

Menopausal Syndrome and its Management in Ayurvedic Perspective: A Review

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Abstract

Approximately sixty million women in India are above the age of 55 years. With the increase in life expectancy, majority of women spend one third of their lives in the postmenopausal age. The health problems cropping up during this period and related to estrogen deficiency are now obvious and well understood. The term 'Menopause' is defined as the permanent cessation of menstruation at the end of reproductive life due to loss of ovarian follicular activity. Menopause normally occurs between 4th to 5th decade of life. In India, the average age for menopause is 47 years. In Ayurveda, it is the age of Swabhawika (physiological) dominance of Vata, decline in Kapha Dosha and Dhatukshaya. Dhatukshaya is a physiological phenomenon during the late middle and old age. Hormone replacement therapy (HRT) is the main line of management in modern medicine which is very expensive and as many risks. Shatavari (*Asparagus racemosus*) and Madhuyashti (*Glycerrhiza glabra*) are widely accepted as a source of Phytoestrogens due to its 'Isoflavones' content.

Keywords

Menopause, Rajonivrutti, Rasayana, HRT, Phytoestrogens



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INTRODUCTION

The word 'menopause' is composed of two words – 'Meno' + 'pause'; 'meno' refers to 'menses' and 'pause' means 'to stop'. Hence the term 'Menopause' is defined as the permanent cessation of menstruation at the end of reproductive life due to loss of ovarian follicular activity¹. The age of menopause in India varies between 45 – 50 years, the average age being 47 years². The clinical diagnosis is confirmed following stoppage of menstruation for 12 consecutive months. Age at which menopause occurs is genetically predetermined.

Menopausal age is not related to age of menarche, race, socio-economic status, number of pregnancies, lactation or taking contraceptive pills. It is however directly related with smoking and genetic predisposition.

WHO scientific group (1981)³ found that employment is associated with early menopause. Mckinlay SM *et al.* (1992)⁴ noted that increasing parity, oral contraceptive pills, education and high socioeconomic groups are associated with delayed menopause. Undernourished women experience early menopause. Cigarette smoking causes early menopause⁵.

Menopause may be physiological or artificial i.e. induced by chemotherapy, radiotherapy or surgery (Hysterectomy). The group of signs and symptoms associated with the menopause is termed as "Menopausal syndrome". Hormone replacement therapy (HRT) along with or without sedatives, calcium supplements or biophosphonates etc. is the main line of management for the same in modern medical science. The treatment is beneficial in cardiovascular and bone changes along with providing short term symptomatic relief from symptoms.

HRT has many limitations and can produce serious adverse effects⁶. In Ayurvedic literature, the term *Rajonivritti* has been described which can be used as a synonym for the term 'Menopause'. *Rajonivritti* (*Rajah* + *Nivritti*) means 'permanent cessation of menstruation' due to effect of ageing (*Jara*) as quoted by *Acharayas*⁷.

The Menopausal syndrome is associated with menopause which in turn is a natural part of the ageing process (*Jara/Swabhawaja Roga*). The basic element for the treatment of this condition is *Rasayana* therapy. *Rasayana* drugs increase the longevity, promote immunity, help in maintenance and promotion of physical

health and mental faculties⁸. These drugs are found to have antioxidant, antimutogenic, immunomodulatory, adaptogenic, antistress and radioprotective properties as proved by various clinical and experimental studies⁹. *Shatavari* (*Asparagus racemosus*) and *Madhuyashti* (*Glycyrrhiza glabra*) are widely accepted as a source of phytoestrogens due to its 'Isoflavones' content¹⁰.

Clinical features

1. Menstrual Irregularities
2. Hot flushes
3. Palpitations
4. Hypertension
5. Headache
6. Psychological symptoms like mood swings, anxiety, depression, irritability, loss of libido.
7. Genito-urinary symptoms – dysuria, dryness of vagina, discharge per vagina, stress incontinence, senile vulvovaginitis, recurrent urinary tract and vaginal infections and genital prolapse.
8. Sexual difficulties - dysparunia (painful coitus) and post coital bleeding
9. Other Symptoms- constipation, dyspepsia, breast pain, feeling of

pricks and pins on body, forgetfulness, fatigue, backache, joint pain, myalgia, weight gain, dry /lusterless skin, mild virilization /hirsutism (excess facial hairs)

Health hazards related with menopause

1. Osteoporosis and Fractures
2. Cardiovascular Diseases
3. Cerebrovascular disorders - Stroke and Alzheimer's disease

Concept of menopause (*Rajonivritti*) in ayurveda

The term '*Rajonivritti*' is composed of two words – *Rajah* + *Nivritti*. '*Raja*' means 'menstrual discharge'. The words *Rakta*, *Artava* and *Artava-shonita* are used with similar intension. '*Nivritti*' means completion, cessation or fulfillment. Thus the term, '*Rajonivritti*' is defined as the 'end of menstruation or stoppage of menstrual cycle'.

'*Rajonivritti*' is the transitional phase in a woman's life span during which the woman enters from reproductive to non-reproductive phase. It is a *Swabhawaja* (Natural) phenomenon which is inevitable. According to Ayurveda, the approximate age of menopause is fifty years of age¹¹. The age of 4-5th decade of life which is described as the age of physiological menopause in

women is termed as '*Praudhawastha*' or '*Adhirudhawastha*' in Ayurvedic literature. It is the age of *Swabhawika* (physiological) dominance of *Vata Dosha*, decline in *Kapha Dosha* and *Dhatukshaya*. The various symptoms of Menopausal syndrome viz. hot flushes, palpitations, anxiety, irritability, depression, reduced memory, insomnia, Recurrent U.T.I. and vaginal infections, constipation, dysuria, dysparunia etc. may be attributed due to the imbalance in the *Doshas* and process of *Dhatukshaya* in the body. *Artavakshaya* (Ovarian follicular atresia) is also a part of the process of *Dhatukshaya* in the body. Exposure to predisposing and precipitating factors like *Vata and Pitta* predominant *Prakriti*, *Avara sattva*, *Mithya Ahara-vihara*, *Manasika Doshas* and stress etc. further enhance or accelerate this condition leading to various distressing symptoms.

Ayurvedic Principles of management

The condition can be managed effectively on the basis of principles of management of *Swabhawika Roga*, *Jara Roga*, *Vata- vyadhi*, *Manas Rogas* and *Dhatukshaya* along with *Vata – Pitta Shamaka* and symptomatic treatment.

- 1. *Nidana Parivarjana* (Preventive measures)** - Avoidance of

precipitating factors (as mentioned under etiology) is the first and foremost step in the management of Menopausal syndrome.

- 2. *Diet and life style modification*** – Light and regular meals should be taken with milk, green vegetables, fruits, dairy products and water in plenty amount. Heavy, very oily, spicy, dry, stale food should be avoided. Light exercises are useful. *Atishrama* (Excessive labour), *Ativyayama* (Heavy exercise), *Mansika Vega* (*Kama*, *Krodha*, *Bhaya*, *Chinta* etc.) should be avoided.
- 3. *Principle of management of Swabhawaja-Roga and Jara Roga***¹² - Only the *Rasayana* therapy is effective in treating them.
- 4. *Line of management of Vata-vyadhi***¹³ - *Snehana* therapy (*Samtarpana*) should be done in *Shuddha-vatika* (only *Vata*-predominant) diseases. *Agnideepana*, *Amapachana*, *Vatanulomana*, *Snehana*, *Swedana*, *Mridu Virechana* and *Vasti* therapy should be applied in *vata roga*. *Rasayana* therapy is best treatment of *Vata-vyadhi*.

5. **Line of management of Manas Roga**¹⁴ - The *Rasayana* drugs (*Medhya Rasayana*) used in *Manasika-vikaras* like *Brahmi*, *Shankhpushpi* etc. are also beneficial in Menopausal Syndrome as it also includes some mental symptoms e.g. anxiety etc. Counseling, reassurance, meditation and yoga are beneficial in alleviating the symptoms of the *Mansika Rogas*.
6. **Line of treatment of Dhatukshaya**¹⁵ - Use of food, drinks, drugs and activities which cause increase in quality and quantity of specific *dhatu* (*swayonivardhanam dravayas*) is beneficial in Menopausal Syndrome. *Balya and Brinhana* drugs (strength promoting drugs) are effective in treating *Dhatukshaya*¹⁵.
7. **Vata-Pitta Shamaka Chikitsa** - Food, drinks and drugs with *Madhura*, *Tikta*, *Snigdha*, *Unushnasheeta* properties, *Madhurvipaka* and *Samtarpana* (nourishing) properties.
8. **Symptomatic Management**
In brief, various treatment modalities which are beneficial in the

management of Menopausal syndrome are –

Samshodhana (Purification) therapy – *Abhayanga* (*Massages*), *Mild Swedana* (*Fomentation*), *Shirodhara*, *Virechana* (*Purgation/ Use of Laxatives*) and *Vasti* (*enema*).

Samshamana (Pacification/ drugs) therapy – *Drugs and Formulations-Shatavari* (*Asparagus recemosus*), *Madhuyashti* (*Glyccerhiza glabra*), *Bala* (*Sida cordifolia*), *Giloya* (*Tinospora cordifolia*), *Nagarmotha* (*Cyprus rotundus*), *Haritaki* (*Terminalia chebula*), *Amalaki* (*Embelica officinalis*), *Shankhpushpi* *Convolvulus pleuricaulis*), *Brahmi* (*centella asiatica*), *Vacha* (*Acorus calamus*), *Jatamansi* (*Nardostychnus jatamansi*), *Ashoka* (*saraca asoka*), *Manjishtha* (*Rubia cordifolia*), *Ashwagandha* (*Withania somnifera*) etc. *Triphala Churna*, *Shatavaryadi Churna*, *Dashmularishta*, *Ashokarishta*, *Dashmula Kwatha*, *Punarnavadi Kwatha*, *Dhatri Lauha*, *Amalaki Rasayana*, *Brahmi vati*,

Chandraprabha Vati, Mahavatavidhwansana rasa, Prawal Pishti and Kukkutand twak Bhasma are effective.

Yoga and Meditation- *Meditation, Pranayama* (Breathing techniques like- *Ujjayi, Bhramari Pranayama*), certain *Asna* like *Padamasana, Vajrasana, Shawasna* etc.

SUMMARY

The group of symptoms associated with menopause is called as ‘Menopausal Syndrome’, Average age of Menopause in 47 years (45-50) years in India. These symptoms include history of Hot flushes, Palpitations, Anxiety, Irritability, Decreased Libido and Dysparunia, Discharge P/V, Dysuria and Dyspepsia etc. Many long term sequelae like Osteoporosis, Cardiovascular disease, Stroke and Alzheimer’s disease may also be associated with Menopausal Syndrome. Hormone replacement therapy (HRT) is the main line of treatment in this condition. Long term use of HRT may produce several adverse effects, particularly endometrial and breast cancer and thromboembolism etc. Though, the beneficial effects of HRT on short-term symptoms and long term sequelae like

Osteoporosis, Cardiovascular diseases are well established but it is not usually preferred because its risks outweigh the benefits.

As per ayurveda, it is a *Swabhawika* phenomenon occurring as a part of natural process of aging (*Jarawastha*, 40-50 years of age) females. There is gradual development of *Dhatukshaya. Rajas (Artava)* is *Updhatu* of *Rasa-dhatu*. The condition of *Artavakshaya* occurs as part of *Swabhawika dhatukshayatamaka* process (natural process of ageing in females) and it is the most important factor responsible for *Pitta Vriddhi and Pittika* symptoms of the disease. The principles of management of *Jara Roga, Swabhawika Roga, Vata-vyadhi, Manasika Roga, Dhatukshaya-chikitsa* and *Vata-pitta- shamaka-chikitsa* may be very effective for the management of Menopausal Syndrome. Some *Rasayana* drugs having Phytoestrogenic properties¹⁶ like *Madhuyashti and Shatavari* etc. Soya is proved as best nutritional supplement with Phytoestrogenic properties¹⁷. Other formulations and modalities described in Ayurvedic texts as described above are very effective as a substitute of hormone replacement therapy.

CONCLUSION

Menopause is the stage of *Rajonivritti* in a female along with certain other symptoms developed due to vitiated *Vata dosha*, *Pitta dosha* predominance and *Dhatukshaya* in the body. On the basis of Ayurvedic principles the Menopausal syndrome can be managed effectively by following a composite scheme of various principles including management of *Swabhawika roga*, *Jara roga*, *Vata vyadhi*, *Dhatukshaya*, *Manasika rogas*, along with general *Vata Pitta shamaka* and symptomatic treatment. *Rasayana therapy* has a significant role to play in the management of all above conditions and hence can prove to be very effective in alleviating the menopausal syndrome.

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