

Supplement usage in women entering the menopausal transition in Brisbane

KL Hanna¹, R Williams², S O'Neill², SK Khoo², R McIntosh², C Patterson¹, P Lyons-Wall¹

¹*School of Public Health, Queensland University of Technology, QLD, 4059*

²*Royal Women's Hospital and The University of Queensland, QLD, 4029*

There is an increasing number of supplements on the market which purport to assist in the relief of menopausal symptoms, with over 38 different products readily available in Brisbane. Yet little published data are available on the extent of use. These supplements include non-prescription medications, herbal therapies and nutritional supplements designed to complement inadequate dietary intake or provide preventative or therapeutic benefits. This study focussed on the extent and pattern of usage of supplements purported to assist with the menopausal transition. Reasons for usage were also assessed.

Subjects were women participating in The Longitudinal Study on Ageing in Women (LAW), a multi-disciplinary study being undertaken in SE Brisbane, with 500 women aged 40–80 yr randomly selected from the electoral roll. Data on reported supplement usage over the previous 6 mo were collected by interview as part of year 1 baseline assessment of overall dietary and supplemental intake of phytoestrogens. Results are presented for the cohort of 158 women aged 40–55 yr who were likely to be entering the menopausal transition.

The overall prevalence of usage of one or more supplements was 58%: 36% reported using vitamins, 27% used herbal therapies (excluding menopausal supplements), 24% used minerals, 6% used supplements for premenstrual symptoms and 11% used supplements for relief of menopausal symptoms, with a significant increase in the older group aged 50–55 yr ($P < 0.05$). Of the women who reported taking supplements for menopausal symptoms, products included Evening Primrose oil (42%), phytoestrogens (38%) eg soy, isoflavones, Red Clover or linseed, and herbal preparations (20%) eg Chinese herbs or wild yam. Usage of supplements according to age group is summarised in the table.

Reported use of supplements for premenstrual symptoms or menopausal transition	40–44 yr (n = 21)	45–49 yr (n = 61)	50–55 yr (n = 76)	40–55 yr (n = 158)
No supplements	85.7%	85.2%	78.9%	82.3%
Premenstrual symptoms	9.5%	8.2%	3.9%	6.3%
Menopausal symptoms	4.7%	6.5%	17.1% ¹	11.4%

¹significantly higher than corresponding values in other age cohorts, $P < 0.05$.

The results of this population-based study indicate that 11.4% of women aged 40–55 yr reported taking supplements for relief of menopausal symptoms over the previous 6 mo. Preliminary analyses in the same cohort indicate that the prevalence of use of hormone replacement therapy (HRT) was 10–20%. Therefore it appears that about 70 to 80% of women were not taking either prescribed or non-prescribed medications. This cannot be attributed entirely to lack of need, as studies indicate that up to 80% of Western women experience adverse menopausal symptoms (1). Whether our findings reflect an absence of severe symptoms or use of alternative strategies, remains to be clarified. Possible concerns regarding the safety of HRT or uncertainty about the efficacy of herbal or nutritional supplements may also partly explain the observed discrepancy.

1. Eden J. Phytoestrogens and menopause. *Baillieres Clin Endocrinol Metab* 1998; 12: 581–587.