

Complementary and Dietary Supplements for Menopausal health: What Works, What Does Not

Professor Lily Stojanovska MSc, PhD

School of Biomedical and Health Sciences, Victoria University, Melbourne, Australia

Menopause is characterised by decreased levels of estrogen which may lead to psychological and psychological disorders. Hormone Replacement Therapy (HRT) is the treatment most commonly used to relieve menopausal symptoms, however, many women have become reluctant to continue and/or commence HRT due to unwanted side effects or for fear of adverse risks. This has motivated many women to cease HRT and look for alternative treatments, particularly dietary and complementary therapies. Furthermore, following the release of the Women's Health Initiative Study indicating that HRT was associated with adverse health risks, there has been an increase in the number of dietary supplements manufactured specifically targeting menopausal women.

Many alternative therapies currently available claim to provide a wide array of benefits to menopausal women, of which some, including soy and black cohosh, have been supported by scientific evidence. There are, however, numerous products for which benefit has been claimed although scientific support is lacking⁵. Maca is one example. Maca is the root of the plant *Lepidium meyenii*, which is grown at high altitude in Peru and is widely available in the US and Australia. It is marketed commercially for its reported benefit in relieving menopause symptoms, although there is scant published scientific data to support any efficacy. Preliminary findings show that Maca reduces psychological symptoms, including anxiety and depression, and lowers measures of sexual dysfunction in postmenopausal women independent of estrogenic and androgenic activity.

This presentation will review the literature of some complementary and alternative treatments used in postmenopausal health related symptoms.