

Yoga and Menopause

Yoga practice aims for internal balance. Many studies have found that yoga may help women relieve symptoms of menopause. Though menopause is simply when a woman's menstruation stops, the transition generally takes several years. This phase is called perimenopause and typically occurs in women between the ages of 40 and 55. During perimenopause, fluctuating estrogen and progesterone levels can trigger a wide array of uncomfortable symptoms. When hormonal levels and body chemistry may be fluctuating rapidly, this can leave a woman feeling out of balance. The most common symptoms are hot flashes, night sweats, insomnia, fatigue, depression, mood swings, and memory lapses. Hormones play a very powerful role in affecting just about every tissue of the body. So it's no wonder that various conditions can arise as the body tries to adjust to these uncomfortable hormonal shifts. Doing yoga regularly may help ward off some of these issues.

Fluctuating Hormones:

Gentle inverted poses have a good effect on the endocrine system. The endocrine system regulates and produces hormones, affecting mood, sexuality, and metabolism. A woman's hormones are deeply affected by menopause because these hormones are produced in the ovaries. Also, these types of poses may help reduce fluid retention and help the immune system.

Hot Flashes and Night Sweats:

Whenever your head is lower than your heart, the pituitary gland is stimulated. This gland regulates the sugar levels and body temperature. Since many menopausal women struggle with hot flashes and night sweats, practicing yoga may provide some relief. More cooling restorative backbends and gentle reclining poses are recommended. Any kind of gripping or tension in the body can make hot flashes worse, so using props such as bolsters, blankets, and blocks to help support the whole body is a good idea. Also, placing the head on a bolster or a chair during forward bends can help calm the brain and relax the nerves too.

Mood Swings and Depression:

When the body is under continual stress, the sympathetic nervous system and the adrenal system can get stuck in overdrive, creating more stress. Practicing yoga gentle forward

folds may help shutting out external distractions and stimuli, soothing the mind and reducing the effects of stress. The nervous system then receives the signal that all is well, and the adrenals and sympathetic nervous system stop working so hard. In addition to the physical practice, learning how to breathe calmly and relax, is an invaluable lesson to learn if you are struggling with physical and emotional issues.

Fatigue and Insomnia:

If a woman feels unusually tired and weary for days or weeks, depleted adrenal glands could be part of the problem. Progesterone is fluctuating making you feel more tired than normal. Gentle supported backbends may help because they encourage the chest and the heart to open and often bring renewed energy, determination, and joy. It also opens the chest, improves respiration and circulation, and helps lift the spirits while completely supporting the body. Since many yoga postures are practiced lying down, the legs can relax helping overcome any current fatigue. With a more regulated adrenal system, insomnia may also be relieved.

Memory Lapses:

At times during menopause, some women suddenly lose their train of thought or find themselves unable to organize their thoughts. This "fuzzy" thinking often happens at moments of great hormonal fluctuation. Many women find that yoga helps clear their thoughts and improve blood circulation. The same postures that counter depression, such as backbends and chest openers can help collect fragmented thoughts.