



How to feel
Fantastic
Before, During, and After
Menopause

Dr. Anne Procyk

HOW TO FEEL FANTASTIC BEFORE, DURING, AND AFTER MENOPAUSE

Hormone Changes Can Wreak Havoc

Menopause is well known for making healthy women feel like they are starting to fall apart. So often women are really trying to do everything right - eating well, exercising regularly, and doing their very best to handle the many different kinds of stress life throws at them. But for many women that simply is not enough, or they feel lost and confused by all the contradictory advice out there. Despite all their efforts, their bodies are no longer responding the way they used to, and they feel betrayed. Does this feel familiar?

The good news is that at Third Stone Health, our doctors specialize in helping women balance their hormones and feel their best. We will help you understand what is going wrong, and more importantly, what to do about it. If you are experiencing hot flashes, sleep problems, moodiness, irritability, forgetfulness, and weight gain, or just don't feel like your best self anymore, we will figure out how and why your hormones are out of balance and guide you toward effective, long-lasting, and fast relief.

Balancing hormones is not a one size fits all solution. Nor is it as simple as taking hormones, even bio-identical ones, because taking any kind of hormone carries the risk of making the imbalance worse instead of better. Your doctor may have already confirmed that you are peri-menopausal, but conventional hormone testing only tells you if your FSH and LH have started to rise. While this is one of the signs that the menopausal transition has started, what it fails to tell you is why you are experiencing symptoms, how long they will last, how severe they will be, or what to do about them. Answering those more important questions requires a much deeper analysis.

For 15 years Dr. Anne Procyk ([click here to read bio](#)) has specialized in diagnosing and treating the complex hormonal changes that occur around menopause. Lack of estrogen and the FSH and LH surges are only part of the reason for the changes of menopause, and are NOT the cause of the most distressing symptoms of menopause. All women eventually go through the drastic changes in estrogen, progesterone, FSH, and LH, that characterize menopause, but only some experience significant discomfort with those changes. When women experience strong symptoms, there are other factors involved that need to be identified.

One of my favorite parts of my job is helping women just like you become one of the women who sails through menopause, barely noticing it. By the end of this article, you will understand how integrative medicine can bring your body back to health, and how to contact me if you want help applying all this information to your unique situation. When you do the right testing and get a full understanding of what is going wrong, results are fast and long-lasting.

The Suffering:

Hot Flashes, Sleep Problems, Weight Gain...and Wondering Where You Lost Your Brain

Many women experience a variety of distressing symptoms around menopause, sometimes lasting for years. The hot flashes alone are often enough to drive women crazy. Sweating with no warning, or feeling unbearably hot and then freezing cold minutes later disrupts your day and makes it hard to enjoy anything. At night, repeatedly waking drenched or even just uncomfortable compromises your sleep, creates anxiety, and leads to fatigue and forgetfulness the next day. Sometimes the feeling of dread precedes and even dominates the physical sensations. Even without hot flashes or night sweats, women often experience difficulty sleeping through the night and restless sleep that leaves them feeling tired and unrefreshed in the morning.

Poor sleep and physical discomfort contribute to moodiness, irritability, and difficulty concentrating. But these emotional symptoms can also be the direct result of the hormonal changes themselves. Many women feel like their hormones have taken over their brain, making them feel unsettled, stressed, foggy, and forgetful. Even if you are not experiencing extreme symptoms, if you simply feel off, not your usual strong, happy self, hormonal imbalance may be the underlying reason.

Weight gain is another common experience of women with hormonal imbalances. No matter what women do, the weight creeps on, especially around the belly. Exercising and eating right no longer seem to work the way they used to, adding a whole other layer of frustration and anxiety to the mix of issues.

Many of these symptoms often start before any detectable change in the menstrual cycle. Even if you are too young to be in menopause, hormonal imbalances can dramatically disrupt functioning. These changes often start long before age 50, and are more likely to start earlier when under stress. Pregnancy and raising children are also profound stresses on hormonal equilibrium, and women often experience dramatic upheavals during those times.

“ “ Don't wait for the symptoms to get so bad that they are unbearable, start doing something now!

What to do

You may have already tried many things to feel better, such as eating better, or taking an over-the-counter herbal formula that claims to help with hormones and stress. Most herbal formulas are a combination of plants that could help, and sometimes do, but without in-depth knowledge and experience of how different herbs work, most women are guessing which one is right for their unique needs. Different women have different combinations of symptoms, and therefore need customized approaches. People also need different dosing levels, which is another reason to seek professional help to gain a deeper understanding of your body, and guidance on what will work best. I love helping people understand exactly what is going on in their bodies, and translating that knowledge into a personalized treatment plan specifically for you.

You also may have already talked to your doctor hoping to gain that deeper understanding. But most conventional doctors only evaluate one thing - whether it is high risk or low risk to use hormone replacement therapy. If you are in the low risk category, the doctor will discuss hormone replacement therapy with you. If you are in the high risk group, usually anti-depressants are the preferred option. Neither option truly addresses the reason you have a hormonal imbalance in the first place. Therefore, while each may relieve symptoms temporarily, the underlying issues continue to worsen, and eventually more problems start.

Every one of my patients receives that comprehensive evaluation that you are looking for. I personally help you understand exactly what is going on, and guide you through a treatment plan that is fully customized for your needs and preferences. Get started today, to not just balance your hormones, but improve your overall health.

Nourish your Body, Nourish your Soul

To keep our hormones balanced, our bodies need the raw materials that build hormones. No one food is the magic ingredient that will cure everything, no single diet is right for everyone. Rather, a balanced diet is the key. It is NOT a coincidence that eating balanced will help us *feel* balanced! Balanced eating is not just eating a variety of nutritious foods, but also how we approach eating. So often we feel oppressed by what we “should” eat...and guilty about what we do eat. We are constantly being lured by false advertising and tempted by the addictive nature of “edible food-like substances.” Eating mindfully helps us make better choices. Better choices help us feel physically stronger and mentally clearer, which helps us be more mindful. Now this is the kind of positive feedback loop we want to support, one that improves our health!

Even with diligent mindfulness, in this world of false advertising and ubiquitous health claims, it can still be hard to know what the best choices are. Start with the recommendation of Michael Pollan: “Eat food, mostly plants, not too much.” Even more importantly - enjoy doing it. There is no perfect diet. Listen to your body. It will tell you when you are on, and off, the right track, much more accurately than marketing advice will. If something is advertised as healthy, it is probably not. It costs a lot of money to proclaim that something is healthy, and the most nutritious whole foods rarely have marketing budgets, while fake foods have huge marketing budgets.

Tips to focus on mindful, healthy eating

Stop, stretch, take 7 deep breaths

Before you put anything in your mouth, or even open the refrigerator door, stop, stretch, and take 7 deep breaths. All too often we eat while rushed or distracted, which leads to poor choices and emotional eating without enjoyment. Menopause increases this tendency, but this simple practice will reverse that trend.

Drink a glass of water when hungry

Hunger, and especially cravings for sweets, is often thirst in disguise. Especially if weight is an issue, whenever you feel the urge to eat, drink a big glass of water instead. Also, then consider what nutritious food options you have. If you are still hungry 10 minutes later, enjoy eating, knowing your body truly needs the food and you have taken the time to make your best choice.



Eat vegetables with every meal

Regardless of whether your body prefers paleo or vegan, vegetables are the foundation of every healthy diet. Eating more vegetable increases the nutrition and reduces calories.

Prepare nutritious snacks: raw nuts

The perfect storm of events that leads to eating junk food is being hungry, short on time, and having processed food easily available. Since processed food is almost always available, the best way to avoid temptation is to not let yourself get overly hungry. The best way to not get overly hungry is to eat regularly, which requires having nutritious food on hand. Taking the time to prepare snacks will keep you, and your children, away from vending machines, fast food, other sources of empty calories that pack on pounds and disrupt hormones and neurotransmitters. Raw nuts are an excellent source of essential fatty acids and protein that are easy to pack and easy to eat.

Cleanse Your Body

Sometimes what we stop putting in our body is as important as what we do put in. Many chemicals widely present in our lives can significantly alter hormones, even when doing everything else right. Cleansing our bodies rids us of the disruptive effects of these chemicals, reducing symptoms by truly restoring balance, instead of merely suppressing them. Try eliminating the following chemicals for 1 week, and see just how much better you feel. You can do anything for a week, and you might be very surprised!

Sugar

Refined sugar causes a cascade of hormonal changes, which in susceptible people includes hot flashes.

Alternative - Fresh whole fruit has fiber and many nutrients along with the sugar, moderating the negative effects of the sugar. Substitute your favorite fresh fruit for desserts, and at the end of the week candy will taste too sweet.

Caffeine

Even that one cup of coffee in the morning is enough to cause hot flashes and disrupt sleep for the next TWO nights. We become more sensitive to these secondary effects of caffeine as we age, so even if you have enjoyed coffee for your whole life and your symptoms are new, switching to decaf can still make a huge difference.

Alternative - Decaffeinated coffee or tea is a wonderful substitute.

Soda

Packed with sugar, caffeine, and other chemicals, soda is the perfect recipe to create hot flashes.

Alternative - Seltzer gives you that fizzy kick, without chemical additives. Explore the huge variety of new flavors available, and find your favorites.

Artificial sweeteners

Notice diet soda was NOT on the alternative list above. Artificial sweeteners not only have some of the same effects as sugar, they also contain other chemicals which can stimulate hot flashes, mood swings, and headaches.

Alternative - Make your own sweet treats, and halve the sugar in the recipe. They will taste just as good, and when they truly are occasional treats, and not a daily habit or a binge, they are part of balanced life. (give a recipe)

Alcohol

Both men and women become more susceptible to the negative affects of alcohol as we age. While small amounts of alcohol can also have positive effects, observing the effect of alcohol on your body is an important test of overall health.

Alternative - When one glass of wine causes hot flashes, it sometimes indicates other health issues that can be corrected with the right nutritional support. A comprehensive health evaluation will reveal if this is true for you.

Is this you?

So many women have suffered varying combinations of these issues, often for years or even a decade or more. But one woman, Cathy, cared too much to let her health deteriorate the quality of her life. She had always been high energy and happy juggling lots of projects - various school and sports events with the kids, an active family, and a part time job. At times she found it stressful, and often wondered how she would get everything done, and she prided herself on always being able to come through with the important stuff. But now that the kids were off to college, instead of it seeming easier, somehow it seemed harder. She worried more, and found it harder to make decisions. Small issues kept her up at night. She could usually fall asleep ok, but around 1-2 am she would wake up, and never fully get back to sleep after that. The sleep loss was really starting to take a toll - after awhile she was not sure if the worrying was giving her sleep problems or if the sleep problems were making her overly anxious.

The only time she experienced hot flashes was if she drank wine, and that was rare so she assumed her hormones were fine. She tried an herbal remedy for sleep, and that seemed to help some, she woke less, but she still felt unrefreshed, and now it seemed even harder to get up in the morning. She used to just enjoy her coffee, but now she needed it. She also needed it again in the afternoon, because she was sleepy and found it almost impossible to get anything done in the afternoon. The worst part was she realized she had started making mistakes at work. She had forgotten a couple of appointments, and if she did not write everything down, things would slip her mind. What scared her most was getting Alzheimers. Her father had been diagnosed a few years earlier and even though he still managed, with help, she saw how quickly he was deteriorating and it terrified her.

Conventional medicine

That was the final straw, so she went to her primary care physician. Cathy's PCP had always been helpful and thorough when problems came up, and Cathy trusted her. She listened sympathetically to Cathy and assured her that she did not have Alzheimer's. The doctor suggested that everything she was feeling was likely due to menopause, even though she did not have significant hot flashes. Because Cathy had a sister who had had breast cancer, she recommended against any kind of hormone replacement therapy. Instead she offered anti-anxiety medication or anti-depressant medications, but also warned that anti-anxiety medication could be addictive. Cathy didn't feel she was depressed, so she didn't want an anti-depressant, and really didn't want to treat the anxiety with just a drug. She tried the medication anyway after a while, and even though it helped her sleep, she still felt as bad as ever. After awhile, despite taking it, and despite not having a period for over a year and her doctor telling her she was through menopause, she started getting hot flashes and night sweats daily. She didn't like the idea of just taking higher doses of a medication that didn't seem to help in the first place.

Integrative medicine

When Cathy sought my help, she was hoping for a different and more complete solution. Even though she ate well, testing revealed a B-vitamin deficiency, which was weakening her adrenal function. The weaker adrenal function was significant enough to impact her sleep and create anxiety, and as it got worse, hot flashes. The coffee had been enough to keep her going for awhile, but now it was just making her worse. Additional labs verified that her thyroid was not contributing to the issue, so I guided her through rehabilitating her adrenal function. With vitamin and herbal support, she found stopping the coffee much easier than she thought it would be - despite a day of headaches, several days later she felt better: less anxious, more able to make decisions, and not so tired in the afternoon. Within a week she was sleeping well, and realized she hadn't felt this good in years, and she wondered why she hadn't sought the holistic approach sooner!

After a few more months of vitamin support and sleeping better, she felt like her old self again. She could even enjoy a glass of wine without having a hot flash. After a few months she no longer needed the adrenal support, and she continued to feel good just by eating well and remembering that she was not obliged to take on every project that came her way just because her kids no longer lived at home. Instead she was able to enjoy doing many things that she previously had not had the time to do, because she now had the energy and excitement she was used to.

When you are ready to feel better, stronger, younger...

Hormonal changes can seem both sudden and gradual at the same time. Every case is unique, and many cases will respond completely to simply following a healthy lifestyle. But if you are still not feeling your best, I invite you to call to schedule a comprehensive evaluation of your health, and get started on the path to feeling younger and stronger. Balancing hormones is not just about relief from hot flashes or mood swings. It is also about sleeping better, having as much energy as when you were 25, losing weight, and having the body and mind you really want.

Your first visit will be a 1 hour comprehensive health evaluation. During that time I will listen to you and ask you many detailed questions about your health. I will identify what the underlying issues are and what tests that are needed to further understand the issues. I will then outline a customized treatment plan specifically tailored to your needs and guide you through the process of restoring hormonal balance and improving overall health. With this method, I have helped thousands of women regain the strength to manage and enjoy what is most important to them.

If you are worried about how much it will cost, the best news is that your insurance probably covers it. Most insurance companies cover the office visits. For more detailed information, visit my website ([link](#)) or call Liz at the front desk. Liz will happily answer any questions you have, and deal directly with your insurance company to verify your coverage to save you the hassle. With that peace of mind, you can finally get the kind of health care you have been looking for, likely paid for by the insurance you already have.

I look forward to meeting you soon!

Dr. Anne Procyk

