

## Part I

**P**remarin (conjugated estrogen) is the number one most frequently prescribed medication in the entire United States.<sup>1</sup> Considering only half the population can be prescribed this medication (female only), and only the elderly patients need this medication, that is an astounding number. I am often asked by practitioners about their patients who are prescribed estrogen but wish to take herbal alternatives, or patients who are prescribed herbs but wonder if the estrogenic effect of the herbs will cause conflicts with their current therapy. I will try to address these issues in three separate parts. Part I will be herbs which have estrogenic effects: their effects and possible side effects. Part 2 will be herbs which may be used to treat menopausal signs and symptoms. Part 3 will be herbs which may be used to treat osteoporosis.

Estrogen is commonly prescribed for numerous purposes, including but not limited to menopausal signs and symptoms, osteoporosis and atrophic vaginitis. More recently, beneficial effects of estrogen have been observed in patients with Alzheimer's disease (with improvement up to 16 weeks) and dyslipidemia. In addition to drugs, there are many other alternatives for natural sources of estrogen. In traditional Chinese medicine, there are many herbs which have estrogenic effect. Though Chinese herbs are not prescribed individually for such purposes, addition of herbs with estrogen-like effect will definitely supplement the formula and enhance the overall therapeutic. According to studies in mice, it has been discovered that *Fructus Cnidii Monnieri* (*She Chuang Zi*), *Semen Cassiae* (*Jue Ming Zi*) and *Radix Angelicae Sinensis* (*Dang Gui*) increase estradiol level; *Flos Carthami Tinctorii* (*Hong Hua*) increases FSH level, and *Semen Astragali Complanati* (*Sha Yuan Zi*) increases the weight of the uterus.<sup>2</sup>

The use of estrogen replacement therapy, despite numerous benefits, still has many potential conflicts and controver-

sies. One of the biggest disadvantages associated with the use of estrogen is the staggering number of side effects, including but not limited to the increased risk of breast and uterine cancer, endometrial carcinoma, malignant neoplasm, gallbladder disease, thromboembolic disease, and photosensitivity.<sup>3</sup> Due to these adverse effects, there are many who opt not to take estrogen supplement, and there are many who cannot take estrogen supplement. In addition to side effects, one of the contraindications of estrogen supplement is patients who have cancer of the breast, uterus or endometrium. Use of drugs, supplements, or food with hormonal activity may stimulate the growth of the cancer cells, and must be avoided. Specifically with Chinese herbs, ones that increase the secretion of female hormones or increase the weight of the sex organs should be avoided. Examples include *Fructus Cnidii Monnieri* (*She Chuang Zi*), *Semen Cassiae* (*Jue Ming Zi*), *Radix Angelicae Sinensis* (*Dang Gui*), *Flos Carthami Tinctorii* (*Hong Hua*), and *Semen Astragali Complanati* (*Sha Yuan Zi*). Furthermore, patients should be careful eating meat or animal products as many have been treated with hormones to hasten growth.<sup>4</sup>

In summary, though traditional Chinese medicine and western medicine have vastly different diagnostic criteria and treatment approach, the medicines used by the two systems are in fact similar in many ways. Both have similar therapeutic effects and potential conflicts. The protocol of how to incorporate these herbs into formulas for treatment of menopause and osteoporosis will be discussed in parts II and III of the article.

## References

1. Buckley, B. 34th Annual Top 200 Drugs. Pharmacy Times, April 1999.
2. Liu, J. and Gong, H. Screening Some of the Estrogen-Like Herbs. The 5th Symposium on Research in Chinese Medicine and The 14th Symposium on Natural Products October 31-November 1, 1999. Taipei, Taiwan.
3. Estrogen Supplements. Drug Facts and Comparison, 1999.
4. Balch, J. and Balch, P. Prescriptions for Nutritional Healing. 2nd Edition. 1997.

## Part II

Estrogen is frequently prescribed to treat menopause and osteoporosis. Menopause is the cessation of menstruation in female individuals. Osteoporosis is a disorder characterized by a reduction in the amount of bone mass, leading to fractures after minimal trauma. In part II of this article, treatment of menopausal signs and symptoms will be discussed.

According to traditional Chinese medicine, menopause can be divided into five main categories:

1. **Kidney Yin Deficiency:** The clinical manifestations of Kidney Yin deficiency include delayed menstruation, scanty in amount or ceased completely, hair loss, scanty vaginal discharge, dryness of vagina, dizziness, tinnitus, hot flashes, night sweats, five heart irritable heat (heat and irritable sensation in the chest, palms and soles), insomnia, increased dreams, itchy skin or formication (tactile hallucination with feeling of insects crawling on skin), soreness and weakness of lower back and knees. There is red tongue with scanty coating, and thready rapid pulse. The recommended herbal formulas are *Anemarrhena Phellodendron & Rehmannia Formula* (*Zhi Bai Di Huang Wan*) or *Artemisia & Turtle Shell Decoction* (*Qing Hao Bie Jia Tang*).
2. **Liver Qi Stagnation:** The clinical manifestations of Liver Qi stagnation include irritability, nervousness, hypochondriac distention, constipation, palpitation, insomnia, emotional instability, and generalized weakness. There is red tongue with thin yellow coating, and wiry pulse. The recommended herbal formulas are *Bupleurum & Dragon Bone Combination* (*Chai Hu Jia Long Mu Tang*) and *Bupleurum & Peony Formula* (*Jia Wei Xiao Yao San*).
3. **Blood Deficiency:** The clinical manifestations of blood deficiency include dizziness, hot flashes, sweating, insomnia, dryness of skin, sallow complexion, emotional instability, and myalgia.

There is pale tongue with thin coating, and thready pulse. The recommended herbal formulas are Tangkuei Four Combination (*Si Wu Tang*) and Ginseng & Longan Combination (*Gui Pi Tang*).

4. Uprising Deficiency Heat: The clinical manifestations of deficient heat include severe night sweating and hot flashes, bone-steaming sensation, irritability, dizziness, nervousness, and emaciation. There is red tongue with thin coating, and thready rapid pulse. The recommended herbal formula is Artemisia & Turtle Shell Decoction (*Qing Hao Bie Jia Tang*).
5. Kidney Yang Deficiency: The clinical manifestations of Kidney Yang deficiency include heavy menstrual bleeding, metrorrhagia or complete ceasing of menstruation, soreness and weakness of lower back and knees, edema of the face and limbs, cold limbs, cold appearance, loose stool, polyuria, and urinary incontinence. There is pale tongue with thin coating, and deep thready weak pulse. The recommended herbal formulas are Eucommia & Rehmannia Formula (*You Gui Wan*) and Ginseng & Ginger Combination (*Li Zhong Tang*).

Even with differential diagnosis, it is sometimes necessary to modify the formula to treat each individual specifically. The guidelines for modification are as follows:

- Short temper, irritability, hypochondriac discomfort, bitter taste in the mouth: add Bupleurum & Peony Formula (*Jia Wei Xiao Yao San*) or Cyathula & Rehmannia Formula (*Zuo Gui Wan*) and Ligustrum & Eclipta Combination (*Er Zhi Wan*)
- Dizziness, vertigo: add Rhizoma Gastrodiae Elatae (*Tian Ma*), Ramulus Uncariae cum Uncis (*Gou Teng*), Concha Haliotidis (*Shi Jue Ming*), Radix Cyathulae Officinalis (*Chuan Niu Xi*), Herba Taxilli (*Sang Ji Sheng*), Os Draconis (*Long Gu*), Concha Ostreae (*Mu Li*)
- Hypochondriac distention and fullness: add Pericarpium Citri Reticulatae Viride (*Qing Pi*), Pericarpium Citri Reticulatae (*Chen Pi*), Rhizoma Cyperi Rotundi (*Xiang Fu*), Tuber Curcumae (*Yu Jin*)
- Breast distention: add Semen Citri Reticulatae (*Ju He*), Semen Litchi Chinensis (*Li Zhi He*)



- Perspiration: add Semen Tritici Aestivus (*Fu Xiao Mai*), Radix Astragali Membranacei (*Huang Qi*), Radix Ephedrae (*Ma Huang Gen*)
- Thirst: add Tuber Ophiopogonis Japonici (*Mai Men Dong*), Tuber Asparagi Cochinchinensis (*Tian Men Dong*)
- Tinnitus: add Magnetitum (*Ci Shi*)
- Palpitation, insomnia, increased dreams, forgetfulness: add Ginseng & Zizyphus Formula (*Tian Wang Bu Xin Dan*), Cortex Albizziae Julibrissin (*He Huan Pi*)
- Unstable emotional state with unpredictable cries and laughter: add Fructus Zizyphi Jujubae (*Da Zao*), Fructus Tritici (*Xiao Mai*)
- Irritability, hot flashes: add Cortex Lycii Radicis (*Di Gu Pi*), Carapax Amydae Sinensis (*Bie Jia*)
- Bitter taste in the mouth: add Radix Scutellariae Baicalensis (*Huang Qin*)
- Insomnia: add Caulis Polygoni Multiflori (*Ye Jiao Teng*), Concha Margaritiferae (*Zhen Zhu Mu*), Cortex Albizziae Julibrissin (*He Huan Pi*)
- Formication, itching of skin: add Caulis Periostracum Cicadae (*Chan Tu*), Radix Ledebouriellae Divaricatae (*Fang Feng*), Cortex Dictamni Dasy-carpi Radicis (*Bai Xian Pi*), Cortex Erythrinae (*Hai Tong Pi*)
- Loose stool: add Semen Myristicae Fragrantis (*Rou Dou Kou*), Herba Epimedii (*Yin Yang Huo*), Rhizoma Curculiginis Orchioideis (*Xian Mao*), Fructus Rubi Chingii (*Fu Pen Zi*)
- Edema: add Rhizoma Alismatis Orientalis (*Ze Xie*)
- Polyuria: add Ootheca Mantidis (*Sang Piao Xiao*)
- Lower back pain: add Radix Dipsaci Asperi (*Xu Duan*), Fructus Psoraleae Corylifoliae (*Bu Gu Zhi*)

- Kidney yin and yang deficiency: add Curculigo & Epimedium Combination (*Er Xian Tang*) and Ligustrum & Eclipta Combination (*Er Zhi Wan*)

While menopausal signs and symptoms can be effectively addressed with estrogen replacement therapy, they are not without risks. Use of estrogen increases the risks of breast and uterine cancer, endometrial carcinoma, malignant neoplasm, gallbladder disease, thromboembolic disease, and photosensitivity.

In contrast, Chinese herbal therapies offer a gentle yet effective way to manage menopause. It is important, however, to keep in mind that these herbs do regulate the endocrine system. Therefore, it is not uncommon for the women to begin having menses with the intake of herbs. Also, some herbs have estrogenic effect should be avoided in cases of estrogen-dependant breast cancer. Examples of herbs with estrogenic activities include Fructus Cnidii Monnieri (*She Chuang Zi*), Semen Cassiae (*Jue Ming Zi*), Radicis Angelicae Sinensis (*Dang Gui*), Flos Carthami Tinctorii (*Hong Hua*), and Semen Astragali Complanati (*Sha Yuan Zi*).

Though menopausal signs and symptoms are disturbing, and self-limiting they are not life threatening. Such signs and symptoms may seem prominent for a few years, but they will gradually lessen in severity and eventually disappear. Osteoporosis, on the other hand, will continue to deteriorate with age and can be life-threatening. It is an disorder that require active intervention and treatment. Detailed discussion will be published in part III of this article.

Part III to be continued in the next American Acupuncturist