

Alternative Treatments for Menopause

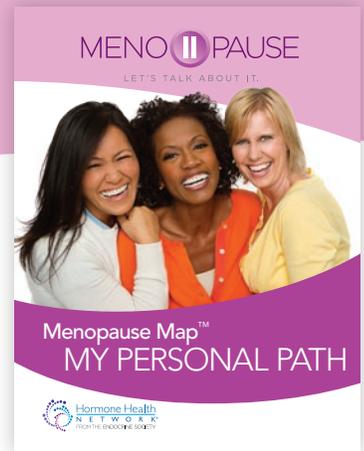
Some women find relief from menopause symptoms by turning to what is called complementary and alternative medicine (CAM). CAM refers to health practices and treatments that are usually considered outside of mainstream medicine.

CAM treatments and therapies are usually (but not always) safe. But even with dietary and herbal supplements, there can be side effects and interactions with other medications. It's wise to talk with your health care provider before starting a CAM therapy.

The first table below lists common herbal supplements and the menopause symptoms they're used to treat.

Symptom	Herb
Hot Flashes	Dong Quai, Black Cohosh, Evening Primrose, Bioflavonoids, Wild Mexican Yam, Soy Products, Sarsaparilla, Fennel, Chaste Tree, Hawthorne
Insomnia	Valerian
Vaginal Dryness	Vitamin E, Flax Seed Oil, Evening Primrose Oil
Fatigue	Ginger, Ginseng, Blessed Thistle, Cayenne Pepper
Anxiety	Chamomile Tea, Passion Flower, Valerian
Skin Changes	Flax Seed Oil, Evening Primrose Oil
Aches and Pains	Dong Quai, Flax Seed, Kava-Kava
Memory Loss	Ginkgo Biloba

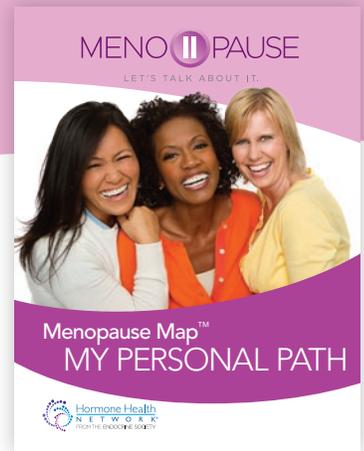
Source: Red Hot Mamas redhotmamas.org



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Many CAM therapies have been the subjects of research into their effectiveness. The table on the following pages shows the current scientific understanding of these popular therapies.

CAM TREATMENTS: WHAT THE SCIENCE SAYS		
<i>Botanical Treatments</i>		
<i>Treatment</i>	<i>What the Science Says</i>	<i>Cautions and Side Effects</i>
Black cohosh	Not proved to relieve menopausal symptoms more than placebo	Not for women with liver disease
Dong quai	Does not reduce hot flashes more than placebo	Not for women who take warfarin, a blood thinner
Evening primrose	No effect on menopausal symptoms May help breast tenderness	Can cause headaches and stomach upset
Ginseng	May help improve sleep, mood, and sense of well-being Not proved to relieve hot flashes or improve memory or concentration	Can cause headaches and stomach upset
Kava	May help relieve anxiety Not shown to help other menopausal symptoms	Possible link between kava and liver damage
Phytoestrogens (estrogen-like substances in cereal, soy, vegetables, and herbs)	Soy supplements may help hot flashes but not proved Red clover not proved to relieve hot flashes more than placebo	May not be for women with conditions affected by hormones (such as breast, ovarian, or uterine cancer); consult your doctor before taking phytoestrogens
Valerian	May help insomnia but effects not proved	Can cause headaches, dizziness, stomach upset, and fatigue the morning after use



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CAM TREATMENTS: WHAT THE SCIENCE SAYS

Non-Botanical Supplements

Melatonin	Can help older people fall asleep and may help others overcome insomnia	May be safe when used short term at recommended doses
Vitamin E	Not proved to relieve hot flashes	May interact with other medications

Mind-Body Therapies

Acupuncture	May help some women with insomnia, mood swings, or hot flashes	
Homeopathy (highly diluted natural substances intended to stimulate the body to heal itself)	Not proved to help symptoms more than placebo	
Magnet therapy	Not shown to relieve pain or hot flashes	Can interfere with medical devices such as pacemakers
Paced breathing	May provide relief of hot flashes when done for 20 minutes three times a day	
Relaxation therapies (including massage, meditation, and yoga)	May relieve stress, insomnia, and fatigue	Massage may not be safe for women with certain health problems, such as advanced osteoporosis
Reflexology (pressure or massage applied to the feet)	Not shown to relieve hot flashes	

Source: Hormone Health Network hormone.org