

Evidence summary

Chinese medicine for menopause

This summary of key findings from *Volume 24: Menopause*¹ of the Evidence-based Clinical Chinese Medicine monograph series outlines:

- what menopause is
- current treatments
- findings from research into classical Chinese medicine literature and modern Chinese medicine clinical studies.

What is menopause?

Female menopause refers to the final menstrual period.² For many women, menopausal symptoms start years before the final period and persist after, with some women reporting menopausal symptoms lasting for more than 10 years.³ The most bothersome symptoms are hot flushes and sweating, but people may experience other symptoms, such as anxiety, depression, urinary symptoms, sleep problems, ‘brain fog’, and muscle and joint pain.⁴

Current treatments

People may manage mild symptoms with lifestyle and dietary changes, such as weight loss and mindfulness relaxation techniques.^{2,5} Hormone therapy can be used to alleviate hot flushes and urinary symptoms.⁶ Non-hormonal therapies, such as drugs to improve sleep and depressive symptoms, may be considered.⁶

Chinese medicine treatments include Chinese herbal medicine, acupuncture, ear acupuncture, moxibustion, Chinese medicine-based psychotherapy, and dietary and lifestyle advice. Chinese medicine practitioners base their treatments on the patient’s symptoms, relevant clinical textbooks and guidelines, research and clinical experience.

Classical Chinese medicine literature

The *Encyclopedia of Traditional Chinese Medicine (Zhong Hua Yi Dian)* is a large, important collection of Chinese medicine books. It includes 291 citations describing the treatment of menopausal symptoms with Chinese herbal medicine.

While the *Encyclopedia of Traditional Chinese Medicine* also includes acupuncture therapies as treatment options for menopause, they are much less frequently cited.

Modern Chinese medicine clinical studies

Nine biomedical databases (five English-language and four Chinese-language) were searched in April 2018 to find clinical studies to include in the *Menopause*¹ monograph. The search found 416 relevant studies of Chinese medicine for menopausal symptoms. Of these, 296 were randomised controlled trials, 34 were non-randomised controlled clinical trials, and 86 were non-controlled studies.

Seven new relevant randomised controlled trials of Chinese herbal medicine were identified in an additional search of the International Clinical Trials Registry Platform in March 2023.

Chinese herbal medicine

Most (191) of the 416 studies were randomised controlled trials of oral Chinese herbal medicines. They showed oral Chinese herbal medicine was more effective than placebo in reducing the severity and frequency of hot flushes, and improving sleep quality and overall symptom severity, but not in improving health-related quality of life. Chinese herbal medicine also improved sleep, anxiety, depression and overall symptom severity more effectively than drug treatment.

When combined with drug treatment, oral Chinese herbal medicines were more effective than drug treatment alone in improving sleep, anxiety, depression and overall symptom severity.

People in the trials reported mild adverse events, but fewer adverse events occurred in people who received oral Chinese herbal medicine than those who received drug treatment.

The seven new relevant registered randomised controlled trials of Chinese herbal medicine for menopause had mixed results: some showed benefit, others showed no benefit.

Acupuncture and related therapies

Among the 97 clinical trials that evaluated the effect of acupuncture and related therapies on menopausal symptoms, 79 were randomised controlled trials, six were non-randomised controlled clinical trials, and 12 were non-controlled studies. Acupuncture used alone or with drug treatment was more effective than drug treatment alone in improving depression and reducing overall symptom severity.

One new relevant registered randomised controlled trial of acupuncture for menopause was identified since 2018. It showed acupuncture was more effective than no treatment in reducing bothersome hot flushes, sweating, sleep problems and skin and hair problems, but did not improve other menopausal symptoms.

Key messages

- Chinese medicine treatments have been used throughout history to treat menopausal symptoms.
- Treatment approaches have evolved over time.
- Oral Chinese herbal medicine may improve hot flushes, mood and sleep.
- Acupuncture may be an effective treatment option for menopausal sleep and mood disturbances.
- Clinicians and patients should discuss potential risks and benefits, so patients can make informed choices about care.

For more information

You can find out more about Chinese medicine for menopause in the book *Evidence-based Clinical Chinese Medicine Volume 24: Menopause*¹ from <https://doi.org/10.1142/11940>

To find out more about Chinese medicine research at the China–Australia International Centre for Chinese Medicine, visit www.rmit.edu.au/research/centres-collaborations/multi-partner-collaborations/cairccm

References

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Disclaimer

This evidence summary is not intended as a guide for self-medication or medical advice – patients should seek professional advice from qualified Chinese medicine practitioners.