleeding) occasional hot flashes, night sweats and disturbed sleep patterns. During this period it is helpful to nourish your entire hormonal system. It is a time when progesterone production is decreasing which effects bone mass and vaginal integrity. EFA's (essential fatty acids) from fish oils, flax seed oil, evening primrose oil, and borage seed oils are important at this time. Some of the herbs listed below as progesterone stimulating may be useful at this time. Drink teas that are nutrient rich such as dandelion, nettle, black currant or dandelion, sarsaparilla with cinnamon, cloves, licorice

(yogi teas often have many of these). Increase calcium rich foods in your diet such as green leafy vegetables, almonds, sesame seeds and pumpkin seeds, kefir and yogurt. Dandelion also helps the body absorb calcium better. A dandelion infused vinegar is calcium rich and aids the absorption of it! Start now to make a routine of gentle regular exercise. It helps to maintain bone mass and density, it stimulates circulation which is extremely important and it is good for balancing out mood swings and promoting good sleep.

During the middle phase of menopause, which can last from 2-5 years, things become a bit more intense. The bones resist taking in calcium, hot flashes and night sweats can become frequent, heart palpitations, emotional sensitivity, mood swings, extreme irritation and sleeplessness are common. The experience can range from almost no symptoms to feeling totally overwhelmed. Make sure you can take time out whenever needed during this time. It is much easier to cope with the moodiness, lack of sleep, hot flashes etc. if you are free to take care of your own needs without having to worry about taking care of others. Taking some time to take care of your self can help tremendously in learning to live with these experiences. Learn to relax and ride out your hot flashes. Like labor pains they become much worse if resisted. Spend time writing about your life and these experiences. What is it that you have been and have done in these past years? Make peace with your past and make plans for your future. What have you always wanted to create? What have you wanted to see or do? What have you learned over the years that you can now put into practice? Who would you most like to be?

The final phase technically begins about a year after your final menstruation. This is a time when there may still be hot flashes. It is a time of increased risk of

osteoporosis and heart disease. Problems with incontinence and vaginal atrophy may arise as a result of decreased hormonal production. Attention to nutrition, herbs and exercise during this time can halt and reverse osteoporosis, keep estrogen and progesterone sensitive tissues from atrophying and help maintain a healthy heart and circulatory system. During this time it is very important to eat little or no red meat. Meat and meat fat weaken your bones and heart, increase cancer risk, and may increase hot flashes. Move, dance, stretch, walk. Remember weight bearing exercise and stretching are most important now to maintain bone density and flexibility. Put your affairs in order. Think about all the things that are most important to you that you would like to have taken care of before you die and make sure you attend to them. Say the things that need to be said and stop putting off things that you want to get to some day. Seize the moment. Nourish yourself with every bite and every action. As we age our body needs more nutrients and often is less able to acquire them from our digestive process. Using a bitters formula before meals helps to increase your digestive efficiency. Continue to eat calcium rich foods. Use herbal vinegars, decrease consumption of processed white flour products and increase whole grains and fibers. Drink mineral rich teas. Eat fresh and dried fruits and leave the high fat desserts for special occasions.

What is happening physiologically as we move into menopause is that the pituitary which is a master gland regulating and stimulating many hormonal functions in our body begins to secrete higher levels than usual of 2 hormones called follicle stimulating hormone (FSH) and lutenizing hormone (LH). Also during this time our ovaries no longer prepare or release eggs and so our levels of progesterone production decreases. Our estrogen production no longer surges and peaks over the month but declines

to a baseline level where it stabilizes. Hormonal changes are not restricted to the reproductive organs. Changes are also occurring to the liver, fat cells, adrenals, pancreas, thyroid and hypothalamus. Because the ovaries are no longer producing hormones this task gets taken over by the adrenals. The adrenals are also in charge of your response to stress (adrenaline) and will have a harder time taking over new duties if they are already highly taxed by a stressful life.

The Symptoms/Effects

Hot flashes- clean out the free radicals, cancer cells, mutated cells, and old cells – it is a process which burns these things out of our body. It is a metabolic cleansing on a cellular level, cleaning up old cells and free radicals which are precursors to cancer. It is like the dragon roaring to guard the cave that is the access to spirit. The hot flashes can be extremely intense and uncomfortable like a little internal volcano, like liquid fire. They usually last about 10 minutes but can last up to 2 days. This is a message that you need some balancing. Stress can bring it on and makes it worse. Herbs are used to gentle the hot flashes but do not completely take them away. Vitex, Sage, Black Cohosh are all helpful for hot flashes and night sweats. Sage may have the effect creating vaginal dryness and Black Cohosh should not be used in large doses.

General prescription for Hot flashes: eat fresh greens, support the liver, avoid heat.

Herbal dosages:

Black Cohosh – Cimicifuga racemosa - as tincture 1 dropper 1-3X per day

Motherwort – Leonorus cardiaca – as tincture 1 dropper as needed up to 4 X per day

Vitex – vitex agnus castus – as tincture 1 dropper 1-3x per day or grind berries like pepper onto food

Sage – salvia officinale - as tincture 1-2 droppers 1-4X per day. As tea drink at room temp 1 cup in evening.

Insomnia – is a typical symptom. Waking up at 3, 4 or 5 am. You may notice your sleep patterns changing. Those who resist may suffer from sleep deprivation. Go to bed earlier and use the morning as quiet time for journaling, meditating or something which fulfills and nurtures you. Herbs that are helpful for relaxation and insomnia are chamomile, lemon balm, lavender, oat straw, hedge nettle, skullcap, hops, passion flower, and valerian. These are known as nervines. They can be taken alone or in combination brewed as a relaxing tea, taken as tinctures in a small glass of water or already combined in capsules. They range from gentlest to strongest in this list.

Lack of sexual interest - The energy previously used sexually is redirected to developing a relationship with the self rather than with the other. This is normal. Vitex has been known to stimulate female libido should this worry you.

Depression – It is part of the life cycle, lower energy, turning inward. Swim deep and give yourself up to the experience knowing you will come out the other side. Avoiding or resisting these feelings will make them persist. It is natural that this transition will bring about some depression. Review the losses and gains over the years, what worked and what didn't? Use this knowledge for deciding how to spend your energy for what is most important to you. Many of the nervines listed above can be helpful in alleviating anxiety, distress and insomnia that often come with depression. Natural light, exercise and fresh air also go a long way to gentle the effects of depression. Humor and laughter are often the best remedies.

Menstrual flooding – passing big clots and lots of blood. This is a time of the final cleansing of the uterus

and endometrial lining. Herbs can help balance this. Use uterine astringents to strengthen and tonify the uterus – raspberry and blackberry root, vitex, yarrow.

Irritability – For many women it's the first time for finding their voice after years of repressing it. It is good to express yourself. Also for many women it's the time when they are able to really speak the truth because there is no longer the children to protect, nothing to lose. It may be helpful to spend time alone or to use some of the mild nervines to take the edge off of these moods if being alone is not possible. Irritation can also be useful as a force to take care of situations that require a bit more forthrightness than usual.

Heart Palpitations – related to the change of hormonal levels. This can be frightening and uncomfortable. Motherwort soothes and calms – use with breaks – 2wks on 1 wk off. Hawthorne Berry can also be helpful here as can some of the nervines to soothe and calm.

Skin and vaginal dryness – tears in the vaginal wall can be created from irritation and rubbing due to the dryness. Irritation and tearing are doorways to infection so. Use soothing demulcent herbs such as comfrey, borage, rose, marshmallow in teas or tinctures to help with both the irritation of the tissues and the dryness. Soothing ointments and creams can also be helpful. Comfrey ointment, wild yam ointment and slippery elm gel, olive oil and taking vitamin E are all helpful for vaginal dryness. For dry skin drink lots of water and use nourishing lotions.

Osteoporosis – Use it or lose it. Where women are active with weight bearing activities this is not a problem. Bone loss can be repaired with calcium, stretching and weight bearing exercise. Increase calcium rich foods in your diet this is especially important in the early and late phases. During the

middle phase the bones actually resist absorbing calcium so the stronger and denser they are going into this phase the better off you will be. The bones will be able to absorb calcium again during the later phase so keep eating these calcium rich foods. Your bones can maintain integrity during the middle phase with regular stretching and exercise.

Diminished energy levels – It is natural to slow down at this time. Find a new rhythm for yourself. It is an opportunity to change things, to stop doing things that you don't want to do anymore. Use your energy doing what you do like and want to do. Energy levels can be supported through food and herbs. Trace minerals are especially important as is exercise. Decrease stress as much as possible. Borage helps us to handle the stress. Adaptogens such as ginseng and dong quai can help to increase energy levels over time, and adrenal tonics such as licorice are important.

Thyroid – Thyroid imbalance is not uncommon. Your metabolism might drop because the thyroid gets sluggish. Your endocrine system is changing so imbalances can occur. Supporting the liver helps support the endocrine system. Dandelion is specific to the liver. The liver plays an important role in hormonal balance because it both stores and breaks down old hormones. If it is full up with old ones no new ones are created, if it doesn't properly break down what is circulating in your system imbalances can occur. We have lots of liver problems in the US because of a lack of bitter in our diet. Tonify the liver using bitters. Metabolisms will get sluggish if the liver is backed up. Natural light is also important as it affects the pineal and the pituitary glands which in turn effect endocrine secretions. So spend some time outside each day. Check with your physician if this becomes a serious problem.

Herbal Allies

Plants also have hormones. These are not the same as human hormones and so one cannot be used directly to replace the other though plant hormones are converted to synthetic human hormones in the laboratory. Plant hormones are called phytosterols. Phytosterols can be used by our bodies as the raw materials or building blocks to make its own hormones in the levels it needs. Each woman is different and each day is different. What the body needs to function optimally changes from day to day depending on many factors. Our bodies have been created to be able to monitor and manufacture what they need to function. Our bodies are also able to fluctuate in response to any changes that happen moment by moment. Synthetic hormones can not do this and may effect the body's ability to maintain itself effectively. It is also important for the body to be able to break down hormones effectively. The liver plays a major role in the break down and excretion of hormones from the body.

Phytosterols are not the same as estrogen or progesterone. Since they provide the raw materials for the body to make hormones they don't need to be taken in specific doses or to be broken down like hormones. The body is left to decide for itself how much hormone is needed at any given time. Some women's bodies need to be regulated by synthetic hormones because something is not working right in their endocrine systems. Other women should not use synthetic hormones because it may cause serious side effects. Every person is different and has different considerations and needs. Phytosterols can be helpful in many cases. Their effects will be very different if taken while on synthetic hormones. Most have nutritive or tonic effects due to other things in the plant's composition and so can still be beneficial in different ways. They can also have interactions with

the synthetic hormones or other medications so always check several sources before embarking on any course of action.

Phytosterols are most concentrated in perennial roots like dandelion, wild yam, maca and ginseng, in hard berries like vitex and saw palmetto and in leaf buds such as briar rose and black currant. Your body's ability to effectively use phytosterols increases when other factors are present in the plants such as flavinoids, glycosides, saponins, and minerals. The herbs that are well known as hormone balancers such as vitex, maca, dong quai, black cohosh, wild yam and sarsaparilla, have many of these constituents. Even inconsistent use of these plants during early menopause will help nourish your ovaries, adrenals, pituitary and make your transition through these times easier.

Herbs that promote estrogen production: Use when bleeding is scanty, early, or irregular

Alfalfa – (*Medicago sativa*) is rich in assimilable nutrients including protein, calcium, vitamin A, B, C, D, E, and K. It is beneficial in moderation can be eaten as sprouts or used in a tea.

Red Clover – (*Tifolium pratense*) is a nutritive herb that is known as a blood thinner which can help circulation. It is a blood purifier and expectorant, relaxes spasms is a diuretic and is good for rashes and skin eruptions. |

Black Cohosh – (*Cimicifua racemosa*) Use this especially if there is anxiety. It reduces the intensity and frequency of hot flashes, supports and eases the metamorphosis of menopause, it tonifies and strengthens pelvic muscles, stimulates digestion, relieves menstrual pain and irregularity, relieves headaches and joint pain, lowers blood pressure and

improves circulation, eases anxiety, relieves water retention and breast tenderness. Do not use if there is menstrual flooding or if there is a possibility of pregnancy. Use 10-15 drops of tincture in a half a glass of water once or twice a day. 3 weeks on 1 week off.

Hops – (*Humulus lupulus*) is a bitter tonic herb that acts as a diuretic, relieves pain, and relaxes spasms. It is a potent sedative and has anti-bacterial effects.

Licorice – (*Glycyrrhiza glabra*) Stimulates production of hormones by the adrenals. It is soothing and healing to the digestive system and can work as a gentle laxative. It is very sweet making a nice addition to various tea blends. Add 1/2 teaspoon to tea mixes. Excess use can cause water retention which can be associated with increased blood pressure.

Sage – (*Salvia officianlis*) Sage is a plant that has long been used for menopausal women. It is very drying so use it in small amounts. It is useful for menstrual flooding. It can be helpful in reducing hot flashes and night sweats, balancing hormones and emotional swings. Relieves headaches and aching joints. It is good for the liver and is a digestive tonic. It is also a urinary disinfectant and helps improve circulation. It contains calcium, zinc and potassium which is good for cellular and nervous system function. Sage means wisdom. It is a plant that helps us connect to our own wisdom through aromatherapy and flower essences. It is a plant that is sacred to Native Americans and is used to purify and cleanse. Dosage – 1 cup of tea or 20 drops of tincture every other day as a tonic. If dry mouth or vaginal dryness occur use only when needed to alleviate specific symptoms.

Herbs that promote progesterone are used when bleeding is to frequent and too heavy

Vitex – (*Vitex agnus-castus*) is especially helpful to those who come to menopause early. It is a slow acting tonic which changes the body over a period of time. If used over the long haul it has been shown to reduce hot flashes and night sweats, relieve cramping, reduce and eliminate endometriosis and uterine fibroids, eliminate menstrual flooding, spotting and irregular cycles, redirect hysteria into steady usable energy, clear skin problems, relieve hormone related constipation and digestive stress, lessen tenderness and lumps in the breast, protect against osteoporosis, treat vaginal dryness and in over 2,000 years of use it has a reputation for being free of side effects. It is a hormonal balancer. It works on the pituitary creating balanced secretions between the pituitary, ovaries and adrenals balancing the levels of progesterone and estrogen. It works to support the pituitary gland which is one of the master glands of the endocrine system.

You use the berry. It smells and tastes like pepper. You can make a decoction (tea) of the berry, mix it in a blend with other herbs, grind it up and put it in capsules or put the berries in your pepper grinder and grind it onto your food. *Vitex* is a female tonic. It reduces PMS symptoms and helps to regulate irregular periods. The herb should be taken for some months to see the full benefit. Dosage 30 drops 1-2x daily, or ground on food 1 tsp per day. Use it 3 weeks on one week off. Can help to reverse scar tissue and reduce fibroids. May not be as effective if taken while on birth control pills or HRT.

Sarsaparilla root – (*Smilax spp.*) Used to clear the body of toxins, treat arthritis and urinary infections. It is anti-inflammatory, diuretic, tonic and is useful for PMS debility and depression associated with menopause. Dosage: tincture - 30 drops 1-2x daily, as tea mix 1-2 cups per day.

Wild yam – (*Dioscorea villosa*) Was used by the Mayans and Aztecs as a relaxing remedy for painful periods, ovarian pain and labor. It is anti-inflammatory so good for arthritic conditions and for digestive problems. As tincture 1-2 droppersful 2 X per day, as tea 1/2 cup twice a day or use an infused oil on soft tissue as often as needed.

Yarrow – (*Achillea millefolium*) – Yarrow is highly astringent, diuretic, antiseptic and stops internal bleeding. It helps to regulate the menstrual cycle, reduces heavy bleeding, tones varicose veins, increases circulation and induces sweating. It is a bitter tonic and known can have the effect of decreasing blood pressure. Mix in tea blends 1-2 cups per day. Take in bitters formula, or as tincture 30 drops 1 x per day as tonic. 2 droppersful 3x per day when needed.

Other useful allies:

Borage – (*Borago officinalis*) Use leaves and flowers. Borage is an adrenal, nerve tonic. It also is a mild diuretic, expectorant and anti-depressant. Borage means courage in Celtic so energetically it is known to give strength, and power to the will. Dosage: 3 cups a day of tea from fresh or dry plant or 20 drops of tincture 3x per day.

Garlic – (*Allium sativum*) - 2 cloves daily – It supports the liver and reduces cholesterol levels in the blood It also helps support immune system

Hawthorne Berry – (*Crataegus* spp.) – Is a tonic for the heart and circulatory system. Hawthorne works in tune with the body's own physiological processes. It takes time for changes to occur. This is another one to take over a long period of time. Tincture 1-2 droppers 2-3x per day. Tea made from the berries drink a cup 1

– 3 x per day. Safe to use with other medications and good tasting.

Dandelion – (*Taraxacum officinale*) – Dandelion is a premier liver tonic. It has lots of minerals and it increases the absorption of calcium. It is one of the most effective detoxifying herbs. It works on the liver and gall bladder to help remove waste products and stimulates the kidneys to remove toxins in the urine. It has major therapeutic benefits for many conditions. As a tincture 2-4 droppers 2-3x per day. As tea 1-2 cups per day use root, leaf or both. Young dandelion leaf steeped in your favorite vinegar can be used sprinkled on foods or as basis for salad dressings. This provides calcium and many needed minerals.

Motherwort – (*Leonuris cardiaca*) – Use for high blood pressure and heart palpitations. It is a gentle sedative that promotes relaxation. It is especially useful for delayed periods, menstrual pain and PMS. It should not be used if bleeding is heavy 1-2 droppers 1-4x per day. Use over time with occasional breaks.

Nervines as needed – chamomile, lemon balm, hedge nettle, oatstraw, skullcap, passionflower, hops, valerian. Can be made into teas singularly or in any combination. Hops and Valerian have very strong flavors and so should be used in small doses. Many "sleepytime" tea blends already exist which work well for calming. Valerian has been known to leave a "hangover" for some people. Try various ones to see what works best for you.

Liver support – bitters blends, dandelion, burdock, milk thistle. These come as dry herbs, tinctures and capsules use what is easiest for you.

Hormone balancing foods: alfalfa, and red clover sprouts, angelica, parsley, oats, soy products, licorice.

Support the adrenals because they are taking over ovaries hormonal functions. The best things you can do for the adrenals are to reduce stress and use EFA's (essential fatty acids) , minerals and herbs to support adrenals.

Choices

In the western medical world menopause is most often dealt with through hormone replacement therapy (HRT). This means taking pharmaceutical hormones probably for the rest of your life. Pharmaceutical companies do not necessarily have your best interests in mind. Physicians are not always well versed in women's reproductive systems and they are very well informed by the pharmaceutical industry. Remember 50 million women is big business. Explore your options. Ask questions. Educate yourself from a variety of sources and make choices about which works best for you. It is your body, nobody else knows exactly what you are experiencing, nobody else will take care of your body for you.

Pros and Cons of HRT

Eliminates hot flashes

Eliminates vaginal dryness

Causes an initial decrease in bone loss

Causes increase in fibroid growth

Increase risk of stroke

Increase risk of breast cancer (this is a very hotly debated topic with conflicting evidence both ways)

Increase risk of gall bladder disease

More medical visits and expenses

Menses can continue

Folic acid levels decrease affecting bone, skin and hair

Increased water retention

Increased breast soreness

May have to continue for the rest of your life once started

Women who should not have HRT

women with a history of:

breast or uterine cancer	diabetes
migraines	a tendency to high blood pressure
liver disease	blood clots
uterine fibroids	stroke
gall bladder problems	varicose veins
lumpy or fibrous breasts	obesity.

Other options: Work with nutrition

- A diet high in fiber, minerals and low in fat and dairy.
- Cut down on refined and processed foods because the preservatives can confuse our endocrine systems
- Decrease use of caffeine it seems to cause erratic triggering in the nervous system.
- Review your relationship to alcohol, it is hard on the liver and digestive system but stress is also damaging.
- Decrease consumption of carbonated drinks they are high in phosphorus which inhibits the excretion of old hormones from the system.
- Increase friendly intestinal bacteria foods. Both Yogurt and kefir do this which aids the absorption of minerals and nutrients.
- Increase vegetable proteins by eating soy (tofu, tempeh and various faux meat products made with soy), seitan, beans, sprouts. nuts and seeds
- Eat whole grains, lots of vegetables, and vegetable juices.
- Include 4-5 servings a day of calcium rich foods or calcium rich herbal tonics – broccoli, kale, spinach, collards and mustard greens, dandelion greens,

tomato, lemons, grapefruit, seaweed, dried fruits, blackstrap molasses, corn tortillas

Calcium - 1500 mg per day. It works more efficiently when combined with: magnesium, boron, Vitamin K and Vitamin D.

Dietary calcium and exercise increases bone mass and flexibility. Other sources of calcium are: dairy, soups made from bones, almonds, sesame seeds, pumpkin seeds, sunflower seeds, oats, fish, dried fruits, watercress, horsetail, chickweed, nettle, spinach, kales, dandelion, borage, comfrey, chamomile.

Calcium tea: Equal parts horsetail, nettles, oat straw, and raspberry leaf. 1 qt boiling water over 1/2 – 3/4 cup herb. Steep 2 hrs to overnight drink through out the day. This tea provides 200-450 mgs. of calcium per cup.

Spring tonic – dandelion leaf, dock leaf, chickweed, nettles, and mallow cover with apple cider vinegar let steep 2 wks to a month use regularly on food and in salad dressings as a perfect calcium tonic. Vinegar helps calcium absorption.

Tums and calcium supplements often lay a coating on the intestinal walls that lay down the hairs which are where nutrients get absorbed. So, they actually decrease calcium absorption. The use of bitter blends will aid digestion decreasing the need for such remedies for heartburn and indigestion.

Iron: cooking in a cast iron pan helps add assimilable iron to foods. Molasses, figs, dates, raisins, yellow dock, burdock rt., alfalfa, seaweeds, miso, garbanzos, sunflower seeds, watercress, chickweed, comfrey, and parsley.

Fiber – fiber is for cleansing the intestines. When hormones break down the primary path out of the body is from the liver out with the bile. Fiber is thought to bind to hormonal by-products and carry them out. Fiber works to keep things moving through the intestines. Whole grains cooked, vegetables and fruit with the skins on, psyllium, and oatmeal.

Water – Drinking 2 liters a day is recommended. Saunas and sweats are helpful to move things out of the body and to stimulate circulation. Spending time in baths, and swimming is relaxing and sothing to the body at all levels.

Body work - Stretching and weight bearing exercise are essential. Try yoga. Work on flexibility and balancing, dance a lot, take Marshall arts. Massage is good as it reduces stress and moves things in your body. It is relaxing and helps release toxins. It is also healing for the endocrine and lymph systems, aids circulation and increases well-being on all levels. So get lots of massages.

Things to avoid or cut down on:

Smoking – decreases circulation and increases the risk of stroke and cancer and heart disease.

Alcohol consumption – affects liver and digestion, fluid levels in body, circulation and nervous system.

Sugar, fats, legal and illegal drugs

Stress, get rid of it. It effects every part of your body in mostly non-beneficial ways. It makes all the symptoms of menopause more acute and decreases your body's ability to respond and maintain it's normal functioning.

The Spiritual Rite of Passage – Putting Things in Perspective

Some indigenous groups were governed by councils of elder women, others were governed by elders of both sexes. Elder women have long been looked up to

for their wisdom and experience. In many cultures they hold positions of respect and power. Menopause was and is in many cultures a celebrated rite of passage seen as a woman moving into her own power free from her children and duties as caretaker of the family.

Studies have shown that the attitude and beliefs a woman moves into menopause with deeply affect her experience in terms of difficulties with symptoms. In large part our experience of menopause is a matter of deciding how we want to go through this experience. Do you want to be resentful, in denial, dragging your feet and holding onto youth or do you want to embrace this time as a powerful shift of life, shift of focus and step into the strength and power that is your life?

It is a natural slowing down time, a time to be less driven and to use our lifetime's experience to focus on what is really important and let go of what is not. It is a time to become comfortable in our own skins and to let go of many fears. After all, by now, we have all lived through many experiences and difficulties and we know that we have survived all that we have encountered so there is no need to spend a lot of energy fearing the future.

The Crone - The archetype of wisdom - The Wizardess, the Priestess – this is a time to make a spiritual connection to the crone/wizard within.

In Western culture the Crone is pictured as the old witch, something dark and evil to be feared. This image goes along with our collective social view of aging especially aging in women. In other times and in other cultures the crone and this time of life has been depicted in a more integrated form as the dark time that is the necessary counterpart to light. It has been seen as the time when things rest as they do during the winter. Wintertime is the time when the crone

holds sway. She puts everything to rest with a blanket of snow. She is the guide through the underworld, lots of dreamtime, time to repair, wind down and plan for the spring. Winter is a time for plants to rest and build up energy in their roots, a time for seeds to germinate, a quiet space. Winter is the midwife of life, death and rebirth. Many things die back in the winter and we see their skeletons. It is a time when all is slowed down. Midnight is the Crone's time, winter is the Crone's season. The Crone teaches in the dark space with dreams and visions. Crone rituals were often performed at midnight. Darkness absorbs all negativity and reflects it back as light. Healing happens at night in the quiet space during the body's regeneration phase. Trees breathe in at night. It is the inbreath of life.

Other Images – The Spinner, The Weaver, the Cutter. She weaves together people, communities. She sits on the edge between civilization and wilderness protecting the wilderness, She will say her Truth – there is nothing to lose. She takes the position of the naturally appointed teacher one who has seen and experienced many things and now shares that wisdom with those who seek that knowledge.

Crones have always been diviners and prophets. The Crone has enough experience to know her own voice and to know what is other and she is able to speak all truth no matter how hard. She is the one who helps those crossing over to death. They are returning to the womb of the mother.

The Crone's holy day is Samahin – Halloween. It is the ending of the old year in the Celtic calendar. It is the time when the harvest is in and put away and we return to the womb. A time of gestation when new ideas are forming and energy is gathering. Any thing not harvested by this time was left as offerings to the Nature Spirits and other creatures. The wicked witch is

an image which dominates Halloween. She is a woman of power and she is often depicted stirring something in a large cauldron – alchemical transformation. The dark of the moon is a good time to make rituals for the elders and the crone. During these times make an affirming tea and offer it to elders everywhere, as a blessing of peace, for compassion, and health.

Menopause is the time of our second Saturn return (the first occurs around 27-28 years old) which burns away whatever is no longer appropriate to our path. It is an opportunity to make changes in our lives, a time to focus on ourselves.

Idea for Rituals / Rites of Passage / Croning Ceremony

- A ritual bath – washing away the past and emerging in a new phase.
- A new garment – A cloak of authority
- Gather together people who are important to you that support you moving into a new phase of life.
- Form a circle
- Call in the directions and elements, ancestors, guide and guardians
- Light a candle for each decade plus 1 for the future as the candle is being lit the one(s) being croned speaks of her life the first decade – lights the first candle, 2nd decade, 2nd candle, and so forth. She speaks her dreams for the future into the circle as she lights the last candle.
- Big feast and celebration.

Other typical rites of passage actions are: cutting hair, body marking, changing names, forming circles, things that represent new behaviors. Give thanks and set intentions. Spend time alone and in isolation. It is a time to reflect and to come into relationship with oneself. Various other ways to do this are Vision

questing, a pilgrimage, a retreat, or a journey out into nature. This journey, this time alone can be perceived as a journey through the underworld to meet the Crone and ask her questions or as a means of creating a space, a breaking point between what has been and what we are moving into – the crossing of a threshold.

Our relationships are changing and ending. Our relationship to who we have seen ourselves to be, our relationship to our children, to our spouses and partners, our roles as mother and caregiver, our relationship to our bodies and our sexuality all are changing whether we choose to embrace it or not. I urge you to make the choice to step into your strength, power and wisdom. I also urge you to support all the women you know to do the same. After all 50,000,000,000 women could definitely make some changes in the world!

I hope this information has been helpful to you and that you share it with other women who might find this information useful.

Welcome to all the wise women who are now populating the planet. Together we can use our wisdom to create a world where women are loved, respected, equal in participation and power, where the masculine and feminine energies are balanced and working together harmoniously. We can create a world where all life on the planet, is loved, respected, nurtured and recognized and maintaining symbiotic relationships with the living systems that support all life is recognized as our kuleana.

Mahalo Nui Loa and Aloha