

Complementary Medicine and Alternative Therapy Use in Women with Early Menopause.

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Background and Aim

Early menopause (EM), menopause occurring prior to age 45 years, affects approximately 5% of women¹. Although menopausal hormone therapy (MHT) is the most effective treatment for menopausal symptoms, a significant decrease in MHT use has occurred since publication of the Women's Health Initiative study in 2002, due to concerns regarding potential increased breast cancer risk². Coincident with this, there has been a significant rise in the use of Complementary and Alternative medicines (CAM)³. Although CAM use has been investigated previously in post-menopausal Australian women^{4,6}, there is limited data regarding CAM use in women with EM. The aim of this pilot study was to explore CAM use in women with EM.

Methods

Observational, cross-sectional, survey of women with a self-reported diagnosis of EM and natural age postmenopausal and perimenopausal⁷ women were grouped as non-EM. Participants aged ≥ 20 years, were recruited nationally from community and clinic. Exclusion criteria: unable to provide consent. Demographics, medical history, menopausal symptoms (Greene Climacteric scale⁸), CAM use (adapted from^{4,5}) and perceptions were collected. Statistical analysis - descriptive statistics, Chi-square tests or Fisher exact tests and independent t-test. Logistic regression model measured the association of independent variables. A P-value < 0.05 was considered statistically significant. This research was approved by Monash Health Human Research Ethics Committee (project 07062A).

Results

63 of 78 women recruited were included in the final analysis (incomplete responses and no formal diagnosis of menopause were exclusion reasons). 27 had a self-reported diagnosis of EM and 36 were included in the non-EM group. More women with EM reported a cancer diagnosis compared to the non-EM group ($p=0.004$) (Table 1). MHT/oral contraceptive pill (OCP) use was significantly higher in women with EM ($p=0.001$). Menopausal symptom pattern varied between groups (Table 2). CAM use differed between the two groups (Table 3). There was no significant association between CAM use and age, education or menopausal symptoms.

Table 1: Demographics and medical history of participants.

Characteristic	EM N (%) or mean \pm SD	Non-EM N (%) or mean \pm SD	P Value*
Age	34.6 \pm 6.6	53.5 \pm 5.2	<0.001
Children	13/26 (50.0)	27/36 (75.0)	0.040
Primary/High School	3/26 (11.5)	10/36 (27.8)	
Diploma/Tafe	12/26 (46.2)	12/36 (33.3)	0.280
University	11/26 (42.3)	14/36 (38.9)	
Smoking	2/26 (7.7)	1/35 (2.9)	0.570
History of Depression	10/25 (40.0)	15/34 (44.1)	0.750
History of Osteoporosis	5/25 (20.0)	2/34 (5.9)	0.120
History of Cancer	10/25 (40.0)	3/34 (8.8)	0.004
MHT/OCP use	20/27 (74.1)	11/35 (31.4)	0.001

*Statistical analysis used Chi-square or Fisher's exact test. Data is presented as frequencies (N) and percentages (%).

Table 2: Menopause symptom bother reported by women

	EM N (%)	Non-EM N (%)	P Value*
Heart beating quickly or strongly	13/27 (48.1)	15/34 (44.1)	0.750
Feeling tense or nervous	18/27 (66.7)	28/34 (82.4)	0.160
Difficulty sleeping	21/27 (77.8)	32/36 (88.9)	0.300
Excitable	12/25 (48.0)	12/33 (36.4)	0.370
Attacks of panic	12/27 (44.4)	11/34 (32.4)	0.330
Difficulty concentrating	18/27 (66.7)	28/35 (80.0)	0.230
Feeling tired or lacking in energy	23/27 (85.2)	29/35 (82.9)	1.000
Loss of interest in most things	18/27 (66.7)	32/35 (91.4)	0.010
Feeling unhappy or depressed	16/27 (59.3)	26/35 (74.3)	0.210
Crying spells	16/27 (59.3)	10/34 (29.4)	0.020
Irritability	19/26 (73.1)	27/34 (79.4)	0.570
Feeling dizzy or faint	15/26 (57.7)	11/34 (32.4)	0.050
Pressure or tightness in head/ body	14/27 (51.9)	15/34 (44.1)	0.550
Parts of body numb or tingling	15/27 (55.6)	20/36 (55.6)	1.000
Headaches	17/27 (63.0)	19/33 (57.6)	0.670
Muscle and joint pains	21/27 (77.8)	26/35 (74.3)	0.750
Loss of feeling in hands or feet	10/27 (37.0)	15/34 (44.1)	0.580
Breathing difficulties	8/27 (29.6)	10/34 (29.4)	0.990
Hot flushes	19/27 (70.4)	31/36 (86.1)	0.130
Sweating at night	19/27 (70.4)	32/35 (91.4)	0.040
Loss of interest in sex	16/25 (64.0)	32/35 (91.4)	0.009

Percentages represent women with any reported symptom from a little to extremely (score 1-3)

Table 3: Current and previous use of different types of CAM by women with EM and Non-EM.

Table 3A: Herbal/ Botanical Therapies			
Therapy	EM N (%)	Non-EM N (%)	P Value*
Black Cohosh			
Current	0/24(0)	1/31(3.2)	1.000
Previous	2/24(8.3)	15/31(48.4)	0.001
Primrose Oil			
Current	1/25(4.0)	2/31(6.5)	1.000
Previous	6/25(24.0)	14/31(45.2)	0.100
Soy Products			
Current	3/23(13.0)	5/29(17.2)	1.000
Previous	2/23(8.7)	6/29(20.7)	0.280
Red Clover			
Current	1/23(4.3)	3/32(9.4)	0.630
Previous	2/23(8.7)	10/32(31.3)	0.040
St. John's wort			
Current	0/24(0)	3/30(10.0)	0.250
Previous	3/24(12.5)	3/30(10.0)	1.000
Ginseng			
Current	0/21(0)	0/31(0)	-
Previous	0/21(0)	3/31(12.9)	0.140
Dong Quai			
Current	1/22(4.5)	0/29(0)	0.430
Previous	2/21(9.5)	1/29(3.4)	0.570
Chasteberry			
Current	1/23(4.3)	1/30(3.3)	1.000
Previous	4/23(17.4)	2/30(6.7)	0.220
Licorice			
Current	0/21(0)	1/32(3.1)	1.000
Previous	1/21(4.8)	6/32(18.8)	0.220
Turmeric			
Current	4/23(17.4)	7/29(24.1)	0.550
Previous	0/23(0)	5/29(17.2)	0.060
Sage			
Current	0/21(0)	0/29(0)	-
Previous	2/21(9.5)	6/29(20.7)	0.440
Valerian			
Current	0/22(0)	0/30(0)	-
Previous	1/22(4.5)	6/30(20.0)	0.220

*Statistical analysis used Chi-square or Fisher's exact test. Data is presented as frequencies (N) and percentages (%).

Herbal and botanical therapies

Less than 25% of women with EM reported current or previous use of herbal/botanical therapies.

Table 3B: Vitamins and Minerals			
Therapy	EM N (%)	Non-EM N (%)	P value*
Fish Oil			
Current	5/23 (21.7)	12/33 (36.4)	0.240
Previous	5/23(21.7)	8/33(24.2)	0.830
Glucosamine			
Current	3/21 (14.3)	5/35 (14.3)	1.000
Previous	2/21(9.5)	12/35 (34.3)	0.040
Calcium			
Current	11/22 (50.0)	10/32 (31.3)	0.170
Previous	6/22 (27.3)	8/32 (25.0)	0.850
Vitamin D			
Current	16/25 (64.0)	14/32 (43.8)	0.130
Previous	6/25 (24.0)	7/32 (21.9)	0.850
Multivitamin			
Current	7/23 (30.4)	11/29 (37.9)	0.570
Previous	7/23 (30.4)	5/29 (17.2)	0.260
Coenzyme Q10			
Current	0/19 (0)	2/29 (6.9)	0.510
Previous	2/19 (10.5)	9/29 (31.0)	0.090

*Statistical analysis used Chi-square or Fisher's exact test. Data is presented as frequencies (N) and percentages (%).

Vitamins and Minerals

Vitamin D was the most common vitamin/mineral supplement with 88% of women with EM and 65.6% of women with non-EM reporting use.

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Table 3C: Mind Body Therapies			
Therapy	EM N (%)	Non-EM N (%)	P value*
Acupuncture			
Current	2/22 (9.1)	2/33 (6.1)	1.000
Previous	2/22 (9.1)	12/33 (36.3)	0.020
Chiropractor			
Current	1/20 (5.0)	4/31(12.9)	0.640
Previous	4/20 (20.0)	6/31 (19.4)	0.950
Homeopathy			
Current	0/19 (0)	2/31 (6.5)	0.520
Previous	2/19 (10.5)	5/31 (16.1)	0.700
Osteopathy			
Current	1/20 (5.0)	1/31 (3.2)	1.000
Previous	2/20 (10.0)	9/31 (29.0)	0.100
Reflexology			
Current	0/18 (0)	2/30 (6.7)	0.520
Previous	0/18 (0)	5/30 (16.7)	0.140
Aromatherapy			
Current	0/19 (0)	3/27 (11.1)	0.260
Previous	3/19 (15.8)	3/27 (11.1)	0.680
Naturopathy			
Current	1/19 (5.3)	3/32 (9.4)	1.000
Previous	4/19 (21.1)	8/32 (25.0)	0.750
Shiatsu			
Current	0/20 (0)	2/30 (6.7)	0.510
Previous	1/20 (5.0)	4/30 (13.3)	0.640
Reiki			
Current	1/19 (5.3)	3/31 (9.7)	1.000
Previous	0/19 (0)	5/31 (16.1)	0.140
Yoga			
Current	2/20 (10.0)	8/32 (25)	0.180
Previous	5/20 (25.0)	12/32 (37.5)	0.350
Mindfulness/ Meditation			
Current	8/23 (34.8)	14/33 (42.4)	0.570
Previous	4/23 (17.4)	6/33 (18.2)	0.940
Paced respiration			
Current	0/20 (0)	3/29 (10.3)	0.260
Previous	0/20 (0)	2/29 (6.9)	0.510
Relaxation			
Current	8/22 (36.4)	12/29 (41.4)	0.720
Previous	1/22 (4.5)	5/29 (17.2)	0.220
Cognitive Behavioural Therapy			
Current	0/21 (0)	3/31 (9.7)	0.260
Previous	2/21 (9.5)	5/31 (16.1)	0.690

*Statistical analysis used Chi-square or Fisher's exact test. Data is presented as frequencies (N) and percentages (%).

Mind and Body therapies

The proportion of women with EM using mind and body therapies varied from 0% (reflexology or paced respiration) to 52.2% (mindfulness/meditation).

Perceptions of CAM use

Most women perceived that "medical practitioners did not suggest CAM often enough" and "put too much trust in prescription medication". Although, 51.6% of women disagreed that "CAMs do more harm than good", 57.4% women were uncertain if CAM were "safer than prescribed medication".

Conclusion

- Pattern of CAM use and menopausal symptoms differ between women with EM and non-EM.
- Consumer knowledge gaps exist regarding CAM use.
- Clinicians need to enquire about CAM use and provide education to inform women

Strengths and Limitations of this study:

- Strengths included the comprehensive list of CAM studied and exploring women's perceptions
- Limitations included the small sample size due to difficulties with recruitment and self reported menopausal status.

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