



## HEAVENLY HERBS and ACUPUNCTURE

Office of SHERYL SANCHEZ, LAc.

8093 Skyway

Paradise, Ca. 95969

(530) 877-7003

[www.heavenly-herbs.com](http://www.heavenly-herbs.com)

### **Natural Herbal Treatment: Menopause and Vaginal Lubrication©**

#### 1) Vaginal Dryness

During the menopausal period, estrogen decreases in the body, and the vaginal mucosa or lining may become thin, resulting in dryness or discomfort. If inflammation occurs due to the degeneration of the vaginal lining, a condition termed 'atrophic vaginitis' occurs. 'This is the most common cause of vaginal irritation in postmenopausal women'.<sup>1</sup>

#### 2) Allopathic or Conventional Western Medical Treatment

Typical allopathic treatment for this condition is to estrogen replacement therapy (ERT), now more commonly referred to as hormone replacement therapy (HRT), either with oral supplements or topically-used ERT crèmes (or vaginally-inserted suppositories). However, this treatment has all the risks of ERT: increased risk of breast, uterine or ovarian cancer, cardiovascular disease, etc. Additionally, this treatment regimen is not appropriate for those who have a history of estrogen-dependent breast cancer, or ovarian or uterine cancer.

#### 3) Naturopathic or Natural Medicine Treatment:

##### a) Essential Fatty Acids (EFAs)

- i) If history of estrogen-dependent breast cancer, use only Fish Oil: 1000-1200 mg/day.
- ii) If not, use above plus supplement with Flax, Borage Seed or Evening Primrose Oil (these oils are phytoestrogenic, or contain plant-based estrogens, so why need to avoid in estrogen-dependent cancers): 1000-2000 mg/day.
- iii) Diet: Salmon and walnuts are excellent sources of EFAs. (So are mackerel and sardines). Add olive also (nutritional value retained only when not heated, so use on salads, etc.) – use virgin or extra virgin olive oil only.
- iv) Note: All oils should be kept refrigerated to avoid rancidity. (Nuts too, actually!)
- v) EFAs have many other health benefits, such as helping the cardiovascular system, brain function (especially DHA, ingredient in fish oil), dry skin and constipation (moisturizing).

##### b) Soy isoflavones

- i) If no history of estrogen-dependent breast cancer, take herbal supplements of soy isoflavones, or herbs such as black cohosh and wild yam. These herbs are phytoestrogenic, and therefore, support estrogen production. Take as directed on bottle, or as prescribed by your health-care practitioner.
- ii) Diet: Add organic soybeans to the diet if appropriate (again, if there is no history of an estrogen-dependent cancer, or if one is not allergic or sensitive to it). Best source is the actual whole food source of the soybean

<sup>1</sup> *Complete Medical Encyclopedia*, American Medical Association, 2003.

itself, called Edaname (or edamame – Japanese term). It can be found in most grocery stores (in the frozen section) in shelled or unshelled form. Typically eaten just steamed, with a bit of salt added. Since this is the whole bean form, easy to add to other dishes: stir fries, soups, salads, etc. (and tastes good). Of course, other options for soy are soy nuts, tempeh, tofu, soy milk and miso.

c) Phytoestrogen Herb Support

- i) Internal use: Typical phytoestrogenic support for menopausal symptoms are appropriate also for vaginal dryness, such as black cohosh, wild yam, chasteberry or Vitex, and dang gui.
- ii) Topical use: Topical phytoestrogenic crèmes are another way to help heal vaginal dryness. There are many brands available, but I carry one brand that is specifically a vulvar crème, with Vitamin A.

d) Anti-oxidants

- i) Vitamin E: Take 800-1,200 IU/day. Excellent for moisturizing and healing the skin in general, plus many other health benefits such as reducing cancer and cardiovascular disease risk. (Best to use the form of mixed tocopherols or gamma-tocopherol, vs. alpha-tocopherol).

e) Vaginal Applications

There are many herbal-based crèmes and suppositories available on the market that are appropriate for vaginal insertion to aid in healing the vaginal lining, or to use specifically for vaginal lubrication. Again, most of these products will use hormones (estrogen or progesterone), or phytoestrogens (soy, black cohosh, wild yam). However, these products are not appropriate if there is a history of estrogen-dependent cancer.

- i) Commonly used products on the market with phytoestrogens are: Dixie Health's Dermal XL Energizing Lubricant (Aloe, Wild Yam, DHEA, Grapefruit Extract, essential oils),
- ii) Products without phytoestrogens are Emerita's Personal Moisturizer – a vaginal lubricant with Vitamin E, Aloe, Calendula, Chamomile and other herbs (but this product has other synthetic additives), Wise Woman Calendula Suppositories (w/ Vitamin E).
- iii) Other possibilities for vaginal insertion:
  - (1) Vitamin E capsule (gel cap form) – poke a hole in the capsule and it will melt inside. Do for periods of 7-10 days, then take a break for 7-10 days. (Best to do at night, while wearing a pad for possible leakage).
  - (2) Vitamin E suppositories: these are becoming harder to find, but I still am able to carry one brand.
  - (3) Vitamin A suppositories (heals epithelial tissue).
  - (4) Calendula suppositories: especially used for minor vaginal irritations, and not long-term use, since it can alter the vaginal pH and possibly cause a yeast infection if used too frequently.
    - (a) Insert suppositories of vitamin A, vitamin E, calendula, dioscorea, or other types of soothing herbal suppositories designed for vaginal use into your vagina.

f) Other Dietary Guidelines

- i) Especially for those with history of estrogen-dependent breast cancer, avoid eating non-organic meat, poultry, and dairy since hormones are used in these products.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> 'Alarm over beef link to breast cancer', Daily Mail, Sean Poulter (dailymail.co.uk), July 3, 2006.