

Complementary and Alternative Medicine for Menopausal Symptoms Management

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ABSTRACT

Menopause is the permanent cessation of menstruation for a complete 12 consecutive months while post-menopause is the period following menopause marked by changes in hormonal status. Studies stated that menopausal women experience symptoms like hot flashes/flushes, night sweats, sleep disturbances, sexual dysfunction, mood disorders, weight gain and cognitive decline which overall affect their lives. Though hormonal therapies are used for symptom management, it was found to have some side effects and increase the chance of cancer. Complementary and alternative medicines (CAM) have a positive impact on the same management. Relaxation, biofeedback, meditation, aromatherapy, use of mineral products and other methods like traditional Chinese medicines, reflexology, acupuncture, acupressure and homeopathy are found to be effective in controlling menopause-related symptoms. We should make them aware of these complementary and alternative medicines.

Keywords: Menopause, post-menopause, complementary and alternative medicine.

INTRODUCTION

Menopause is the permanent cessation of menstruation for a complete 12 consecutive months and post-menopause is the period following menopause. [1,2] It is a naturally occurring transitional period from reproductive to non-reproductive, marked by changes in hormonal status. This

transition does not occur suddenly or abruptly but occurs over years along with menopausal-related changes in physical, psychological, emotional, sexual and social aspects. [3,4] The world population of women aged ≥ 50 years is expected to increase to 1200 million by the year 2030. Similarly, the number of women aged 45 years and above in India is expected to reach 401 million in 2026 from 96 million at present (Population Projection Survey 2011). [5] Studies stated that more than half of these women would experience symptoms like hot flashes/flushes, night sweats, sleep disturbances, sexual dysfunction, mood disorders, weight gain and cognitive decline which overall affect their lives. [6]

Though hormonal therapies (HRT) are used commonly for managing menopausal symptoms, it was found to increase the health risk for cancer and have some side effects. [6] So, to prevent women from this risk, we should make them aware of the CAM available which will help them in reducing the symptoms.

Aim of this article:

This article aims to review complementary and alternative (CAM) interventions for menopausal symptoms.

COMPLEMENTARY AND ALTERNATIVE MEDICINE

Standard medical care: It is a proper treatment for certain types of diseases which

are accepted and widely used by health care professionals.^[7]

Complementary therapy: These are the interventions which are being used along with the standard medical care, like acupuncture and massage which are used for pain management along with the standard medical care like analgesics.^[7]

Alternative therapy: These are used instead of standard medical treatment, like the use of herbal products instead of medicine.^[7]

CAM is broadly divided into three categories and it is represented below.

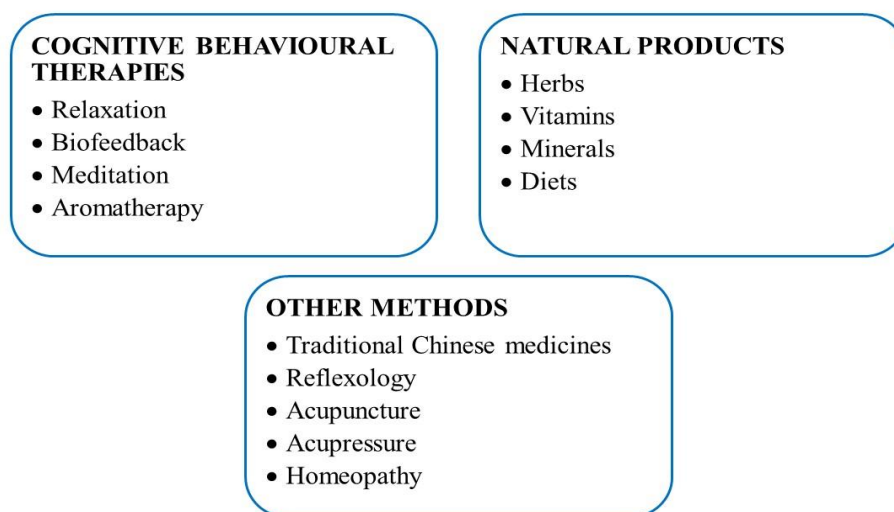


Figure 1 Complementary and alternative medicine division.^[6]

COMPLEMENTARY AND ALTERNATIVE MEDICINE FOR MENOPAUSAL SYMPTOMS MANAGEMENT

Relaxation

It is a process which reduces stress and anxiety in our mind and body through various techniques like deep breathing exercises, muscle relaxation and visualization.^[8] Studies have shown that mindfulness training and meditation improve sleep quality, reduce the severity of insomnia, improve the level of attention and reduce the menopausal and vasomotor symptoms.^[9] Relaxation techniques like paced respiration (slow deep breathing that uses the diaphragm for inhalation and exhalation) and muscle relaxation were effective for the relief of symptoms, hot flashes, night sweats and sleep disturbance.^[10]

Biofeedback

Type of mind-body technique which involves control of some of the body's

functions like heart rate, respiration, breathing and skin temperature. It relaxes muscles and eases stress.^[8] This technique was found to be effective in controlling hot flashes.^[11] Not many research studies have been found on biofeedback.

Meditation

Meditation is the self-regulatory process by which attention is developed through practice. Practice focusing our mind on a particular thought or object and training to pay attention to achieve mental and emotional stability and calmness.^[12] Mindfulness training improves sleep quality and reduces the severity of insomnia level and other vasomotor symptoms.^[13,14] There are various ways of practicing meditation that serve different purposes. Deep breathing exercises and relaxation techniques have been shown to provide a positive impact on controlling vasomotor symptoms like hot flashes and night sweating.^[15]

Aromatherapy

Aromatherapy is the method of use of aromatic essential oil extracted from flowers and other non-flowering plants for inhalation massage or both as a therapeutic method. Various experimental studies conducted on aromatherapy found that aromatherapy (lavender/ low dose of neroli) inhalation and massage reduce menopausal symptoms.^[16,17] Aromatherapy massage was found to be effective, especially in reducing stress and depression among middle-aged women.^[18]

Herbal medicine

These are products extracted from plants that are used to treat diseases or for the enhancement of health and well-being.^[19] Sage herbs, black cohosh, black cumin, fennel, evening primrose, ginkgo, aniseed and soybean are effective in the management of menopausal symptoms.^[20] In an experimental study conducted among menopausal women, oral intake of herbal extracts of chamomile, fennel and saffron was found to be effective in controlling urogenital and psychological symptoms.^[21]

Vitamins and minerals

Vitamin E and C supplements reduce the chances of cardiovascular diseases and studies also found that vitamins A and C are effective in reducing night sweats, insomnia, depression and tiredness. Vitamins not only reduce symptoms but also improve their well-being.^[22]

Various clinical evidence exists on the effectiveness of intake of vitamin K and a combination of calcium and vitamin D in reducing bone mineral density loss and the incidence of fractures in menopausal women.^[23]

Diets

Soy and soy products have a high content of phytoestrogens which reduces menopausal symptoms. Dietary modification: low in fat and high in whole grains, fruits and vegetables also help in controlling vasomotor symptoms as these diets contain

rich amounts of antioxidants and fibres including vitamins C & E, carotenoids and flavonoids.^[24] Regular intake of foods high in fibre foods also reduces menopausal symptoms and makes them healthier. Various studies state that lifestyle and dietary factors also play a very important role in the onset of menopause and the symptoms experienced.^[25]

Reflexology

It is a type of massage that involves applying different amounts of pressure to the feet, hands and ears. Foot reflexology is effective in reducing women's depression and improves sleep disorders. Reflexology not only improves the quality of sleep, but studies have found that it also reduces hot flashes and relieves muscle tension which overall improves their total wellbeing.^[26]

Acupressure

It is a traditional Chinese medical practice in which pressure is applied to a specific point on the body. Acupressure was found to be effective in reducing pain, nausea, vomiting and sleep disorders by influencing the change in melatonin levels and thereby increasing the serotonin secretion. In menopausal women, acupressure reduces hot flashes, and night sweats and improves their health quality.^[27,28] In a clinical trial conducted among menopausal women found that applying pressure on auricular points of Shenmen reduces menopausal stress and improves sleep quality.^[29]

Homeopathy

It is a medical system developed in Germany. It works on two unconventional theories:

- “Like cures like” is a notion that a disease can be cured by a substance that produces similar symptoms in a healthy person.
- “Law of minimum dose” a notion that the lower the dose of medication, the greater its effectiveness.

Homeopathic products can be extracted from plants, minerals or animal origins.^[30]

Use of homeopathic medicine was found to improve quality of life by reducing hot flashes, depression and metabolic abnormalities. Homeopathy products of *Capsium frutescens* were found to be effective in controlling hot flashes.^[31]

CONCLUSION

Complementary and alternative medicine (CAM) for menopause is found to be effective and have fewer side effects as compared to hormonal replacement therapies. So, as a healthcare provider, we should make postmenopausal women aware of all the available CAM which would help them in controlling the symptoms and in improving their quality of life. Lifestyle and dietary modification which is one of the CAM plays a very important role in improving their overall health as there is a saying that small changes eventually add up to huge results.

Declaration by Authors

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