Thriving Through Perimenopause & Menopause: An Integrative and Empowering Approach

Debra G. Bell, MD

May 9, 2025

UW Medicine
OSHER CENTER FOR INTEGRATIVE HEALTH

Life After 40: What is happening to me?

Managing Perimenopause and Menopause, A Virtual Series of Integrative Medicine Group Visits

with Debra G. Bell, MD, an expert in women's health and natural/integrative medicine.

Over four virtual visits, we will address:

- The changes that occur during perimenopause and menopause and the symptoms that can arise.
- Possible treatment options.
- Understanding the mind-body connection
- Food and menopause – weight, metabolism and menopause symptoms
- Sleep
- Sexual Health

This series allows for time that is often not available at an individual office visit. Individual concerns are addressed in the context of the group. There is also an opportunity to share with and learn from others who are also in this phase of life.

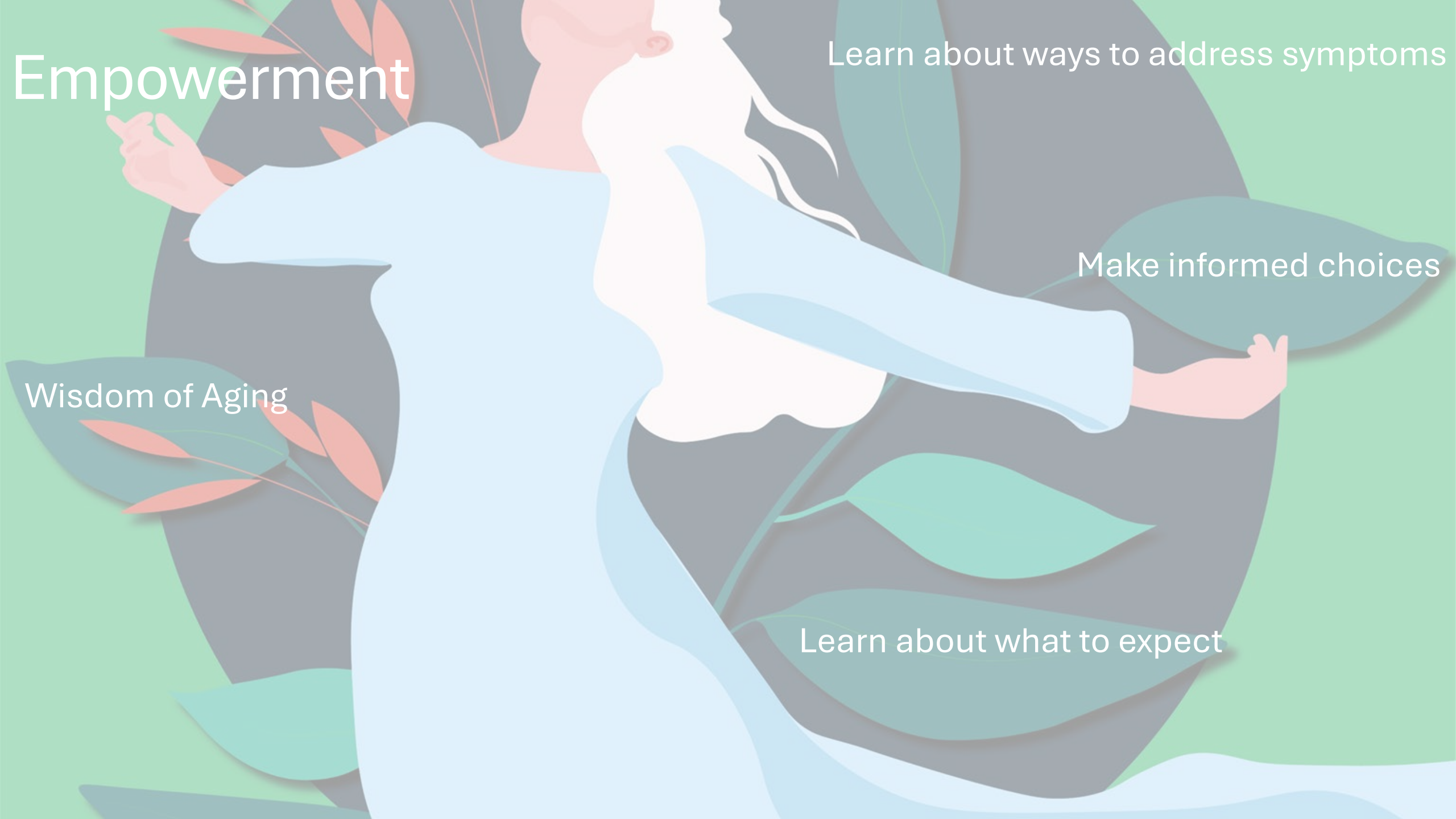
- All visits will be virtual. You must have access to the internet, video and audio on your computer.
- The visits will take place the first (1st) and third (3rd) Wednesday of each month from 10:20-11:40 am.
- The dates are June 4, June 18, July 2 and July 16.

A new series begins every two months, ask your provider to send a specialty visit referral to Primary Care at Northgate.

UW Medicine
PRIMARY CARE

- Overview/definitions of perimenopause and menopause.
- Possible physical changes and symptoms.
- Phase of life. Not a medical event
- Symptom relief
- Wisdom of Aging

UW Medicine
OSHER CENTER FOR INTEGRATIVE HEALTH


Empowerment
Learn about ways to address symptoms
Make informed choices
Wisdom of Aging
Learn about what to expect

Definition

Menopause: End of menstruation, anovulation. The hormonal balance is different than in the menstrual years.

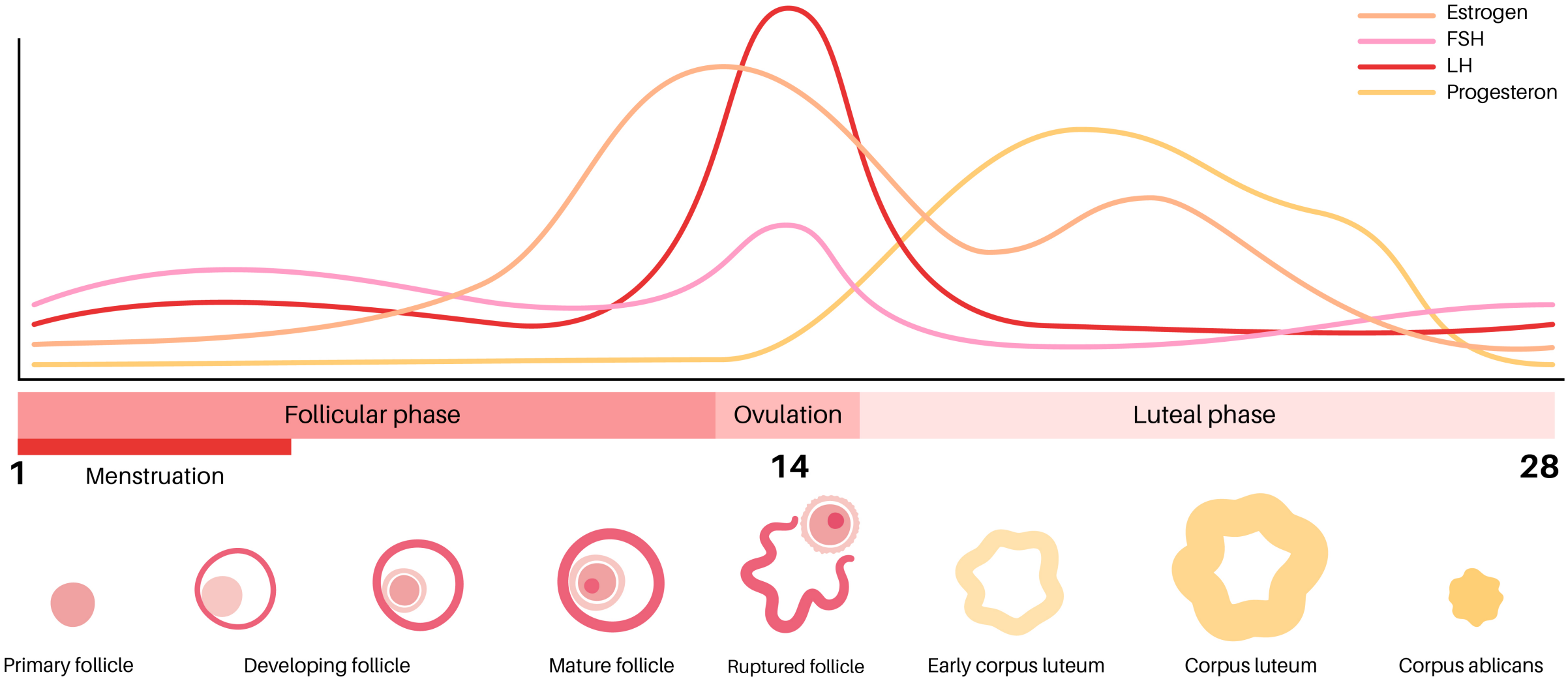
Perimenopause: the time prior to menopause. May be a few months – years.

The Challenge

- No two menopause transitions are alike
- Individualized treatment – Integrative Medicine

UW Medicine
OSHER CENTER FOR INTEGRATIVE HEALTH

Menstrual Cycle



Perimenopause

Heavy menstrual flow

Irregular menstrual flow

Growth of fibroids

Breast Changes

UW Medicine
OSHER CENTER FOR INTEGRATIVE HEALTH

Symptoms

- Vasomotor symptoms: hot flash, night sweats, palpitations.
- Insomnia
- Fatigue
- Headaches
- Irritability, depression
  anxiety
- Skin sensations
- Decreased libido
- Vaginal dryness
- Dry skin
- Weight gain or change in shape
- Brain Fog

UW Medicine
OSHER CENTER FOR INTEGRATIVE HEALTH

Physical Changes of Menopause

- Some atrophy of vagina, cervix, uterus, and ovaries
- Shortening and thinning of vaginal walls
- Decreased elasticity and thinning of labia
- Decreased pelvic floor muscle tone
- Reduction in secretion of cervical mucus
- Changes in breast shape
- Body fat redistributed
- Decreased bone mass
- Reduction in metabolic rate.

Pay Attention

IT IS NOT JUST ABOUT TAKING SOMETHING

SELF CARE

QUIT SMOKING

EAT WELL

EXERCISE

AVOID EXCESS: Caffeine, Sugar, Alcohol, artificial sweeteners.

Nutrition: Foods to support hormone/estrogen metabolism

- Arugula (also called rocket)
- Bok choy
- Broccoli
- Brussels sprouts
- Cabbage
- Cauliflower
- Chard
- Collard and mustard greens
- Daikon radish
- Horseradish
- Kale
- Kohlrabi
- Radish
- Rapini (broccoli rabi)
- Rutabaga
- Turnip
- Wasabi
- Watercress

Cruciferous Vegetables

High **lignan foods**

Flaxseeds and prunes

UW Medicine
OSHER CENTER FOR INTEGRATIVE HEALTH

Nutrition

Support steady glucose metabolism
-

Low glycemic load diet support metabolic changes

Half the plate is vegetables, eat a protein (plant- based proteins are great), and a healthy fat

UW Medicine
OSHER CENTER FOR INTEGRATIVE HEALTH

Isoflavones: Soy

Whole Organic Soy:

- Edamame, soy beans,
- soy nuts, tofu, tempeh,
- miso, tamari,
- unsweetened soy milk.
- NOT processed soy

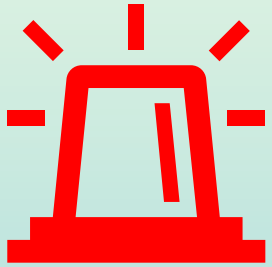
- Does not increase estrogen
- may alleviate menopause symptoms, and lower the incidence of osteoporosis, coronary artery disease, breast and uterine cancer
- Supplements less consistent results than soy in diet.

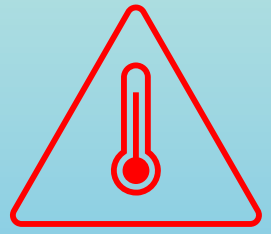
Stress

Sympathetic Nervous System

Increase symptoms

- Stress reduction techniques
- Exercise
- Yoga, alternate nasal breathing
- Acupuncture





Herbs and Supplements

- Many options
- Start with something simple
- Consider meeting with a professional

Black Cohosh

- Applicable parts - root. Tincture or standardized extract.
- Dose of standardized extract 40-80 mg up to twice per day
- Can help mild to moderate hot flashes/night sweats and mild depression.
- Black cohosh does not have estrogenic properties! Can use for hot flashes in breast cancer.

Ashwagandha
Withania somnifera

- The applicable parts - root and berry.
- Often standardized extract
- Broad range of doses
- Can help with insomnia, stress and stress related weight gain, anxiety

UW Medicine
OSHER CENTER FOR INTEGRATIVE HEALTH


This Photo by Unknown Author is licensed under CC BY

Vitex agnus-castus
Chaste berry

- Applicable parts berries and seeds
- Broad range of dosage. Standardized extract
- improves some menopausal symptoms, including anxiety and vasomotor dysfunction,
- Can be very helpful for heavy menstrual periods and early night sweats, irritability, breast tenderness and other aggravated PMS symptoms in perimenopause.

UW Medicine
OSHER CENTER FOR INTEGRATIVE HEALTH

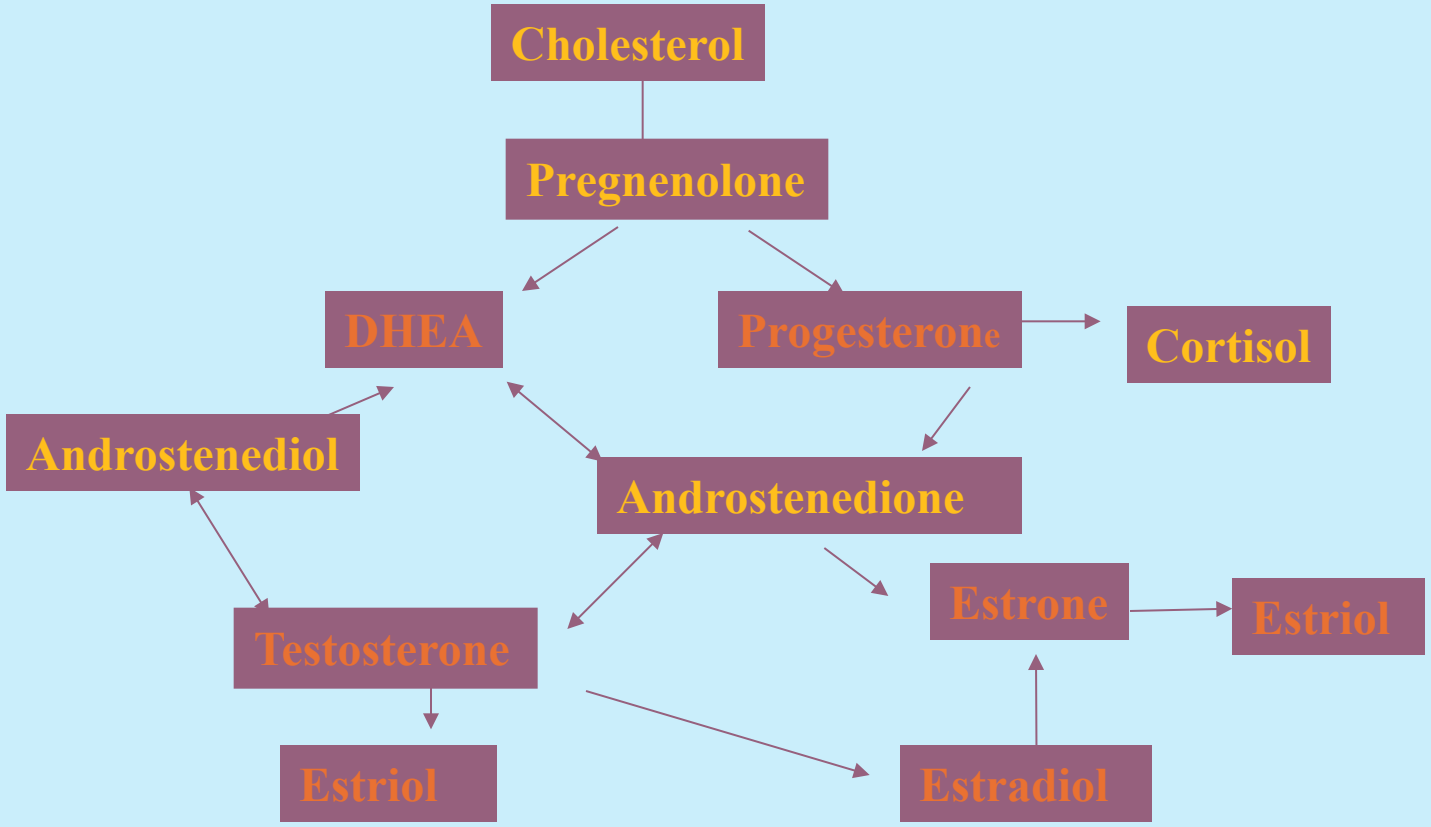
Bio-Identical Hormone

- Produce the same physiological responses as endogenous hormones
- Can be administered in a manner that imitates the body's natural balance and mechanisms of hormones
- Use in reproductive, perimenopausal, and menopausal years.

Sex hormones

- Estrogen. Estrone (E1), Estradiol (E2) Estriol (E3)
- Progesterone
- Testosterone
- DHEA

The Steroid Hormones



Why use HRT?

Treatment of Symptoms

Mode of administration:

- transdermal
- sublingual
- oral
- vaginal

Summary

- Menopause is not a disease
- Age brings wisdom and beauty
- Start with the basics
- Stress reduction
- Herbs: Consider working with a professional
- Bioidentical Hormones can be helpful for symptom relief

Hormone Dominance/Deficiency

Estrogen Deficiency

- Hot flashes
- Night Sweats
- Vaginal Dryness
- “Foggy” Cognition
- Memory Lapses
- Headaches, migraine type
- Weight gain
- Mood changes - Weepiness, anxiety

Estrogen Dominance/Progesterone Deficiency

- Mood Swings
- Night sweats
- Breast tenderness
- Water retention
- Moodiness - Irritability, anxiety
- Weight gain
- Sleep disturbances
- Headache
- Irregular or Heavy Menstrual Bleeding
- Nausea

Testosterone may be in play with changes in libido, muscle tone or strength, hair, stamina,
weight.

DHEA - libido, energy, weight

UW Medicine
OSHER CENTER FOR INTEGRATIVE HEALTH