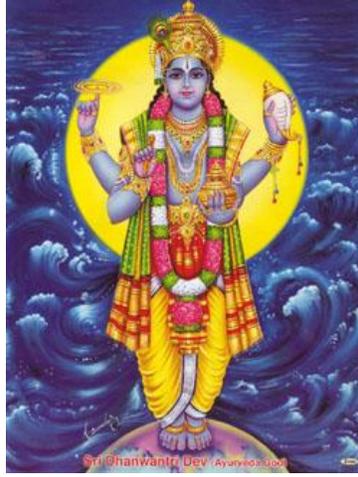


# Ayurveda – An ancient healing system's gifts to the Modern Woman

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*California College of Ayurveda, Grass Valley, CA*

*Sandhiya Ramaswamy  
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|| **Dhanvantari Stotram** ||

*Om Sankham Chakram Jaloukaam  
Dadhadamruta GhatamChaarur Dorbhicchaturbhihi  
Sookshma Swacchati Hrudayaamsuka  
Parivilasan Moulim Amboja Netram  
Kaalaambodojvalaangam Katitata Vilasat  
Chaarur Peetaambaraadyam  
Vandey Dhanvantarim Tam  
Nikhila Gada Vana Proudda Daavaagni Leelam*

*Salutations to him, Lord Dhanvantari, who is holding in his four hands a Conch, a Disc .a Leech  
and a pot of celestial ambrosia  
in whose heart shines a very clear, gentle and pleasing blaze of light, which also shines all  
around HIS head and lotus eyes.*

*On the dark blue/black water his body is luminous and splendid.  
His waist and thighs are covered in yellow cloth and who by his mere play destroys all diseases  
like a huge forest fire.*

|| **Mahalakshmi Gayatri** ||

*Om Mahalakshmyai cha vidmahe  
Vishnu patnyai cha dhimahi  
Tanno Lakshmihi prachodayat*

*Om. Let us meditate on the Great Goddess Sri Lakshmi, the consort of Sri Maha Vishnu. May  
that effulgent Maha Lakshmi Devi inspire and illumine our mind and understanding.*

### **Acknowledgements**

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## **Introduction**

According to a recent TIME magazine study, for the first time in the history of this country, the majority of the work-force will be women (projected by year-end 2009). [1] Women are the primary breadwinner in almost 40% of all households today. [2] Women are empowered in so many ways like never before. They have come a long way since 1920, when women were finally allowed to vote in this country. Life expectancy has been steadily rising over the years, and the average life expectancy of a woman today is 80 years. [3] While women have made tremendous progress, today's woman is juggling work, marriage and family like never before. In a recent survey, in response to the question "how often do you experience stress?" 40% of the women reported that they experienced stress frequently, while another 39% of the women reported that they experienced stress sometimes. [4] In one of the JAMA patient pages on Women's Health, under a section called Special concerns for Women, it is noted that women often focus on the health care of their children and spouses while neglecting their own health. It also notes that obesity is a major medical problem for women's health and contributes to various ailments such as a heart disease, diabetes, some forms of cancer and osteoarthritis. [5] 61% of women today are overweight (compared to 41% in the 1970s). On average women consume 344 more calories per day than they did in 1974. [6] Cardiovascular diseases (26%) and cancer (23%) are the 2 main causes of death in women. [7] Ayurveda, the ultimate medicine of empowerment can equip the modern woman with its time tested wisdom and help her achieve optimal health of body, mind and spirit. While the reach of Ayurveda is all-encompassing this paper focuses the offerings of Ayurveda as it pertains to correcting the imbalances that arise during the women's menstrual cycle – specifically PMS and other related menstrual disorders - menorrhagia, amenorrhea, dysmenorrhea and the transition to menopause. The topic of pregnancy and childbirth is not covered in this paper, as it would be a research topic unto itself.

## **Ayurveda**

The Sanskrit term Ayurveda can be literally translated as Knowledge or Science of Life. The term Ayus means Life and Veda means Knowledge or Science. The definition of Ayus however is not just limited to describe the physical manifestation of life. According to the Caraka Samhita

‘Ayus’ means the conjunction of body, sense organs, mind and self. [8] As for the word Veda or Knowledge, as per Dr. Marc Halpern, “genuine knowledge is not simply the understanding of facts, but a deep knowing of the truth. To know something means to become one with the knowledge. This is the highest form of knowing, and is called direct perception.” [9] Ayurveda is thought to have emanated from the Vedas - large body of texts originating in ancient India, over 5000 years ago. Let us examine some of the statements by the country’s foremost Ayurvedic teachers and authors to understand the central premise and scope of Ayurveda and the distinction versus conventional medicine:

“Ayurveda is based upon a deep communion with the spirit of life itself, upon a profound understanding of the movement of the vital force and its manifestations within our entire psychophysical system. As such, Ayurveda presents a striking alternative to the biochemical model of modern medicine, the limitations of which are becoming increasingly evident through time. We are not simply an accident or a design of chemistry, but an expression of living consciousness that is universal in nature – which is inherently wise and which has the power to balance and transform itself once its nature is understood. Reclaiming that connection with life as a whole is the real basis of healing, not manipulating the life force with drugs, however useful they may be.” [10]

“Ayurveda is the art of daily living in harmony with the laws of nature. It is an ancient natural wisdom of health and healing, a science of life. The aims and objectives of this science are to maintain the health of a healthy person and to heal the disease of an unhealthy person. Both prevention and healing are carried out by entirely natural means.” [11] The concept of the five elements lies at the heart of Ayurvedic science. [12] The five elements from the subtlest to the grossest are Ether, Air, Fire, Water and Earth. These five elements are recognized in Ayurveda as the building blocks of all creation and material existence, both organic and inorganic, in a physical as well as a symbolic metaphorical sense. [13][14] The human being, a microcosm of nature, is also made up of these five elements.

*Yatha pinde, tatha Brahmande.*

‘As is the atom, so is the universe;  
as is the body, so is the cosmic body.’ [15]

“In a profound sense, Ayurveda is the mother of all healing systems. From its eight principal branches (pediatrics, gynecology and obstetrics, ophthalmology, geriatrics, otolaryngology, toxicology, general medicine and surgery) have come the main branches of medicine as it is practiced today, as well as many modern healing modalities, including massage, diet and nutritional counseling, herbal remedies, plastic surgery, psychiatry, polarity therapy, kinesiology, shiatsu, acupressure and acupuncture, color and gem therapy and meditation. All these have roots in Ayurvedic philosophy and practice.” [16]

“The highest goal of Ayurveda has never been immortality in the physical sense, but spiritual immortality in the form of enlightenment. As people embark on the journey of healing through Ayurveda, they realize that good health is related almost directly and proportionally to proper lifestyle and state of mind. The path to perfect health parallels the path to enlightenment!” [17]

“Ayurveda” literally means the “knowledge of the totality of life.” The term Veda means “pure knowledge.” It refers specifically to Nature’s intelligence – the cosmic blueprint or orderliness that underlines and governs the function and evolution of everything in the universe, including our human physiology.” [18]

### **The Menstrual cycle or the woman’s moon cycle**

The word "menstruation" is etymologically related to the word "moon". The terms "menstruation" and "menses" are derived from the Latin word *mensis* (month), which in turn relates to the Greek word *mene* (moon) and to the roots of the English words *month* and *moon*—reflecting the fact that the moon also takes close to 28 days to revolve around the Earth (27-32 days).

The period between two new moons known as the synodical lunar month, is 29.53 days long. [19]

### **A Women’s Time with the Moon – Maya Tiwari, *Women’s Power to Heal through Inner Medicine***[20]

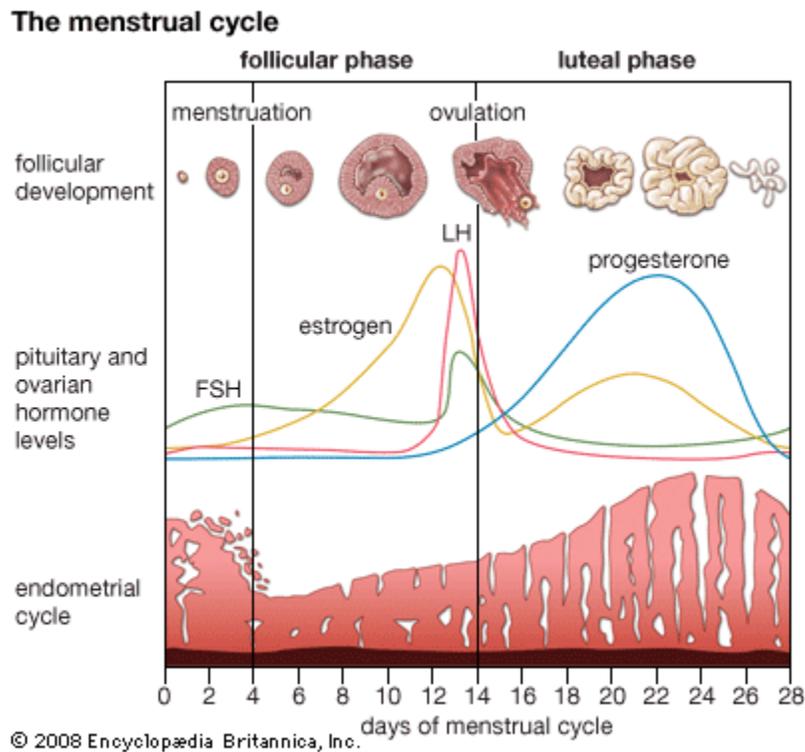
“The ancients claimed that all substance of life is created from the dust of Mother Moon, the cosmic source. The moon’s perpetual cycle determines all rhythms, desires and possibilities on the earth. The moon significantly influences a woman’s biorhythms and her body, mind and spirit are intricately connected to her cycles. Her ovum is artava, from the Sanskrit root *rtu* meaning

season. *Rtu* also implies ritual suggesting that the rhythm of life comes from the ritual dance of the seasons, and in particular the lunar season. We can learn the healing secrets of the cosmic pulse by paying attention to our own cycles and rhythms.” [21] From the ancient times, the new moon was associated with menstruation; at this time of rebirth, women would gather together and offer their life-generating material to the Earth. The waxing moon (new moon to full) is associated with the proliferative phase and the waning moon with the luteal phase – cleansing. [22] Native women faithfully observed seasonal rhythms to ensure the earth’s sustenance and nourishment, and recognized that the cycles of the seasons, like the rhythms of the womb, were created from the moon’s phases. At the opposite spectrum of the dark days of the new moon is the light period of hope and rejuvenation celebrated at the time of the full moon. “The full moon marks the time of beautification, abundance and fertility, the result of transformation and purification of the primordial blood into the translucent essence of Ojas”. [23] According to Maya Tiwari, we can reclaim our biorhythms by understanding and recognizing the impact of lunar junctures on our personal healing and transformation. [24]

Along the same lines, Christiane Northrup, in her book *Women’s Bodies, Women’s Wisdom* has this to say about the menstrual cycle – “we can reclaim the wisdom of the menstrual cycle by tuning into our cyclic nature and celebrating it as a source of our female power. The ebb and flow of dreams, creativity and hormones associated with different parts of the cycle offer us a profound opportunity to deepen our connection with our inner knowing.” [25]

Menstruation is regarded in Ayurveda as a time of purification – a time for the woman’s body and mind to purify and rejuvenate each month. According to Robert Svoboda, the menstrual cycle is Nature’s gift to women. In his words “A wise woman will work with nature to take advantage of this natural monthly cleansing, so that both she and Nature can achieve their goals..... However, when you cut yourself off from your wellspring, you block Nature’s efforts to help and heal you- and this blockage will often display itself most vividly as some impediment to your menstrual flow.” [26]

## Menstrual cycle – an overview <sup>[27]</sup>



The onset of menses (menarche) is at puberty usually between the ages of 11 -15. The average menstrual cycle lasts 28 days, but can range from 20-45 days. <sup>[28]</sup> The monthly cycle stops during pregnancy and permanently at menopause. Menstruation is the shedding of the lining of the uterus (endometrium) accompanied by bleeding. The menstrual cycle begins with the first day of bleeding, which is counted as day 1. The cycle ends just before the next menstrual period. Menstrual bleeding lasts 3 to 7 days, averaging 5 days. The menstrual cycle is regulated by hormones. Luteinizing hormone and follicle-stimulating hormone, which are produced by the pituitary gland, promote ovulation and stimulate the ovaries to produce estrogen and progesterone. Estrogen and progesterone stimulate the uterus and breasts to prepare for possible fertilization. The cycle has three phases: follicular or proliferative (before release of the egg), ovulatory (egg release/ovulation), and luteal or secretory(after egg release). <sup>[29]</sup>

The menstrual cycle begins with menstrual bleeding (menstruation), which marks the first day of the follicular phase. Bleeding occurs after estrogen and progesterone levels decrease at the end of the previous cycle. This decrease causes the top layers of thickened lining of the uterus (endometrium) to break down and be shed. About this time, the follicle-stimulating hormone level increases slightly, stimulating the development of several ovarian follicles. Each follicle contains an egg. Later, as the follicle-stimulating hormone level decreases, only one follicle continues to develop. This follicle produces estrogen. [30]

The ovulatory phase begins with a surge in luteinizing hormone and follicle-stimulating hormone levels. Luteinizing hormone stimulates egg release (ovulation), which usually occurs 16 to 32 hours after the surge begins. The estrogen level peaks during the surge, and the progesterone level starts to increase. [31]

During the luteal phase, luteinizing hormone and follicle-stimulating hormone levels decrease. The ruptured follicle closes after releasing the egg and forms a corpus luteum, which produces progesterone. During most of this phase, the estrogen level is high. Progesterone and estrogen cause the lining of the uterus to thicken more, to prepare for possible fertilization. If the egg is not fertilized, the corpus luteum degenerates and no longer produces progesterone, the estrogen level decreases, the top layers of the lining break down and are shed, and a new menstrual cycle begins. [32]

### **Menstrual Cycle – The Doshic involvement**

All three doshas have a strong influence on the menstrual cycle. During the follicular (also known as proliferative) phase (end of menses until ovulation or the first half of the cycle) Kapha is on the rise. The hormone Estrogen (Kapha-like in many ways), peaks during this stage of the cycle. During the next phase of the cycle – the luteal or secretory phase (ovulation till flow begins), progesterone, a more Pitta type hormone takes center stage. So during the second half of the cycle, Pitta dominates in the woman's body. The time of the actual flow or menses is the time of Vata – specifically Apana Vayu, as it transports the menstrual blood out of the body. [33]

## **Causes of Menstrual Cycle Imbalances**

According to the Merck Manual only 10-15% of women have cycles that are exactly 28 days.<sup>[34]</sup>

Usually, the cycles vary the most and the intervals between periods are longest in the years immediately after menarche and before menopause (known as perimenopause). Pregnancy is a natural cause of a missed period.

However menstrual cycles get disrupted due to a variety of reasons – these include being on birth control pills, hormone replacement therapy, other medications, poor diet & nutrition, low body fat, excessive weight loss, or being overweight. Stress, exhaustion, or very hard exercise and inactivity also can change or disrupt the menstrual cycle. Excessive caffeine and alcohol (interferes with the metabolism of estrogen and progesterone in the liver) consumption, smoking and drug use can also disrupt the menstrual cycle. Disorders such as polycystic ovarian syndrome and uterine fibroids, cysts, polyps and endometriosis can also cause imbalances. And last but not least increased stress can cause disruptions in the menstrual cycle. <sup>[35] [36]</sup>

Of course there remains the fundamental cause of all imbalances from an naturopathic /Ayurvedic perspective – being out of touch with our true nature as spirit , not being in touch with the lunar calendar, like the women of ancient times used to be. “Modern invention’s such as the Birth control pills, contraceptive devices and hormone replacement therapies have interfered with the woman’s natural cycle, so much so that women’s menstrual cycles begin at the opposite end of the lunar calendar cycle. Women are losing touch with their innate primordial inner rhythms, which control not only the menstrual cycles, but also the physical, mental, emotional and intuitive well-being.” <sup>[37]</sup>

## **Classical Ayurvedic Interpretation of the Female reproductive system <sup>[38]</sup>**

The Ayurvedic term for the diseases of the female reproductive system is Guhyaroga. Garbharoga is the term for the diseases of the uterus. Embryology is known as Atulyagotriya. Diseases of the vagina (Yoni in Sanskrit) are called Yoni vyapat. There are 20 types of Yoni Vyapat listed in the Caraka Samhita and Astanga Hrdayam. 11 of these are Vata related, 2 Pitta, 1 Kapha and 6 involve multiple doshas. <sup>[39]</sup>

*“The genital track of women does not get affected without vata. Hence one should pacify it first and then treat other dosas”* [40]

*“Twenty diseases of the vagina arise because of consuming bad food”* [41]

### **Ayurvedic practices to re-balance the woman’s menstrual cycle**

**Uttara Basti** (care of the womb) – Bringing the woman’s cycle insync with the moon cycle

Uttara Basti according to Maya Tiwari, is one of the many forgotten gems of Ayurvedic wisdom, and is one of the single most essential practices for a woman. Uttara Basti, a powerful method of healing, is the practice of cleansing and nourishing the womb and one of the main reasons of this practice is to restore balance to the womb, and bringing the female cycle back in rhythm with the moon cycle. [42] Maya Tiwari recommends this practice for all women (who are 16 years or older), upto 65 years of age. According to her Uttara Basti helps fortify hormones and a woman’s sensuality, while revitalizing her spirit during menopause and recommends Uttara Basti for five to seven years after the cessation of the menstrual cycle. She recommends it for the following conditions – vaginal infections, malodor, dryness, soreness of vaginal passage, PMS, irregular or excess menstrual flow, venereal diseases, infertility, hormonal imbalance, menopause, and uterine disorders. Contra-indications to Uttara Basti are when there is vaginal bleeding, hemorrhaging, extreme hot or cold weather, directly after eating, diarrhea, pregnancy, fibroid treatments or bleeding fibroids. [43]

#### When to do UV [44]

If cycle is in harmony with the new moon – Two or three days after the end of the cycle.

For cycles out of harmony with the New Moon – One day after the new moon; the 1<sup>st</sup> through the 8<sup>th</sup> days of the new moon are appropriate

Menopausal cycle - The 1<sup>st</sup> through the 8<sup>th</sup> days of the new moon are appropriate

#### Uttara basti formulas and conditions that they are recommended for [45]

Triphala –Aloe decoction – PMS, painful menstruation, PMS cramps, sterility, stagnation, venereal disease, osteoporosis and endometriosis

Rose-Raspberry decoction – Scanty menstrual flow, irregular or excessive menstrual flow, vaginal dryness, uterine disorders, vaginal malodor, soreness or dryness of the vaginal passage

Please see appendix on preparation of Uttari Basti decoctions and application

## **Panchakarma to Purify/ Rasayana therapy to build Ojas**

*“When the ojas is diminished, the person is fearful, weak, always worried, having disorders in sense organs, deranged lustre and mental ability, rough and emaciated” [46]*

*- Caraka Samhita*

The purification therapies of panchakarma (vaman, virechana, basti and nasya) are an excellent vehicle to balance the doshas and remove ama and other accumulated toxins in the body, while the tonification therapies of brihmana chikitsa and rasayana therapy, are excellent at nourishing the dhatus and building Ojas. If the patient is depleted and does not have a strong ojas, pancha karma is not recommended. If the patient has ama, a palliative treatment (shaman chikitsa) combining tonification therapies (brihmana chikitsa) with mild purification is recommended. If there is no ama present and the patient is weak (very low ojas), brihmana chikitsa (tonification therapies) should be employed. [47]

Rejuvenation (Rasayana) is a special form of tonification therapy. It follows deep cleansing like Pancha Karma, and the elimination of excess doshas from the body, as real renewal is possible only after the factors of decay have been taken away. Though its methods are similar, it is different from general tonification therapy that can be given in any debilitated condition. The emphasis is on substances to increase Ojas and improve sattva. Special herbs for the mind like gotu kola, calamus and shanka pushpi are used. Asana, pranayama and meditation preferably in a retreat situation for a period of at least two weeks is recommended. [48]

## **Rasayana Phala – benefits of rejuvenation therapy**

*Long life (good), memory, (great) intelligence, (perfect) health, youthfulness, (bright) complexion and color, (bold) voice and magnanimity, increase of strength of the body and the sense organs, perfection in speech, sexual prowess and brilliance – all are obtained from Rasayana therapy. It is the best means of keeping the rasa and other dhatus in excellent condition [49]*

*- Astanga Hridayam*

## **Premenstrual syndrome** <sup>[50]</sup>

Premenstrual syndrome (PMS) refers to a wide range of physical or emotional symptoms that typically occur about 5 to 11 days before a woman starts her monthly menstrual cycle. The symptoms usually stop when menstruation begins, or shortly thereafter. An exact cause of PMS has not been identified. However, it may be related to social, cultural, biological, and psychological factors.

PMS is estimated to affect up to 75% of women during their childbearing years.

It occurs more often in women:

- Between their late 20s and early 40s
- Who have at least one child
- With a family history of a major depression
- With a history of postpartum depression or an affective mood disorder

The symptoms typically get worse in the late 30s and 40s as a woman approaches the transition to menopause. As many as 50 - 60% of women with severe PMS have an underlying psychiatric disorder (premenstrual dysphoric disorder).

### **Symptoms**

A wide range of physical or emotional symptoms have been associated with PMS. By definition, symptoms are considered to be PMS-related if they occur during the second half of the menstrual cycle (14 days or more after the first day of the menstrual period) and are absent for about 7 days after a menstrual period ends (during the first half of the menstrual cycle).

The most common symptoms are: Headache, backache, abdominal pain and/or cramps, swelling of ankles, feet and hands, muscle spasms, breast tenderness, weight gain, acne flare-ups, nausea, bloating, constipation or diarrhea, fatigue and food cravings. Emotional symptoms can include anxiety, panic, confusion, depression, irritability and difficulty concentrating,

## **Exams and Tests**

There are no physical examination findings or lab tests specific to the diagnosis of PMS. It is important that a complete history, physical examination (including pelvic exam), and in some instances a psychiatric evaluation be conducted to rule out other potential causes for symptoms that may be attributed to PMS.

A symptom calendar can help women identify the most troublesome symptoms and to confirm the diagnosis of PMS.

## **Premenstrual dysphoric disorder <sup>[51]</sup>**

Premenstrual dysphoric disorder (PMDD) is a condition marked by severe depression symptoms, irritability, and tension before menstruation. These symptoms are more severe than those seen with PMS. The causes of PMS and PMDD have not been identified. Hormone changes that occur during a woman's menstrual cycle appear to play a role.

PMDD affects between 3 - 8% of women during the years they are having menstrual periods. The condition is usually worse in younger women. Seasonal affective disorder (SAD), major depression, anxiety, and similar disorders are seen in many women with this condition.

## **PMS – Ayurvedic Interpretation**

PMS from an Ayurvedic point of view, is viewed primarily as a Vata and Pitta imbalance (refer to second half of the menstrual cycle when PMS most likely occurs – is a Pitta Phase culminating with Vata phase of the menstrual cycle). The condition can also be brought on by low ojas, which can cause disruptive fluctuations in the hormonal cycle and biorhythms of the body, and hence can cause many of the symptoms associated with PMS. <sup>[52]</sup>

## **Vata Type PMS**

Caused by a vata provoking lifestyle – variable routines, intake of cold, dry, light foods, excessive exercise, travel and stress. As indicated above, Low ojas can also be a contributing factor.

Physical symptoms include constipation, palpitations, headache and severe cramping pain.

Emotional symptoms include emotional instability (mood swings), insomnia, fear, irritability and anxiety. <sup>[53]</sup> <sup>[54]</sup> Symptoms are worse during Vata times – pre-dawn and pre-dusk (2:00 – 6:00 am and pm) <sup>[55]</sup>

## **Chikitsa (Treatment)**

Establishing stable routines (Dinacharya) to balance out Vata's inherent variability or instability is of paramount importance. <sup>[56]</sup> Reducing the overall amount of activity and practicing gentle yoga or tai chi, meditation to promote inner calmness is also important. <sup>[57]</sup>

## **Diet**

Warm, unctuous nourishing food is the best antidote to counter Vata's cold, dry and light qualities. Sweet, sour and salty tastes best pacify Vata dosha; Conversely, pungent, bitter and astringent tastes aggravate Vata and hence should be avoided. <sup>[58]</sup> It is also best to avoid refined foods (white flour, bread), junk foods, and frozen foods, excessive amounts of dairy and meat products, cold drinks, caffeine and alcohol.

### Best Foods for Vata <sup>[59]</sup>

Vegetables – Squash, sweet potatoes, pumpkin, Carrots, asparagus, green beans, onions

Grains – Basmati rice, brown or white, whole cooked oats

Legumes – Aduki beans, mung dhal, Toor dal

Nuts – all nuts in moderation (especially almonds)

Dairy – Ghee, raw cow's milk, buttermilk

Oils – Sesame, almond

Sweeteners – Sucanat, Raw honey

Fruits – Bananas, Dates, apricots, peaches, pineapple, mango, melons, oranges

### **Herbs** <sup>[60]</sup>

Dipanas & carminatives- Ginger, asafoetida, black pepper, nutmeg and cardamom

Spices to promote menstruation – Ginger, turmeric

Laxatives – Triphala

Nervine sedatives (also antispasmodics)– Valerian Root, Jatamamsi, Ashwagandha

Nervine Tonics – Ashwagandha

Female Hormonal / reproductive tonics – Dong quai, vidari kand, wild yam and shatavari

### **Lifestyle** <sup>[61]</sup>

Stress reduction through Meditation, walks in nature and Yoga

Aromatherapy – Clary sage, Lavender, Rose, Sandalwood

Self massage (abhyanga) - especially application of warm sesame oil to the head and lower abdomen. It can also be applied to vagina or a douche can be made with demulcents like shatavari

### **Panchakarma / Rasayana therapy**

Since Low ojas is a contributing factor in PMS, rasayana therapy should be implemented. In case of ama being present, a period of purification should precede rejuvenation

Uttara Basti – the importance of Uttara Basti in bringing the women’s cycle in rhythm with the lunar cycle and hence alleviating disorders of the menstrual cycle has already been discussed.

### **Pitta Type PMS**

Caused by a pitta provoking lifestyle – intake of hot, oily foods, excessive work and competitiveness and intensity. Low ojas can also be a contributing factor. Physical symptoms include skin rashes and acne. There may be diarrhea, thirst, sweating or fever. <sup>[62]</sup> Emotional symptoms include emotional instability, irritability and anger. <sup>[63]</sup> Symptoms are worse during Pitta times – pre-dawn and pre-dusk (10:00 – 2:00 am and pm) <sup>[64]</sup>

## **Chikitsa (Treatment)**

Stable routines (Dinacharya) along with less intense lifestyle and relaxation are very important to balance out. Also important are cooling the body and mind, eliminating stimulants and getting some rest. <sup>[65]</sup>

## **Diet**

Bitter, astringent and sweet tastes best pacify Pitta dosha; conversely, pungent, sour and salty tastes aggravate Pitta and hence should be avoided. <sup>[66]</sup> Food should be warm and unctuous and mildly spiced (too hot both in temperature and/or spice, will aggravate Pitta)

It is also best to avoid refined foods (white flour, bread), junk foods, frozen foods, oily, spicy foods, excessive amounts of dairy and meat products, cold drinks, caffeine and alcohol.

### Best Foods for Pitta <sup>[67]</sup>

Vegetables – Dandelion greens, collards, lettuce, arugula, asparagus, broccoli, brussel sprouts, cabbage, cauliflower, cucumber, bitter-gourd, jicama, sprouts, white potatoes

Grains – Basmati rice, brown or white, wheat,

Legumes – Aduki beans, black beans, black-eyed peas, chick peas, lima beans, mung dhal

Nuts – coconut, sunflower seeds

Dairy – Ghee, raw cow's milk

Oils – coconut, sunflower

Sweeteners – Sucanat, Maple syrup

Fruits – Apples, Dates, apricots, grapes, pineapple, mango, melons

## **Herbs <sup>[68]</sup>**

Dipanas (cool)- fennel, coriander and cardamom

Alteratives – Dandelion root, aloe vera, burdock root, bhringraj

Nervine sedatives – Gotu Kola, Brahmi, shank pushpi

Nervine Tonics – Brahmi, Shank Pushpi

Female Hormonal / reproductive tonics – Ashok, wild yam and shatavari

### **Lifestyle** <sup>[69]</sup>

Stress reduction through Meditation, walks in nature and Yoga –

Aromatherapy – Clary sage, Lavender, Rose, Sandalwood

Self massage (abhyanga )

### **Panchakarma / rasayana therapy**

Since Low ojas is a contributing factor in PMS, rasayana therapy should be implemented. In case of ama being present, a period of purification should precede rejuvenation Virechana followed by Smasarjana Krama

Uttara Basti – the importance of Uttara Basti in bringing the women’s cycle in rhythm with the lunar cycle and hence alleviating disorders of the menstrual cycle has already been discussed.

### **Kapha Type PMS**

Kapha type PMS is characterized by water retention, nausea, swollen breasts, edema, stiffness in joints, dull pain or cramps, and sluggishness. Emotional symptoms include emotional instability, being emotionally overwrought, tearful and sentimental. Susceptibility to colds or flu and mucus discharges increases. Symptoms are worse during Kapha times – early morning and early evening (6:00 – 10:00 am and pm) <sup>[70]</sup> <sup>[71]</sup>

### **Chikitsa (Treatment)**

Stimulation, especially physical exercise and vigorous pranayama, reduced food intake, and even short-term fasting is recommended. <sup>[72]</sup> <sup>[73]</sup>

### **Diet**

Pungent, astringent and bitter tastes best pacify Kapha dosha; conversely, sweet, sour and salty tastes increase Kapha and hence should be avoided. Food should be warm, stimulating,

nourishing and prepared with hot spices. Heavy or oily foods should be avoided. It is also best to avoid refined foods (white flour, bread), junk foods, frozen foods, oily, spicy foods, excessive amounts of dairy and meat products, cold drinks, caffeine and alcohol. [74] [75]

### Best Foods for Kapha [76]

Vegetables – Dandelion greens, collards, lettuce, arugula, asparagus, broccoli, brussel sprouts, cabbage, cauliflower, cucumber, bitter-gourd, jicama, sprouts, white potatoes

Grains – Barley, buckwheat, corn, millet, rye

Legumes – Aduki beans, black beans, chick peas, lima beans, red lentils

Nuts – pumpkin seeds, sunflower seeds (very small amounts)

Dairy – Ghee, goat's milk, spiced yogurt (sparingly)

Oils – canola, mustard, safflower

Sweeteners – Honey, Raw

Fruits – Apples, apricots, berries, poemgranate

### **Herbs** [77] [78]

Dipanas (hot)- Trikatu, cloves, cayenne, cinnamon, turmeric

Nervine stimulants – Calamus, holy basil

Circulatory stimulants / diaphoretics/diuretics– Barberry, Black cohosh, punarnava, vacha, holy basil, parsley

### **Lifestyle** [79]

Vigorous / stimulating Yoga ; vigorous pranayama such as kapalabhati

Aromatherapy – Patchouli, Basil, Eucalyptus

Self massage (garshana )

Panchakarma

Uttara Basti – the importance of uttara Basti in bringing the women's cycle in rhythm with the lunar cycle and hence alleviating disorders of the menstrual cycle has already been discussed.

## **Other menstrual cycle disorders**

### **Amenorrhea**

Amenorrhea is the absence of menstrual bleeding and may be primary or secondary.

Primary amenorrhea is the absence of menstrual bleeding and secondary sexual characteristics (for example, breast development and pubic hair) in a girl by age 14 years or the absence of menstrual bleeding with normal development of secondary sexual characteristics in a girl by age 16 years.

Secondary amenorrhea is the absence of menstrual bleeding in a woman who had been menstruating but later stops menstruating for 3 or more months in the absence of pregnancy, lactation (the ability to breastfeed), cycle suppression with systemic hormonal contraceptive (birth control) pills, or menopause. <sup>[80]</sup>

### **Causes**

There are many causes of amenorrhea – adrenal disease, thyroid disease, pituitary disease, hypothalamic disease, ovarian failure, hirsutism and chronic anovulatory disorder, which is caused by physical and emotional stress. Stress causes low levels of FSH and LH along with low estrogen levels. <sup>[81]</sup> Causes also include exposure to cold, poor nutrition, anemia, emaciation and dehydration. Lack of body fat and too much exercise can bring it about, which is why some athletic women fail to get their period. <sup>[82]</sup>

### **Ayurvedic Interpretation**

Known as Nashta rakta, amenorrhea is considered a deficiency disease largely attributed to Vata Dosh. <sup>[83]</sup> <sup>[84]</sup> It is a condition affecting both rasa dhatu (decrease in menstrual secretions) and shukra dhatu (lack of ovulation). <sup>[85]</sup> In all conditions of amenorrhea, ojas is severely depleted.

<sup>[86]</sup>

## **Chikitsa**

### **Nourishing Therapies**

As there is great depletion, rasayana therapy is recommended. Uttara basti, as discussed before also serves as an excellent nourishing practice to balance out any menstrual disorder / imbalance. Dr. Frawley recommends warm sesame oil application to the lower abdomen. <sup>[87]</sup>

### **Diet**

An anti-Vata, tonifying diet is recommended with emphasis on dairy (especially ghee), whole grains, vegetables, nuts and other nourishing foods. Care must be taken to ensure that digestion is balanced by normalizing agni. This is accomplished by spicy herbs such as ginger, cinnamon and trikatu.

### **Herbs**

Herbs to promote menstruation are indicated along with tonics to build the reproductive system. Some of the best herbs for treating amenorrhea are ashwagandha, kapikacchu and shatavari. Emmenagogues include mugwort, dong quai, pennyroyal, tansy and rue. Myrrh is recommended as an excellent choice for amenorrhea (taken as a tincture 10-30 drops, every 3-4 hrs.). <sup>[88] [89]</sup>

### **Lifestyle**

As they are in a state of depletion, rest is recommended. A sattvic lifestyle incorporating some meditation, yoga or walks in nature will be highly beneficial.

### **Dysmenorrhea** <sup>[90]</sup>

Dysmenorrhea is the medical term for menstrual cramps.

Menstrual cramps are dull, throbbing or cramping pains in the lower abdomen. Many women experience menstrual cramps just before and during their menstrual periods. For some women,

the discomfort is merely annoying. For others, it can be severe enough to interfere with everyday activities for a few days every month. For some women, menstrual cramps are caused by identifiable problems, such as endometriosis or uterine fibroids. Menstrual cramps that aren't caused by some underlying condition tend to lessen with age and often disappear once a woman has given birth.

## **Causes**

During menstrual periods, the uterus contracts to help expel its lining. Prostaglandins, hormone-like substances involved in pain and inflammation, trigger the uterine muscle contractions. Higher levels of prostaglandins are associated with more severe menstrual cramps. Many experts believe that severe contractions constrict the blood vessels feeding the uterus. The resulting pain can be compared to the angina that occurs when blocked coronary arteries starve portions of the heart of food and oxygen.

Menstrual cramps also may be caused by:

**Endometriosis.** In this painful condition, the type of tissue that lines the uterus becomes implanted outside the uterus, most commonly on the fallopian tubes, ovaries or the tissue lining the pelvis.

**Uterine fibroids.** These noncancerous tumors and growths in the wall of the uterus rarely may be the cause of pain.

**Adenomyosis.** In this condition, the tissue that lines the uterus begins to grow into the muscular walls of the uterus.

**Pelvic inflammatory disease (PID).** This infection of the female reproductive organs is usually caused by sexually transmitted bacteria.

**Cervical stenosis.** In some women, the opening of the cervix may be so small that it impedes menstrual flow, causing a painful increase of pressure within the uterus.

### **Ayurvedic Interpretation**

According to Ayurveda, dysmenorrhea is primarily due to an imbalance in the Vata dosha. This imbalance results in dryness in the uterus caused by insufficiency of chemical secretions produced by the uterus. <sup>[91]</sup> Symptoms include cramping pain, gas, bloating and constipation or alternating constipation and diarrhea, difficulty concentrating and emotional instability. Samana vayu is vitiated in the digestive system, as well as the mind, along with the other Vayus. Relocation of vata to the artavavaha srota causes painful cramps of the uterus. <sup>[92]</sup> Although dysmenorrhea is most common in those with Vata type constitutions, it may also be experienced by Pitta and Kapha types. In Pitta types symptoms include burning sensations, anger, skin eruptions and diarrhea, while Kapha type may experience congestion, edema, weight gain and mucous. <sup>[93]</sup><sup>[94]</sup>

### **Nourishing Therapies**

Uttara basti, as discussed before also serves as an excellent nourishing practice to balance out any menstrual disorder / imbalance (not be performed during menstruation). Dr. Frawley recommends warm sesame oil application to the lower abdomen.

### **Diet**

An anti-Vata, diet of warm, moist foods is recommended. Care must be taken to ensure that digestion is balanced and stabilized by normalizing agni. Specifically samana vayu imbalance should be addressed with herbs such as nutmeg and ginger.

### **Herbs**

Herbs that are antispasmodic, muscle relaxing and pain reducing make the best remedies for Vata type dysmenorrhea. These include turmeric, nutmeg, valerian, ginger, licorice and

jatamamsi. [95] Chinese herbs such as dong quai and white peony specifically relieve spasms of the smooth muscles of the uterus. [96]

## **Pitta Type**

The major symptoms associated with Pitta/Vata type dysmenorrhea are loose stools, anger, mood swings and acne. [97] In the digestive system pachaka pitta's heat dominates and hence loose stools are common.

## **Diet**

A warm diet is still important to pacify the underlying Vata condition; however incorporation of slight use of bitter taste should be incorporated in order to cool Pitta down.

## **Herbs**

In addition to the herbs prescribed for Vata above chrysanthemum, brahmi and gotu kola are very important in addressing the vitiation of sadhaka pitta in the mind causing anger and violent outbursts. Alteratives with a prabhav for skin such as burdock and red clover can be used to treat skin eruptions such as acne

## **Menorrhagia**

Menorrhagia is excess menstrual bleeding. Excessive uterine bleeding occurring at the expected intervals of the menstrual periods. The bleeding from the uterus starts on schedule but is heavier than usual and may last longer than usual. [98]

The signs and symptoms of menorrhagia may include: [99]

- Menstrual flow that soaks through one or more sanitary pads or tampons every hour for several consecutive hours
- The need to use double sanitary protection to control your menstrual flow

- The need to change sanitary protection during the night
- Menstrual periods lasting longer than seven days
- Menstrual flow that includes large blood clots
- Heavy menstrual flow that interferes with your regular lifestyle
- Tiredness, fatigue or shortness of breath (symptoms of anemia)

### **Causes** [\[100\]](#)

In some cases, the cause of heavy menstrual bleeding is unknown, but a number of conditions may cause menorrhagia. Common causes include:

**Hormonal imbalance** - In a normal menstrual cycle, a balance between the hormones estrogen and progesterone regulates the buildup of the lining of the uterus (endometrium), which is shed during menstruation. If a hormonal imbalance occurs, the endometrium develops in excess and eventually sheds by way of heavy menstrual bleeding.

**Dysfunction of the ovaries** - Lack of ovulation (anovulation) may cause hormonal imbalance and result in menorrhagia.

**Uterine fibroids** - These noncancerous (benign) tumors of the uterus appear during your childbearing years. Uterine fibroids may cause heavier than normal or prolonged menstrual bleeding.

**Polyyps** - Small, benign growths on the lining of the uterine wall (uterine polyyps) may cause heavy or prolonged menstrual bleeding. Polyyps of the uterus most commonly occur in women of reproductive age as the result of high hormone levels.

**Adenomyosis** - This condition occurs when glands from the endometrium become embedded in the uterine muscle, often causing heavy bleeding and pain. Adenomyosis is most likely to develop if you're a middle-aged woman who has had many children.

**Intrauterine device (IUD)** - Menorrhagia is a well-known side effect of using a nonhormonal intrauterine device for birth control. When an IUD is the cause of excessive menstrual bleeding, you may need to remove it.

**Pregnancy complications** - A single, heavy, late period may be due to a miscarriage. If bleeding occurs at the usual time of menstruation, however, miscarriage is unlikely to be the cause. An ectopic pregnancy — implantation of a fertilized egg within the fallopian tube instead of the uterus — also may cause menorrhagia.

**Cancer** - Rarely, uterine cancer, ovarian cancer and cervical cancer can cause excessive menstrual bleeding.

**Inherited bleeding disorders** - Some blood coagulation disorders — such as von Willebrand's disease, a condition in which an important blood-clotting factor is deficient or impaired — can cause abnormal menstrual bleeding.

**Medications** - Certain drugs, including anti-inflammatory medications and anticoagulants (to prevent blood clots), can contribute to heavy or prolonged menstrual bleeding. Improper use of hormone medications also can cause menorrhagia.

**Other medical conditions** - A number of other medical conditions, including pelvic inflammatory disease (PID), thyroid problems, endometriosis, and liver or kidney disease, may cause menorrhagia.

### **Ayurvedic Interpretation**

According to Ayurveda, the condition of menorrhagia arises from the rakta dhatu – blood tissue and is caused by an excess Pitta condition in the blood. It is known as rakta-pitta, meaning heat in the blood. In addition to the causes described above, emotional sources at the root of this condition include unresolved anger, resentment and hostility. The condition is related to stress and is generally experienced by the Pitta type who is driven by career, work, competition and material power.

Menorrhagia is both a condition of excess and deficiency, since heavy bleeding can ultimately lead to malnourishment and anemia. <sup>[101]</sup>

## Chikitsa

An anti-pitta diet is required with avoidance of all hot and oily food. Exercise and exposure to heat and sun should be avoided. An ice pack can be applied to the lower abdomen during bleeding. <sup>[102]</sup>

Astringent, hemostatic and cooling herbs such as red raspberry, rose, manjistha, ashok and arjuna are of great importance. Alum powder, aloe-vera gel, and ghee act as excellent anupanas to carry the herbs deep into the blood tissue. Once bleeding is over tonic herbs such as amla, shatavari, dong quai, ashwagandha and aloe can be taken. <sup>[103] [104]</sup>

Uttara Basti when used with the triphala-aloe decoction applied in the new moon cycle is a powerful remedial measure for menorrhagia. <sup>[105]</sup>

## Menopause

Menopause is a normal, natural event—defined as the final menstrual period and usually confirmed when a woman has missed her periods for 12 consecutive months (in the absence of other obvious causes). Menopause is associated with reduced functioning of the ovaries due to aging, resulting in lower levels of estrogen and other hormones. It marks the permanent end of fertility. Menopause occurs, on average, at age 51. <sup>[106]</sup>

### Stages of menopause <sup>[107]</sup>

As the menopausal transition occurs over months and years, menopause is commonly divided into the following two stages:

**Perimenopause** - This is the time when women begin experiencing menopausal signs and symptoms, even though they still menstruate. The hormone levels rise and fall unevenly and there may be symptoms such as hot flashes. Perimenopause usually lasts four to five years or longer. During this time, it's still possible to get pregnant, but it's quite unlikely.

**Postmenopause** - Once 12 months have passed since the last period, the woman has reached menopause. Her ovaries produce much less estrogen and no progesterone, and they don't release eggs. The years that follow are called postmenopause.

## **Symptoms**

Menopausal symptoms affect 70% of women approaching menopause. <sup>[108]</sup>

The most common symptom affecting women going through menopause is hot flashes. It is estimated that 75-85% of American women get hot flashes during this phase of their lives. Hot flash is a sudden, transient sensation of warmth or heat that spreads over the body and creates redness, especially noticeable on the face and upper body. Night sweats, are closely related to hot flashes but are more intense and occur at night, accompanied by excessive perspiration. Other physical symptoms can include vaginal dryness, vaginitis, cystitis, urinary incontinence, digestive disturbances, weight gain, hair loss, headaches, fatigue, palpitations, tachycardia and loss of libido. Emotional symptoms can include insomnia, irritability, nervousness, anxiety and depression. <sup>[109] [110]</sup>

### Other complications

#### **Cardiovascular disease**

Heart disease is the leading cause of death of women in this country(26.5%).<sup>[111]</sup> As it relates to menopause, risk of cardiovascular diseases increase due to the decline in estrogen level. <sup>[112]</sup>

#### **Osteoporosis**

Osteoporosis causes bones to become brittle and weak, leading to an increased risk of fractures. Postmenopausal women are especially susceptible to fractures of the hip, wrist and spine. During the first few years after menopause, women may lose bone density at a rapid rate, increasing the risk of osteoporosis. <sup>[113]</sup>

### **Hormone Replacement therapy and the findings of WHI (women's Health Initiative)**

To 'counter' menopause in the past, doctors began offering a therapy called hormone replacement therapy, to replace declining levels of estrogen in women's body. Billed as the protective 'fountain of youth', it was supposed to alleviate or completely obliterate symptoms and complications of declining estrogen levels that accompanies the transition to menopause – hot flashes, osteoporosis, heart

disease and general physical decline. However this practice came to an abrupt and screeching halt in July 2002, when the Women’s Health Initiative (WHI- the first ever randomized controlled trial of hormone therapy in women, was suddenly stopped 3 years early, due to the excessive side effects experienced by the group taking the hormones. The women who were given both estrogen and progestin, had an much greater incidence of heart attacks, strokes, blood clots, and breast cancer, as compared to the placebo group, which is why the study was prematurely halted. The findings of the WHI did result in a complete shift in the medical community’s thinking about menopause. They realized suddenly that menopause was not a disease – what women have known for millennial generations. <sup>[114]</sup>

### **Menopause – the Wise woman Years – a Naturopathic / Ayurvedic perspective**

According to Dr. Nancy Lonsdorf , of Maharishi Ayurveda, menopause is a completely natural and healthy process of female physiology and occurs for a very good reason – to stop menses and prevent the possibility of childbirth at a time when the body may not be able to withstand the stress that accompanies these events. <sup>[115]</sup> Dr. Lonsdorf actually calls menopause a health *advantage*, as the cessation of menses curtails the monthly loss of blood, iron and protein at a time in life when the body is aging and has to work harder to assimilate nutrients efficiently to get adequate nutrition.

Menopause is a natural event just like puberty and pregnancy, which are cyclical hormonal shifts.

Menopause is not a cause of disease or degeneration. <sup>[116]</sup> - fortunately this extreme negative view has changed over the past decade, as hundreds of thousands of empowered baby boomers have entered their menopausal years. <sup>[117]</sup> According to Dr. Svoboda, menopause also serves as a time for personal evolution. Ojas decreases with advancing age – with ojas no longer contributing to the production of new life, it can be redirected towards other projects. <sup>[118]</sup>

“Menopause is an oasis of lightness wedged between the phases of fertility and wisdom.” <sup>[119]</sup> Just like menarche and the monthly moon cycles, the ancient Native cultures celebrated and honored a woman’s transition into menopause or the Wise woman Years. One such example is in Judaism where it is believed that once a woman no longer menstruates, her life-force energy stays inside of her and makes her wise. There is a celebration of her wisdom in a ceremony known as ‘simhat hochmah’,

where she becomes a crone and may walk with the Torah (traditionally only carried by men), symbolic of the wisdom that she possesses. <sup>[120]</sup>

According to Christine Northrup, there is no other stage in a woman's life that has as much potential for understanding and tapping into her innate power as this one – i.e. the years surrounding the menopausal transition. <sup>[121]</sup> 'every woman must listen carefully to her individual inner guidance to hear her personal truth about how best to negotiate this life stage with maximum access to her inner wisdom and power to create health' <sup>[122]</sup>

### **Hormonal Shifts during Menopause and the myth of Estrogen deficiency** <sup>[123]</sup>

According to Dr. Lonsdorf, nature has programmed our bodies to make the shift to menopause normally and with good health. Fluctuation and eventual decline of the female hormones estrogen and progesterone is the major hormonal event occurring at menopause. While there is only one form of progesterone, Estrogen is a generic term that encompasses a class of reproductive hormones that are chemically similar. The body makes 3 different types of estrogen – Estrone (E1), Estradiol (E2) and Estriol (E3). The most potent form is Estradiol and is the predominant form of estrogen during the reproductive years. Estrone is a less potent form, and is most abundant after menopause. Estriol is the weakest of the three and is produced mainly by the placenta – it is most abundant in the body during pregnancy. During perimenopause, progesterone and estrogen levels begin to fluctuate and decline until after the last menstrual period, after which they gradually stabilize. The ovaries continue to produce low levels of estrogen – mainly Estradiol and Estrone, even after menses has stopped. The ovaries and the adrenal glands also produce a hormone that is converted to Estrone by an enzyme that is present in the fat, skin and muscle tissue, providing additional Estrogen support. The small amount of testosterone produced by the ovaries continues to be produced after menopause and drops off relatively less than the female hormones, estrogen and progesterone. According to Dr. Lonsdorf, it is the continued production of all these hormones that helps ease the transition and supports the body after menopause. Dr. Christine Northrup describes it similarly – Progesterone and androgens (hormones associated with sexual response and libido, and general well-being) such as DHEA and testosterone are all made by the ovaries, in addition to estrogen. According to Dr.

Northrup, a woman's total well being at menopause and beyond depends equally on having adequate levels of these hormones as it does on estrogen. <sup>[124]</sup> She goes on to say that during menopause while there is a decline in hormone production by the ovaries, there is a two fold increase in production of androgenic hormones from other organs and body sites— adrenal glands, skin, muscles, brain, pineal gland, hair follicles and body fat. Since androgens serve as precursors for estrogen production and acts as weak estrogens themselves, she indicates that a healthy woman going through her menopausal transition is naturally equipped to deal with the hormonal changes occurring in her ovaries. In her view, women who produce adequate levels of androgens at this time, have minimal or no problems during menopause. <sup>[125]</sup> In light of all these facts, according to her, the common thinking in the medical community that menopausal symptoms are mostly related to estrogen deficiency resulting from ovarian failure is inaccurate as it is a belief based on incomplete information. This view is echoed by Dr. Lonsdorf of MAPI, - “the prevalent belief that falling estrogen levels are solely responsible for all the symptoms that we currently attribute to menopause is a mistake. “ <sup>[126]</sup> While there is a definite drop in estrogen and progesterone perimenopause and menopausal years, women in their forties and fifties exhibit other signs of aging that may have been going on for decades – the result of stress, poor diet and unhealthy lifestyle choices. When women reach forty, there is a noticeable slowing down of metabolism and digestion, especially if they have been leading a sedentary lifestyle. Dr. Lonsdorf also points to cultural differences that further bring into the question the wisdom of the prevalent belief that menopausal symptoms are the inevitable result of estrogen decline. For example there is no word in the Japanese language for ‘hot flashes’ because they are so rare among the Japanese women. Their absence is attributed to their diet which includes high amounts of soy, which contains phytoestrogens – plant estrogens that mimic the effect of estrogen in the body. Similarly in rural India, women living simple and low stress life, consuming a diet of fresh foods and performing daily physical tasks, rarely have menopausal symptoms. She comments on how the Indian Vaidyas (Ayurvedic physicians), on visits to the West are very surprised at the many reproductive problems Western women face including menopausal symptoms, as well as other menstrual cycle disorders, all of which occur far less in India. <sup>[127]</sup> Even in this country, 15% of the women who go through menopause do not get any hot flashes. And while every woman goes through menopause not all of them have osteoporosis or cardiovascular diseases, which leads one to perhaps

believe that these health problems are due to something more than just declining estrogen. According to Maharishi Ayurveda, these diseases are primarily due to the cumulative effects of unhealthy lifestyle habits during a woman's entire premenopausal life and are only partially aggravated by shifting hormones when a woman arrives at her perimenopausal and menopausal years. In other words the foundation for the imbalances that manifest during menopause and beyond have been laid down long before the arrival of menopause. Dr. Lonsdorf also goes on to say that there is a realization dawning on the medical community (the more aware ones at least) that drugs and hormones cannot replace what years of poor lifestyle have destroyed. [128] Ayurveda, with its holistic and customized approach, can support the woman's health during menopause by awakening the body's innate intelligence for healing and by strengthening the body's own self-healing and balancing mechanisms. [129] Even if a woman has led an unhealthy lifestyle up to that point, Ayurveda can help her re-lay the foundation for a healthy lifestyle from this point forward and for many more years into the future as she makes one of the most important transitions in her life. According to Ayurveda, during the transition to menopause, a woman moves into the Vata phase, symbolic of the autumnal time of life. [130]

### **Ayurvedic interpretation and treatment of menopause**

Although women of all three doshas have complications, menopause is a condition primarily related to Vata. [131] Hence vata will need to be pacified first and in addition to any other doshic imbalance that needs to be addressed.

Vata type menopause symptoms – Anxiety, nervousness, worry, memory loss, insomnia, emotional instability

Physical – Constipation, palpitations, vaginal dryness and atrophy, urinary incontinence, cystitis, feelings of excessive oldness after hot flashes, dryness and thinning of the skin and hair, brittleness in the mucous membranes and the bones, joint and muscle aches, bone fractures and osteoporosis

## Vata pacifying practices [\[132\]](#) [\[133\]](#)

- Vata nourishing diet and herbs – plenty of fresh fruits, vegetables, grains and legumes
- Ample rest
- Nourishing Ayurvedic home treatments such as daily herbal oil massages and uttara bastis
- Meditation and mindful exercises such as Yoga, tai Chi and walking
- Engaging in enjoyable activities to nourish and uplift mind and heart
- Recuperative Pancha Karma and Rasayana therapies to restore hormonal balance

## Vata Pacifying Diet

Sweet whole grains are considered one of the most healing foods for Vata during this time. Of particular importance are brown rice, barley and root vegetables (grounding). Fruits that are high in boron are considered excellent replenishers of estrogen; these include apples, peaches, dates, grapes and raisins. Mung beans and almonds also pacify and nourish Vata. Organic cow's milk, yogurt, butter and ghee are excellent for Vata as well. Maya Tiwari also recommends seaweeds such as kombu, dulse, agar-agar and kelp, as they contain minerals such as calcium, zinc, magnesium, iodine and L-tyrosine which are needed to bolster the body.[\[134\]](#)

## Food tips to alleviate Hot Flashes [\[135\]](#) – to be taken for 6 months during menopause

- Eat a small amount of brown rice
- Half a glass of coconut water with juice of half a lime (in summer)
- Half a glass of pomegranate juice
- Warm organic cow's milk with 10 strands of saffron before bed
- ½ tsp. of castor oil in one tablespoon of lime juice with a pinch of rock salt daily

## Herbal remedies

According to Maya Tiwari, Ayurveda's most nourishing herbs for menopause are aloe vera gel, shatavari, ashwagandha, kapikacchu, triphala, dashmula, brahmi, gotu kola, vidari, saffron, and amalaki. <sup>[136]</sup> Dr. Halpern recommends the use of endocrine hormonal tonics containing phyto-hormones important in the management of menopause <sup>[137]</sup>, especially during the transitional stage (see list below). These herbs also help alleviate symptoms of hot flashes in some women. <sup>[138]</sup> Dr. Halpern however cautions their use after their complete transition into menopause. <sup>[139]</sup>

## Hormonal tonics

Wild Yam, Chaste Berry - Progesterone

Shatavari, Dong Quai, Black Cohosh – Estrogen

In the management of vaginal dryness and vaginitis, Dr. Halpern recommends the use of topical medicated ghee, especially Shatavari ghee. <sup>[140]</sup> In her book, *Women's Power to Heal*, Maya Tiwari offers a recipe for saffron and shatavari milk with ghee taken at bedtime as a vata nourishing practice for the menopausal woman (1 cup organic milk, 10 strands saffron, ½ tsp. shatavari powder, 1 tsp. ghee). <sup>[141]</sup>

## **Pitta type menopause** <sup>[142]</sup>

Physical symptoms – Intense hot flashes with spells of heavy bleeding, migraine headaches, night sweats, loose bowel movements, skin rashes, acne, inflamed muscles, tendonitis, bodily malodor, urinary tract infections

Emotional symptoms – Irritability, intensity and anger

## Pitta pacifying therapies

While the management of Vata is most important during menopause, care must be taken to pacify Pitta as well. These include Pitta pacifying foods and herbs (see dietary guidelines under PMS) – however care must be taken to limit the use of bitter taste, as this can aggravate Vata. Cooling dipanas should be favored over warming dipanas. Cool demulcent herbs such as gokshura, aloe vera and licorice are beneficial not only to Pitta, but to Vata as well. Shatavari is an excellent cooling endocrine tonic for Pitta. Pitta nervine tonics and sedatives such as Brahmi and Gotu Kola can be used along with Ashwagandha (Vata pacifying).

## **Kapha type menopause** [\[143\]](#)

Physical symptoms – Abdominal heaviness, weight gain, water retention, breast swelling, yeast infections, sleepiness

Emotional symptoms – Crying spells, lethargy, listlessness, depression

## **Chikitsa**

While the management of Vata is most important during menopause, care must be taken to pacify Kapha as well. These include Vata / Kapha pacifying food program emphasizing small amounts of warm nourishing foods to increase agni. Sweet foods which are very beneficial to Vata should be taken in small quantities so as to not imbalance Kapha further. Along with use of warm dipanas such as ginger, pippali, triaktu and cloves to increase agni and aid digestion, lekhanas (herbs that help to reduce body weight) such as chitrak and guggulu can be used. To counter the weight gain, regular exercise is also very beneficial. Nervine stimulants such as calamus, bayberry and tulsi can be given to counter lethargy and depression.

## **Nourishing Foods, Herbs and Lifestyle practices for osteoporosis**

Osteoporosis can be countered by eating foods that are high in calcium (organic dairy foods, leafy vegetables, green vegetables and beans), Vitamin D (organic dairy foods), and trace minerals manganese (pineapples, oatmeal, cereals and nuts) and boron (fruits, soy beans, nuts and honey). The Ayurvedic herb Praval Pishti (red coral) containing calcium carbonate is used in the treatment of osteoporosis. <sup>[144]</sup> In addition to calcium rich foods, exercise is one of the best treatments for osteoporosis, as bone density increases with exercise. <sup>[145]</sup> According to Dr. Nancy Lonsdorf, regular exercise and intake of adequate calcium can reduce the rate of bone loss by 50 percent. <sup>[146]</sup>

## **Taking care of the Heart and Ojas**

For palpitations and tachycardia, heart strengthening herbs such as Arjuna and Bala can be given. Maya Tiwari offers a Heart tonic formula recipe which has a mixture of turmeric and arjuna powders (1/2 tsp. each) to be taken in an anupana (vehicle) of warm milk (1.5 cups). <sup>[147]</sup>

## **Ojas (virility tonic) <sup>[148]</sup>**

Maya Tiwari offers the following recipe as one that helps to strengthen and restore hormonal balance to the body, which is of paramount importance at this time in a woman's life.

1.5 cups of cow's milk: 1/2 tsp. shatavari powder : 1/2 tsp. vidari powder : 1/2 tsp. wild yam powder :  
10 strands saffron threads : 1 teaspoon ghee

Mix powders and saffron in warm milk, add the gee and drink after breakfast for a period of three to six months

## **Conclusion**

Women today are empowered in many ways and are an integral and important part of today's socio-economic fabric. They have asserted their economic independence and are on equal footing as men, after many years of trials and tribulations. This also means that women are juggling more responsibilities than ever before. But true to their traditional role as nurturers and caregivers, women are taking care of their families and putting them first. Now more than ever, it is important for women to take a pause, turn the spotlight on them and examine their lives and the state of their health – and start on the path to bring back balance to their lives and connect to their true nature – so that they can live in optimal health, while taking care of their families.

Ayurveda, the ultimate medicine of empowerment, can equip the modern woman with time tested methods of healing support– diet, herbs, lifestyle, purification and rejuvenation therapies, asana, meditation and pranayama, aroma and color therapies. Specifically, as it relates to a woman's monthly menstrual cycle, Ayurveda offers guidelines and therapies not only to alleviate symptoms of menstrual disorders, but to bring regularity and balance to the monthly cycle, by addressing the root cause of the imbalances. All women have the power to heal within them – Ayurveda helps them to connect with their own inner wisdom and guidance and heal from within.

***“Om lokah samastah sukhino bhavantu”***

**“May all beings, everywhere be happy and free, may the thoughts and actions of our lives contribute to that happiness and to freedom for all”**

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## **Appendix**

Uttara Basti Decoctions and directions for application – from Maya Tiwari’s *Women’s Power to Heal Through Inner Medicine* (Mother Om Media, 2007), Pages 82-86

### **Preparing Uttara Basti decoctions**

Use a double boiler when preparing the decoctions because they need a warm and gentle quality for introduction into the womb space. You don’t want to introduce direct heat to the decoction, since it would have to be introduced through the lower pathways of the body. The lower pathways do not have the power of agni, digestive fire, to counteract direct heat. We want the treatment to be gentle.

### **Utensils and Equipment**

One double boiler, or alternately, one large pot and one small bowl which fits loosely in the pot, two small stainless-steel pots, one metal strainer (4 to 5 inches in diameter); one reusable UB bags with douching nozzle; and two bath towels.

### **Uttara Basti formulas**

Use a double boiler to prepare Basti solutions. All formulas listed yield one application each. Use only organically grown ingredients.

### **Triphala-Aloe decoction / One application**

2 cups water  
1 tsp triphala powder  
1 tablespoon aloe vera gel

Bring water to boil in a double boiler. Add triphala powder, then cover and allow to simmer for approximately three minutes. Remove the container from heat and allow the solution to steep for 15 minutes. Strain through a fine sieve, retaining the sediment. Pour the aloe vera gel into the solution and pour the decoction into the UB bag. Follow the directions below for administering the treatment while it’s still warm.

### **Rose-Raspberry decoction / One application**

2 cups water  
1 tablespoon dried rose buds  
1 tablespoon dried raspberry leaves

Bring water to boil in a double boiler. Add the dried leaves and buds, then cover and allow to simmer for approximately five minutes. Remove the container from heat and allow the solution to steep for 15 minutes. Strain through a fine sieve, retaining the herbal roughage to add to your bath water following the treatment. Pour the decoction into the UB bag. Follow the directions below for administering the treatment while it’s still warm.

### **Directions for applying Uttara Basti**

- An oil massage or self massage is recommended before therapy
- Observe a light diet on the UB therapy days
- Spread a clean towel in the bathtub
- Attach the nozzle to the UB bag and close the shut off clip
- Smear the nozzle with an ample amount of sesame oil or cocoa butter
- Hang the UB bag containing the solution approximately three feet above where you will be lying
- Undress and rest comfortably on your back with legs apart and knees bent
- Take a few deep breaths
- Close your eyes and feel every limb in your body relaxing

- Insert the nozzle into the vaginal passage
- Squeeze your buttocks firmly together and lift the hips slightly off the ground (some solution will spill in the process)
- As soon as the UB bag is empty, relax the hips, release the nozzle from the vaginal passage, and allow the decoction to flow out gradually
- Gently get up and remove the wet towel from the tub
- Since the retention of the decoction is so brief, you may immediately repeat the process
- Afterwards, take rest in a warm and cozy space for a few hours