

Yoga Therapy And Menopause

By: Michele Roy
For: Karen Heaven Claffey
Date: November 14, 2009

Introduction:

Years ago women did not live very long, 60-65 yrs of age, after the onset of menopause women generally had 10-15 yrs. Today fortunately, we can experience many decades of life after menopause. We have more choices in how to live those years. Some of the health challenges for women in the menopause years can be addressed through lifestyle changes. Lifestyle is a key factor in meeting the health concerns of this stage of life and this essay will be focusing on how yoga therapy can be one of the modalities women can use to focus on their health and well being. Yoga has been proven to be a life enhancing intervention for women who want to significantly add life to their years. The techniques and treatments presented here will be a holistic approach to a woman's health and well being during her menopause years.

Menopause is not a medical condition but a natural transition, which literally means a pause in menses. When your menses have ceased for a full year you are considered to be in menopause. The production of hormones becomes erratic and this change can produce symptoms such as: Hot flashes, night sweats, headaches, irritability and anxiety, fatigue and insomnia, and temporary memory lapses. Women also experience a change in their sense of self and identity, this can be accompanied by a sense of loss and confusion in her accustomed role in society. This perceived and real change in a woman's life along with the physical changes during this time have proven to be a tremendous challenge. A challenge that begins with embracing a new way of approaching one's life, relationships and health.

I hope through this report you will discover how yoga therapy serves as a beacon of light to women in understand themselves and translating that understanding into a useful way of being in the world. Many women have found yoga can reduce the uncomfortable side effects of fluctuating hormone levels. Realizing the place that physical, emotional, spiritual health plays in our life is the foundation of Yoga Therapy and can serve all women in their quest for wholeness during the menopause years.

Menopause what is happening in the body?

The key players in this stage of life are the endocrine glands. They are the pituitary gland at the base of the brain, the hypothalamus lies above the pituitary gland in the brain, the pineal gland also near pituitary, the thyroid gland at the base of the neck, the islets of Langerhans in the pancreas, the adrenal glands located above the right and left kidneys and the ovaries. The hypothalamus regulates temperature, sleep and appetite. The islets of Langerhans regulate carbohydrate metabolism including our blood sugar levels which affects our energy and our insulin levels. The ovaries which produce hormones that direct our sex drive. The glands of the endocrine system do produce hormones especially during menopause as the ovaries are no longer occupying that function. During perimenopause 45-55yrs of age- the stage of a few years before menopause is when a woman has fewer eggs containing follicle in her ovaries and hormone levels have started to fluctuate.

Eventually very few egg follicles ripen and little estrogen or progesterone is released from the ovaries. This causes high levels of FSH (follicle-stimulating hormone) and LH (Luteinizing hormone) to be released from the hypothalamus and pituitary gland in an effort to stimulate the unresponsive ovaries.

“The hypothalamus area of the brain directs the hormonal system. It is influenced by many external factors including emotions, stress and diet, as well as hormones from other parts of the reproductive system. The hypothalamus secretes gonadotropin-releasing hormone (GnRh), which signals the nearby pituitary gland to produce (FSH) and (LH). These enter the bloodstream and, when they reach the ovaries, stimulate the growth of a follicle containing an egg cell, and trigger ovulation. After ovulation, the ovaries produce higher levels of progesterone and estradiol, which promote endometrial growth in the uterus. If no pregnancy ensues, hormone levels falls and you get your menstrual period, resetting the hypothalamus/pituitary cycle.” (page 30, Mind over Menopause)

During menopause “The low level of estrogen in the blood starts to affect organs all over the body and may produce symptoms. High levels of FSH and LH may also produce symptoms, in particular affecting the metabolism of fats and carbohydrates and the chemistry of the brain. The ovaries do not stop working and continue to produce some estrogen after menopause, as well as androgenic hormones. The Type of estrogen produced is known as estrone and is less active than the estriol produced by developing follicles. Estrone is also produced in fat cells throughout the body. With less estrogen to balance the androgenic (or “ male type”) hormones produced, the balance tips toward a more masculine type hormone profile, leading to symptoms such as male pattern hair loss and growth, a thicker waist and an increased risk of heart disease.”(p18 : the Menopause Bible).

This biological view of the physical changes on a micro level helps us to understand that the change in our bodies as we age, are a natural phenomena. These micro changes are also represented at the macro level of a woman’s life with changes in physical mental and emotional perspectives. The initial changes can also serve to refocus a woman’s attention on self care and pausing to consider her roles and responsibilities. Woman’s early years are often years devoted to care giving to families and pausing to replenish our energy and perspectives can be a time of empowerment, and increased confidence.

The yoga sutra 1.41 states “when the mind is free from distractions it is possible for all the mental processes to be involved in the object of inquiry.” When the mind and body pause the innate faculty of knowing and intuition which traditionally is said to lye beyond the distractions of the world, becomes available to us. I suggest to you that menopause can be a time of great focus, inner strength and wisdom for all women transitioning into menopause it is a kind of metamorphosis, an opportunity to live life in a new way and to have life renew us from the inside out

Medical Treatment for Symptoms of Menopause:

A common medical treatment for managing these menopausal symptoms has been HRT (hormone replacement therapy) but this has been shown to be associated with serious health risks.

In the 1970s, though, the first black cloud appeared. Two major studies published in the *New England Journal of Medicine* showed that estrogen supplements could increase the risk of cancer in the lining of the uterus. Pharmaceutical companies responded by offering new formulas that combined estrogen with another hormone, progesterone, which had been shown in numerous studies to counter the increased risk of uterine cancer from taking estrogen alone.

By the 1980s, research had suggested that the estrogen-progesterone combination could also lower the risk of heart disease, osteoporosis, and perhaps even Alzheimer's disease. The studies showing these benefits, however, also showed that estrogen-related drugs could increase the risk of breast cancer. Perhaps more important, the trials were not definitive. Some were quite small; others used an observational approach--that is, researchers interviewed women who had chosen to take hormones (or not) and followed up with them for a number of years to record any health troubles. This approach is far from the gold standard for medical research, as the results can easily be misleading. For example, women who chose to take HRT tended to have a healthier lifestyle than those who didn't. So while those taking hormones fared better at the end of the study, it wasn't clear if this was a result of the drugs or their better overall health.

For researchers to be certain that HRT could help prevent disease, they needed to perform a double-blind study with a control group. In 1993, scientists recruited more than 16,000 postmenopausal women and randomly assigned them to take either the most widely prescribed hormone combination (Prempro) or sugar pills. The eight-and-a-half-year trial was dubbed the Women's Health Initiative (WHI).

In the middle of the trial, though, a hurricane hit. Researchers discovered that Prempro was actually increasing--not decreasing--the risk of heart disease, blood clots, and stroke. Add to this the previous data on increased breast-cancer risk and researchers arrived at a difficult verdict: HRT poses significant health risks for postmenopausal women that generally outweigh the drugs' benefits. In July 2002, WHI officials halted the trial three years early and advised the postmenopausal study participants to quit taking HRT. (Yoga Journal article: "Menopause can be a trying time for women")

Recently, more women have been looking for natural alternatives to HRT and some women have experienced the benefits of yoga for coping with the symptoms of menopause.

Yoga Therapy and Menopause

Yoga can help alleviate many of the symptoms of menopause. On a physical level it relaxes your nervous system, balances your endocrine system, increases blood flow and oxygen to your reproductive system purifies your liver and strengthens the muscles that support your organs. On the psychological level, yoga reduces your stress response thereby giving a sense of choice in your behaviours which promotes relaxation and helps the hypothalamus regulate hormones more efficiently. Yoga encourages you to inform yourself internally, going inside listening to the body and responding from there. Responding to one's environment from an internal reference point, can serve to strengthen a woman's inner knowing and sense of responsibility. The philosophy of Yoga invites us to re-examine the habits, tendencies and the beliefs that have formed our lives. The Yamas (vows) and Niyamas (guidelines for conduct) (see appendix) are simple principles of living that can support and guide a woman's journey throughout her life and especially during times of intense changes like menopause.

During menopause woman can feel they have lost the solid ground that supported them in their early beginning years of marriage, childbearing, care giving and also, realizing their career goals. Their social identities often came from activities that were inspired by these roles in their life. As these roles change and/or these activities fall away, which is often during the menopause years, (50+ years of age), a woman's perception of self is changed. Questions such as: "How can I contribute?", "What is my role or place in society?" "Where can I put my energies?", "What is important to me now?", "What do I value?". Doubts and confusion can arise and take a previously confident woman into a place of uncertainty. Patanjali's yoga sutras speak to this process of self-examination.

Yoga sutra 2.1 – Tapahsvadhyayavarapranidhanani kriyagoh-

"The practice of Yoga must reduce both physical and mental impurities. It must develop our capacity for self-examination and help us to understand that, in the final analysis, we are not the masters of everything we do."

This is where Yoga plays an important role, building a capacity for living in uncertainty while being in the moment, as well as providing guiding principles to serve as a compass in our changing lives, keeping us on course and connected to our truth. Yoga Therapy provides a culture of grounding the body and mind especially during times of change. As woman enter menopause we become more aware of our limitations and our possibilities. Both of these seemingly opposites are reconciled in the practice of yoga. According to the Yoga Sutra's, accepting and surrendering to our limitations is the gateway to divine possibility.

Yoga Sutra 2. 45 Samadhi siddhir isvara-pranidhanate-

Through surrendering one's actions to god, one has access to full integration.

I believe menopause is a time of change, and like all change, takes us through a journey of self examination and retrospection that helps us re-evaluate who we are and who we will become in the world now that things have changed. Menopause changes often are initially exhibited through changes in the body. The cessation of menses, body temperature changes, irritability, changes in sexual desire and metabolism occur. Accepting the changes and discovering a new way of being in the world, is liberating for many women almost a shedding of the past giving us a permission to reveal a self that is not necessarily new but might have been hidden or inaccessible until the onset of menopause and all that it has to offer. It is an opportunity to re-evaluate, learn and apply different activities, behaviours and thinking, with the intention of living life more fully. Every change provides a choice to be a victim of the change VS being at the source of the change, positively directing the change to best serve our needs and vision for life.

According to Ayurveda, regulating your daily routine to reflect your natural biological rhythms can help to correct imbalances. Herbal support, revising your diet and making lifestyle changes during menopause will help bring a holistic and long lasting approach to dealing with the symptoms of menopause.

Let's take a look at some of the symptoms of menopause and explore these changes from the perspective of yoga therapy and how yoga therapy can be a great proactive step to towards creating positive changes in our lives.

Common Symptoms of Menopause:

- Headaches
- Joint aches and stiffness
- Hot flashes
- Changes in our sexuality
- Sleep disturbances and insomnia

Headaches:

Fluctuations in hormone levels which are characteristic to perimenopause and menopause can increase the intensity of headaches and migraines. These are also brought on by muscle contraction and constriction, dilation of the blood vessels in the head, eating and sleeping patterns, emotional factors and intense physical exertion.

Treating headaches with aspirin, only deals with the symptoms, not the causes. Tension headaches can be brought on by any number of problems, including bad posture, muscle fatigue, sinus infections, emotional turmoil, and high blood pressure. Being aware of your body can help prevent headaches and/or stop it before it takes hold of the physiology.

“The most common cause of headaches is the forward head position, with rounded shoulders, a curved upper back, and accompanying muscular tension. The first sign of a headache is often a tightening of the shoulders and neck. This contraction causes a reduction in blood flow to the vessels of the head, resulting in a headache.” (Yoga journal website article heads up about headaches)

Yoga poses and breathing techniques which relieve tension headaches, and working with a yoga therapist to assess your posture and alignment have proven to be effective treatments for headaches.

Asanas:

- Seated, Forward bend, head supported
- Legs on the wall, chest supported, with head wrapped and eyes covered
- Leaning back on chair, Cobblers pose, head and neck supported with blankets
- Corpse pose, raise head on blanket and cool compress under occipital bone at base of skull.

Pranyama:

Yoga Sutra II. 49 “tasmin sati svasa-prasvasayor gati-vicchedah pranayamah”

With effort relaxing the flow of inhalation and exhalation can be brought to a standstill: this is called breath regulation.

Yogic Breathing:

Breath work or practice is one of the key principles of yoga. Proper breathing techniques play a vital role in reducing stress and tension, as well as, giving the body energy and vitality.

Headaches are not only caused from poor posture and circulation but also from over thinking, thinking stressful thoughts or repeating patterns of thoughts. Helping the mind to release from thinking by focusing on the breath, can serve to liberate the mind and reduce stress. Breathing is our innate ability to receive life. Yogic breathing tones the diaphragm, expands the lungs and stretches the intercostal muscles. Bringing oxygen into the body and promoting deep breathing and relaxation is a key purpose of yogic breathing.

Yogic breathing is a 3 part inhale breath followed by one smooth flowing exhale. Begin by finding a comfortable position, and begin to inhale filling the lower abdominal area, sequencing your inhale to next fill your mid chest and then the upper chest, without holding your breath. End with a long exhale emptying each chamber in reverse order, upper chest, mid chest and lower abdominal area. 5 minutes practice.

Viloma A restores, equalizes and balances the flow of Prana (life force) in the body;

Working only with the breath in an easy, non-aggressive manner, inhale through the nose with the mouth closed to a count of three, filling the pelvic area, lower chest and upper chest consecutively, inserting a slight pause after filling each area and exhale fully with slowly and easily until your lungs are empty of breath. At any time, if you feel you are

working beyond your capacity, stop and resume normal breathing. Begin with 5 minutes practice.

Meditation:

Yoga Sutra I.2- Yogas citta-vritti – nirodah

Yoga is to still the patterning of consciousness.

Yoga Sutra I.3 Tada drastuh svarupe vasthanam

Then pure awareness can abide in its own essential nature.

Headaches are often due to an over active mind. Woman who are in their menopause years often have teenage children and/or aging parents to care for. A caregivers mind can be filled with worries and sometimes a feeling of overwhelm is accompanied by the mind inability to come to rest. Giving a chance for the mind to rest and expand, reducing the obsessive nature of the stressed mind to contract into thinking about something and instead creating space for the mind to just expand into its true nature of pure awareness, is the purpose of meditation. The best attitude towards meditation is to be very patient as the mind does not always want to focus. Having a sense of expectation towards positive results can create uncomfortable pressure and thus take away the enjoyment of the experience. By practicing meditation regularly, the person whom meditates gains a wonderful sense of the self. Meditation is a self healing process; any form of stress is a sign of our negative thinking and dis ease within our mind. If we don't attend to dis ease in the mind we may find that chronic stress can lead to disease of the body.

Once you find a position suitable for you, close your eyes and pick something simple to focus on. Many people use their breathing. Just breathe in deeply, feel your lungs fill and then exhale slowly as your blood becomes enriched with oxygen. Just pay attention to your breathing as you do it. Then, when your mind starts to wander and think thoughts, “I wonder how long it’s been” or “This is it?” Just release those thoughts and turn your attention back to your breathing. Maybe you’ll start thinking: “I’m watching my breathing; I’m watching my breathing.” Let those thoughts go too. Letting go and quieting the incessant inner monologue by bringing your attention to your breathing. Begin with 10 minutes sitting position. Option to rest in shavasana for 3-5 minutes after seated meditation.

Joint and Bone Aches and Stiffness:

Our bones and joints support us and allow us to move through our lives. Our health before our menopause years is a key factor in our joint and bone health in our later years. Lifestyle, environmental and genetic factors will determine our bone health. Maintaining our minerals in balance through proper nutrition and exercise is important in reducing

bone and joint problems. Awareness of Osteoporosis has grown significantly over the years has been on the minds of many woman entering menopause. According to WHO (World health organization) 20 % of post menopausal women have osteoporosis. Mineral balance is an important element in healthy bones. There are a few points to consider:

“Low bone density is not necessarily a sign of brittle bone density. If bone Quality is good; you can actually lose 25% or more of your bone mass and still resist fractures. In fact, it’s normal to lose a bit of bone density as you get older, but that doesn’t mean your bones must get brittle.” (Yoga and the wisdom of menopause p.102)

“And having dense bones does not guarantee freedom from fractures. Interestingly, roughly half of those with bone density low enough to qualify as having osteoporosis never experience an osteoporotic fracture. Conversely, a significant number of people with medium and even high bone density experience unexpected fractures. While mineral content and bone density are important, the ability of bone to heal and repair itself is probably of equal importance in preventing osteoporotic fractures. (Yoga and the wisdom of menopause p 101).

Tips on balancing minerals in the body:

1. Reduce sugar intake (inhibits body ability to absorb calcium)
2. Reduce caffeine intake (inhibits body ability to absorb calcium)
3. Reduce intake of soft drinks or consumption of phosphoric acid (inhibits body ability to absorb calcium.
4. Reduce intake of salt (high sodium leaches calcium from the bone)
5. Reduce alcohol (more than 2-3 units of alcohol a day can damage osteoblasts, those cells which make new bone)
6. Make sure you are not exceeding 100g of protein a day as it increases the excretion of calcium in the urine.
7. Get plenty of vitamin D (an essential bone building vitamin)\
8. Participate in weight bearing exercize (creates an environment where the bones are signaled by the brain to increase their density, to adapt to the increased demands of the weight bearing activities)
9. Practice yoga as it balances strength and flexibility. The body is brought to alignment reducing the risk of injury and/or undue wear on the joints, and muscular imbalance.

Yoga Therapy Practices:

For our joints and bones a series of balanced movement is important. Inactivity is as much a risk factor as overexertion on the bones and joints. Yoga improves the blood circulation in joints, builds bone density, and removes unwanted toxins and other waste products.

Asana:

. Simple asanas, movements help increase the circulation in the joints and limbs. Various Asanas like Basic Movement practice:

Sun salutations
Standing poses
Warrior I, II, and III
Standing forward bend variations
Side angle pose
Lunge poses
Balancing poses
Tree
Half moon
Down dog

Pranayama –

Simple Pranayama is recommended, which involves deep breathing, special type of Pranayama with inhalation via right nostril and exhalation via both nostrils and creating a sound of Hmm...

Heat Treatment and Massage –

A light massage of medicated Ayurveda Herbal oil is very effective, especially after application of heat (moderate and bearable with heat bags). Massage makes the joint movements easier and then patients can perform physical movements, so if massage is followed by Asanas, it has been found to be more fruitful.

- Steam bath
- In the morning drink warm water + fresh lime on empty stomach
- Sun bath for 10 to 15 minutes

-
Home remedies for stiffness in joints and bones–

- Drinking boiled water with dry ginger once a day
- Before taking shower / bath, massage the painful part / joint with Castor Oil.
- Before going to bed, drink 2 spoons of Castor oil + 1 spoon Honey + ¼ cup warm water
- Fresh and light diet, consume food immediately when it is cooked & warm (avoid stale and cold food)
- Eat lunch by 12 noon & dinner before 7 pm
- Do not overeat

Hot Flashes:

Episodes of temperature change in the body lasting seconds to minutes. They include Heart palpitations, increase in blood flow to the skin, and strong sensation of heat in the body. Nearly 60% of all women will experience hot flashes and they will last from 1-5 years.

“An imbalance in the hypothalamus (that part of the brain that regulates temperature. Hot flashes coincide with ultradian surges in LH (luteinizing hormone), which is secreted in bursts every 30 to 60 minutes or longer. Each hot flash begins as an LH level spike.” (The complete Natural Medicine Guide to Woman’s Health, page 275)

Yoga Therapy Practices:

To cool the body and relax the nervous system.

“Inverted poses also have a dramatic effect on what physiologists call hemodynamic- the flow of blood to every organ of the body. They have a particular potent-and measurable-effect on the glands of the endocrine system, including the pineal, pituitary, thyroid, parathyroid, adrenals and hypothalamus. Keep in mind that the endocrine system controls the changes in hormone levels that occur during menopause” (Yoga and the wisdom of menopause, page 85)

Supported deep relaxation pose Savasana
Supported lying down bound angle pose
Wide angle standing forward bend with head supported
Supported downward facing dog
Supported lying down hero pose
Supported bridge pose
Supported shoulder stand
Supported half plow pose with a chair and neck support
Lying back over a chair supported
All backbends
Supported legs up on a wall
Supported bridge pose

Pranyama:

Breathing to cool the body and draw prana into the center of the body instead of to the skin surface.

Practice Shitali breathing:

Using belly breath, which is cooling to the physiology, inhale through the mouth and exhale through the nose. The tongue is curled so as to produce a pipe, and inhale through the mouth as if breathing through a straw. 5 minutes

Nadi shodana:

Sit comfortably with straight spine, open chest and closed eyes. Extend your right palm forward and fold down your index and middle fingers, leaving the thumb, ring finger and pinkie extended. You have made a space for your nose to fit between your thumb and ring fingers. Closing the left nostril with the side of your index finger and the thumb can close the right nostril. We exhale and inhale on each side then switch. Exhale-inhale-switch. 5 minutes.

Breathing in essential oils that help pacify heat in the body:

Treat yourself to a fresh bouquet of tuberose, gardenia, or freesia. Or dab on a diluted essential oil: Try rose, jasmine, geranium, vetiver, or ylang ylang.

Tips for Woman who experience hot flashes:

1. Keep a diary of your hot flashes. Hot flashes follow certain patterns. There are certain things that can trigger them, including hot weather, caffeine, or stress. When you keep track of your hot flashes for a week or two, you may discover those things that trigger them. Avoid or eliminate those triggers.
2. Layer your clothing, putting one lightweight item over another. If you become hot, remove your jacket or sweater.
3. Drink a glass of cold water or juice at the onset of a flash.
4. Keep a thermos of ice water or an ice pack by your bed at night.
5. Wear clothing made of absorbent material, such as cotton. Don't wear silk blouses or other clothes that show perspiration stains.
6. Take vitamin E supplements. This has been used for 50 years to treat hot flashes. Start with 400 IU of vitamin E a day, working up to 800 IU daily. Good sources of vitamin E include vegetable oils, nuts, whole grains, and wheat germ.
7. Take GLA (gamma linolenic acid), naturally found in borage, black currants and evening primrose oil.
8. Dong Quai is known as the 'female ginseng.' This herb "smoothes out" the mood and brings on relaxation.
9. Other herbs such as Hawthorn berry, yam root, black cohosh and blue cohosh are also useful.
10. Avoid stressful situations. Stress can trigger hot flashes. For help in avoiding or handling stress, Exercise daily for at least 40 minutes a day. Practice yogic asanas and yogic breathing. See a yoga therapist for personal recommendations based on your symptoms.

Sexual changes:

Women during their menopausal years may notice vaginal dryness, irritation or pain during intercourse. And some women may experience atrophy, which is the most common cause of pain during intercourse. This is when the vagina becomes dry and less

stretchy and it is unable to be penetrated. Other women may not experience any of the symptoms. Because of lower levels of estrogen and hormonal changes dryness and mild or severe discomfort may present itself. It is important to visit your health care provider to discuss these symptoms. Many women find relief with lubricants and specially designed moisturizers. The decrease in estrogen that women experience with menopause can cause vaginal dryness. The elasticity and size of the vagina changes, and the walls become thinner and lose their ability to become moist. This can make sex painful or even undesirable. Use water based vaginal lubricants such as K-Y jelly, Replens and Astroglide. These are available over the counter. Do not use oil- based lubricants such as petroleum jelly. They don't dissolve as easily in the vagina and can therefore trigger vaginal infections. Studies indicate that women who stay sexually active experience fewer vaginal changes than those who don't. Sexual activity promotes circulation in the vaginal area, which helps it stay moist. For women without partners, manual stimulation will help promote circulation and moistness in the vagina.

Yoga Therapy Treatment:

Siddha Yoni Asana:

Sitting with legs cross in front of you, bring one ankle on top of the other. The heel of the lower leg is pressing on the labia majora of the vagina, and the heel of the top foot is touching the clitoris. Place a folded cloth in between ankles to reduce discomfort on ankles. This position helps redirect sexual nervous impulses back up the spinal cord to the brain, it also redirect blood flow to the pelvic region, balancing the reproductive system.

Sun Salutations for warm up and increase overall blood flow

Abdominal lifts in hero pose

Simple side bends to improve your breathing

Bridge pose pelvic lifts with breathing

Reclining butterfly

Happy Baby

Alternate between cobra and puppy dog

Alternate between camel and puppy dog

Seated twist

Cobbler pose

Deep relaxation corpse pose

Restore balance to vagina:

Eat ground flax seeds 2 TBLSP a day to maintain Phytoestrogens.

Drink red raspberry tea 2 X a day

Practice Kegels to increase blood flow to vagina and bladder.

Sepia is an effective homeopathic remedy for vaginal dryness and hot flashes

Apply almond oil and Vitamin E oil before bed to nourish vagina

Yoga can:

- Deepen the connection you feel with your partner.
- Improve your own understanding of yourself and your partner.
- Put you more in harmony with your own body and mind and so, make you a better partner.
- Help you cultivate and maintain emotional and physical states.
- Keep you fit and healthy so that you're more able. ;)
- Allow you to get into some very interesting positions!

Sleep disturbances and insomnia:

Insomnia is sleep disruption, either having trouble going to sleep or staying asleep and waking too early. According to the United States Department of Health and Human Services in the year 2007, approximately 64 million Americans regularly suffer from insomnia each year. Insomnia is 1.4 times more common in women than in men.

Menopausal symptoms stated previously all play a role in disturbing a woman sleep patterns. Women often describe night sweats as being the most common disturbance of their sleep including the inability to return to sleep after an episode. Many woman can experience up to 5-6 episodes of hot flashes a night. Sleep disturbances can be caused by many different reasons during the menopausal years, medications, sleep apnea and restless leg syndrome, heart problems and high blood pressure to name a few. Lifestyle can also be an important factor, drinking alcohol or coffee close to bed time, smoking also is a stimulant.

Medical Treatment:

Over the counter sleep aids or prescription drugs are often prescribed to alleviate insomnia. These treatments are to be used on a short term based as they can carry other health risks. Some drugs used to help with sleep are sedatives and antidepressants these drugs can cause sleepiness and drowsiness during the day.

Yoga Therapy Treatment:

Many people who practice yoga speak of "freeing the mind from mental disturbances," "calming the spirit," or "steadying the mind."

Yoga sutra 1.10 Abhava-pratyayalambana vrttir nidra

“Deep sleep is a pattern grounded in the perception that nothing exists.”

This aphorism describing deep sleep is based on Patanjali's understanding of the patterns of consciousness. He states there are 5 patterns of consciousness which are either hurtful or benign. Sleep being one of those benign patterns of consciousness but one that is an important one, as we know our faculties are greatly inhibited without a good nights sleep. He is also pointing, for those of us with disturbed sleep, to leave the world behind when we go to sleep. To truly invite the patterns of deep sleep we need to leave the world behind. Patanjali refers to using practices like yoga and meditation to bring our attention to pure awareness, utterly independent of cause and effect, thereby increasing our abilities to rest in stillness. The reduction of nervousness, irritability and confusion, depression and mental fatigue are some of the benefits experienced by yogic practitioners. One experiences a relief from the pressure of "compulsions." Nervousness can subside or disappear. The regularity of practice will be a determining factor in realizing these benefits.

Yoga Nidra is an ancient yogic technique which produces complete relaxation in the mind and body. Menopausal woman lack of rest has shown to have many side effects, fatigue, and lapses in memory, irritability and lack of energy. Practicing a technique that brings on deep rest and relaxation will alleviate nervousness and anxiety because lack of sleep.

Yoga Nidra Practice:

In Yoga Nidra a process is used to make the brain centers active by focusing awareness on the parts of the body in a definite sequence. Thus, the person tries to stimulate various parts of the brain by focusing the awareness on the corresponding parts of the body. By awareness is meant 'attitude of witness' towards physical or mental actions of the body.

Usually it takes from twenty to forty minutes to complete one Yoga Nidra session. The procedure is carried out by first doing a few *asanas* -practicing a few postures. (See asana practice this section) Then the person lies on his or her back in totally relaxed posture (shavasana -posture simulating dead body). Eyes are lightly closed, arms are kept with palms facing upwards and fingers are half lifted from the ground, breathing is natural and quiet.

Before the rotation of awareness the student should make a positive resolve or intention about the aim in life or practice. The wordings should be clear and precise:

1. Rotation of Awareness

Then the rotation of awareness begins. The person has to just visualize the part of the body mentioned by the instructor; it can be a teacher or a tape-recorder (to purchase your

yoga nidra cd set. <http://www.irest.us/catalog/product/cds/meditative-heart-yoga-sounds-true>). The student must not move any part of his body. Quickly corresponding with the instructions, he or she has to shift his or her awareness from one part to the next. The student should not imagine the next part before the instructor mentions it. The whole process should be a pleasure and not a burden. There should not be any anxiety or expectation.

The usual pattern is to start focusing awareness in the following sequence:

First on the right side:

The thumb, fingers (one by one), palm of the hand, then the wrist, the forearm, the elbow, arm, shoulder, right side of the back, hip, thigh, knee, leg, ankle, foot, great toe, other toes of the right foot.

The same sequence is repeated for the left side.

Then awareness is focused on the proximity of the body with the carpet (ground). Back of the head, shoulders, back and spine, thighs, heel. Next the front of the body-surface is brought in to awareness. Face, brow, eyes, nose, lips, mouth, ears, chin, neck, chest, abdomen.

2. Awareness of the breath

After rotation of the consciousness in such a sequence, focusing the attention on the act of breathing completes **physical relaxation**. One simply maintains awareness of breath, either at the nostril or of its passage through the navel and throat. It is claimed that the process, in addition to concentration of mind, assists in "pratyahara" - withdrawing the sense centers from their objects of sensations.

Tips for getting good nights sleep:

1. Going to bed and waking up at the same time every day
2. Making the last hour before bed quiet time, no TV, radio, phones or computers
3. Make your bedroom for sleep and sex only no TV or computer in the bedroom
4. Keeping the bedroom temperature controlled
5. Block out all light in the bedroom
6. If worried before bed use calming music and/or breathing techniques (see below)
7. Avoid looking at the clock during the night
8. If you're waking up and not going back to sleep get up and have a hot tea instead of tossing and turning.
9. Have a warm bath before bed
10. In the hour before bed write in your diary write all the things you are thankful for.

Chakra Focus during Menopause:

I believe that the seventh crown chakra and the fourth heart chakra are the energy centers where woman in their menopausal years want to focus on and open . The synergistic development of this 2 energy centers will culminate in a true awakening. Great discernment and great compassion will ultimately support a woman's journey to the full awakening of her spirit.

“Physiologically, the crown chakra relates to the brain, especially the higher brain, or cerebral cortex. Our amazing human brain contains some thirteen billion interconnected nerve cells, capable of making more connections among themselves than the number of stars in the entire universe. This is remarkable statement. Our brains, as instrument of awareness, are virtually limitless. Yet there are 100 million sensory receptors within the body, and ten trillion synapses in the nervous system, making the mind 100,000 times more sensitive to its internal environment than to its external one. So it is truly from the place within that we receive and assimilate most of our knowledge.”(Wheels of life, a user's guide to the chakra system page 321)

Life is a journey, a process, a series of experiences both good and bad from which we learn. How we respond to life comes from our heart. The real peace and joy flows from our hearts. Nurturing the heart chakra in our menopausal years will enable our innate wisdom and joy to flow out into our community and heal it. The 4th chakra represent the healer, the 7th chakra represent the sage. A sage or wise woman who is tuned to the impulses of the heart is what our world needs. Menopause is a time of great healing and power, as woman we need to invite ourselves to live our best life, using all our experiences and lived life to guide our children, grandchildren and community to their inner peace and knowing, through our stories and through our presence.

Conclusion:

I have covered some of the main symptoms of menopause and the ways that yoga therapy can address them, but there are many other possible symptoms of menopause that we can discuss further, weight gain, cardiovascular disease, and depression too name a few. It

should also be noted that many women don't experience any major symptoms during menopause, it is important as yoga therapist to not assume that because we have older participants in our classes that they are experiencing these symptoms. It is best to ask questions first and avoid any assumptions.

Our attitudes and beliefs about aging are often precursors to how we feel about our bodies as we pass through menopause. Our culture does not represent aging in a positive light, and our media is often reflecting back to us how we need to battle our aging bodies and mind, as if we must fight off this aggressive disease, called aging. Our medical system often misleads women to think that menopause is something to be managed and changed. Our mothers and grandmothers often don't discuss their experiences during menopause; my own mother memory of menopause is as if it was a non event, no symptoms at all.

Understanding and accepting aging and the changes it brings as natural, is a good first step to responding to the symptoms of menopause. Maintaining a healthy focus on the body, mind and spirit will help support us through any change. Yoga therapy is a great start to balancing our perspective of our bodies, and minds, as well as nourishing our spirit. Yoga therapy gives us the means and ability to connect with ourselves and develop a strong sense of joy and acceptance of our bodies. Yoga reveals our innate ground of inner peace. All the practices in this report will open the gateway to greater stability and freedom in the body, mind and spirit. Practice is the key ingredient; a practice means a commitment to giving your attention to yourself during your menopause. Pausing to reflect, inquire, and accept life as it is in this moment.

Bibliography

- Beck, Leslie RD, Nutrition Guide To Menopause. Toronto: Viking Canada, 2003.
- Clennell, Bobby, The Woman's Yoga Book. Berkley, California: Rodwell Press, 2007.
- Dharam Kaur, Sat ND, Danylak-Arhanic, Mary MD, The complete Natural Medicine Guide to Women's Health: Toronto, Robert Rose, 2005.
- Francina, Suza, Yoga and The Wisdom of Menopause. Florida, Health Communications Inc, 2003.
- Henkel, Gretchen, The Menopause Sourcebook. Chicago: Contemporary Books, 2001.
- Judith Anodea, PhD, Wheels of Life. Minnisota, US., Llewellyn Publications
- Horn, Janet M.D ; Miller Robin M.D, The Smart woman's Guide to Midlife & Beyond. Oakland, CA, New Harbinger Publications Inc, 2008.
- Kagan, Leslie; et al., Mind over menopause. New York: Free Press, 2004.
- Manson, JoAnn M.D, Hot Flashes, Hormones and Your Health: New York, Mcgraw Hill, 2007.
- Moore, Michele M.D, The Only Menopause Guide You'll Need. Baltimore: The John Hopkins University Press, 2004.
- Northrup, Christiane, The Wisdom of Menopause. New York: Bantam House, 2006.
- Phillips, Robin M.D, The Menopause Bible. A Firefly Book LTD. 2005.
- Sparrow, Linda, Yoga for a healthy Menstrual Cycle. Boston, Shambhala publications, 2004
- The Boston Women's Health Collective, Our Bodies Ourselves: Menopause. New York: Touchstone, 2006.
- Yoga Journal website www.yogajournal.com, Article " Menopause can be trying time for women.
- Yoga Journal website www.yogajournal.com, yoga journal website article" heads up about headaches."