

# YOGA and MENOPAUSE

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Menopause is the cessation of menstruation. It means “the last menstruation”, a time during which ovulation and menstruation cease and reproductive functions (childbearing) come to an end. It is characterized by a decrease of estrogen and progesterone production. Decline of estrogen is mainly responsible for menopausal symptoms. Most estrogen is produced by the ovary but the adrenals as well as fat cells also produce some amounts of estrogens and while the ovaries will eventually stop producing estrogen, the adrenals and fat cells will keep producing it in small quantity.

Yoga practice at this time can help alleviate menopausal symptoms (hot flashes, emotional instability, stiff & aching joints, insomnia, fatigue etc...). Yoga supports these physiological changes by maintaining hormonal balance, by stimulating the endocrine system, the adrenals and particularly the pituitary gland which is involved in regulating hormones, blood-sugar levels and body temperature.

Such poses as standing forward bends, downward dog, various inverted poses and in particular headstand stimulate the Pituitary gland. The headstand brings blood supply to the brain, it is calming and cooling, and helps relieve fatigue. Seated forward bends squeeze the internal organs and bring, on the release of the pose, fresh blood supply to the pelvic region and stimulate the ovaries. They also have a soothing effect on the nerves, and help reduce headaches. Other poses such as cobra, supported bridge, supported leg on the wall can help with hot flashes, and while relieving and strengthening the back they improve the functioning of the adrenals and stimulate them to release more estrogen. Hot flashes can also be managed with the practice of the supported shoulder stand and head to knee pose. The angle pose, supported recline angle pose and seated wide angle pose all focus on the pelvic region. They control heavy menses, menstrual irregularities and vaginal dryness.

Savasana and some Pranayamas such as ujjayi are good practices to cool down the system, restore energy and emotional stability, as well as inner calmness and also helps with hot flashes. For menopausal symptoms supported and restorative yoga poses are most suitable.

Emotional disturbances around menopause are not only and necessarily related to hormonal changes. Lifestyle, various life stresses and a negative attitude towards menopause and not accepting this natural process can bring about many emotional upsets. Menopause is not a disease, but a phase of life that should be accepted with grace and approached with a positive mind. Since menopause is a fact of life and inevitable just as menarche (first menstruation), it is best to accept it. In the same way as we accept passage to Womanhood (menstruation) and Motherhood (childbearing) we need to also accept Menopause as a natural physiological process in our life. A time perhaps to give back to our bodies for all the hard work it has performed through the years with often very little complaints - To now give back in form of time, nurturing, support and attention so that this new journey is as smooth as possible.

## Soothing and restorative practice. Poses can be practiced individually or combined to suit your needs



**Note:** The above photos are provided to give some ideas of restorative poses that can help during menopause, and are by no means exhaustive.

Some of the above poses can be further supported. For instance for the reclined angle pose, a rolled blanket, cushion or yoga blocks can be placed under the knees or thighs (groin and knee support). For the Reclined hero, support can be placed under the buttocks to release the knees and groin. Crossed legged forward, more height can be placed under the chest and head etc... The right support will bring the soothing effect you are after.

**Cautions:** Some of these poses may not be suitable if you have neck, back, knee problems and HBP or they may have to be adjusted to your need.