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Menopause



Nona Taylor

ORIENTAL MEDICINE

What is menopause?

Menopause is when a woman stops having periods & is no longer able to become pregnant naturally.

Periods usually lighten, start to become less frequent over a number of months or years before they stop. They can also stop suddenly.

Menopause is a natural part of ageing & usually occurs between the age of 45-55 yrs as a woman's oestrogen levels decline. 1 in 100 women experience menopause before 40 yrs & this is called premature menopause or premature ovarian insufficiency.

<https://www2.hse.ie/conditions/early-menopause/>

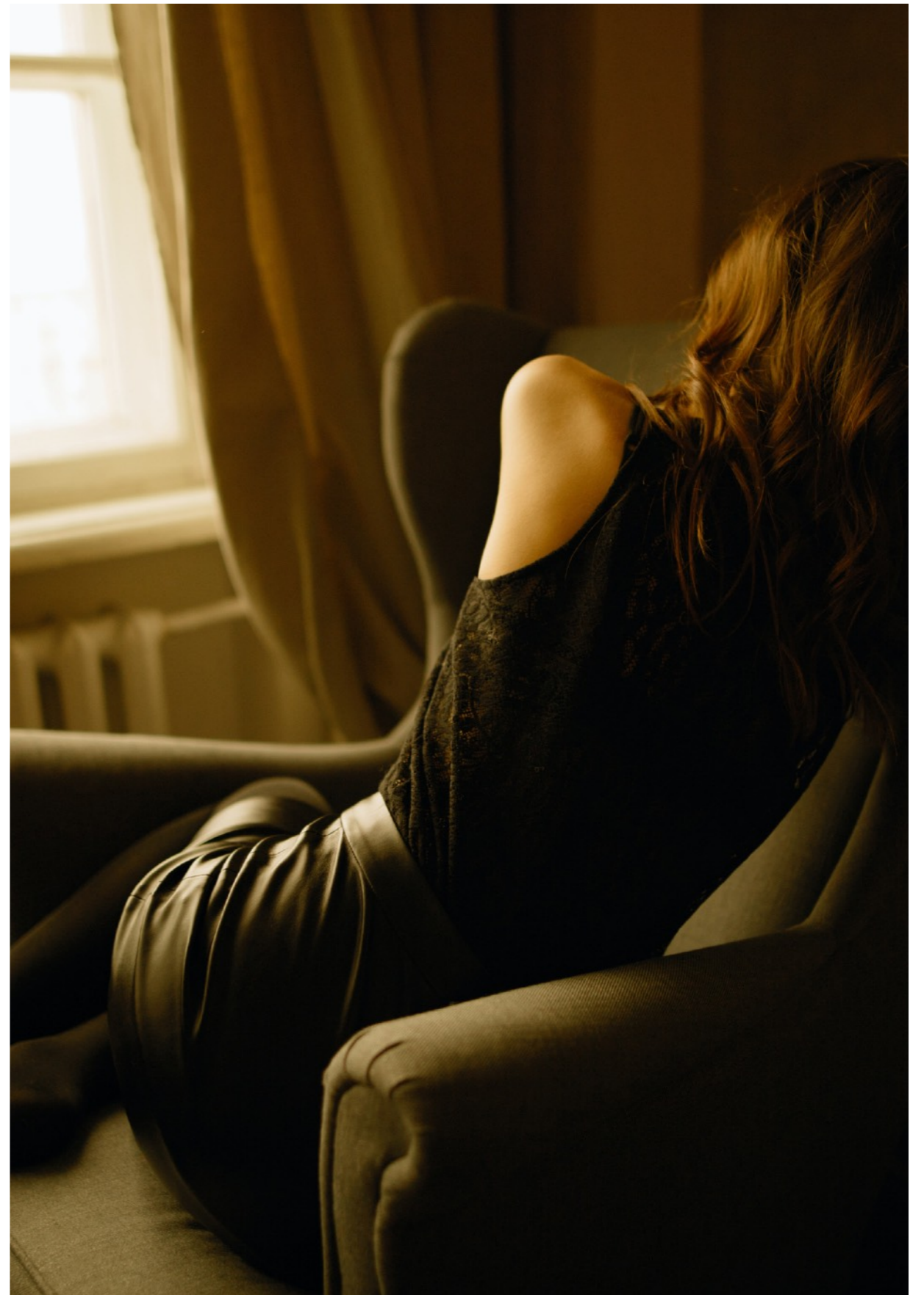


Symptoms of menopause

- * Hot flushes
- * Night sweats
- * Vaginal dryness
- * Discomfort during sex
- * Reduced sex drive (Libido)
- * Difficulty sleeping
- * Low mood
- * Anxiety
- * Problems with memory & concentration

Menopausal symptoms can begin months or even years before your periods stop. They can last up to 4 years after your last period stopped.

Some women experience symptoms for much longer



Oriental perspective

In Japan only 20% of women experience menopausal symptoms while now in the America 77% of women do!

Historically woman experienced few or no symptoms beyond the cessation of their menstrual flow. Menopause was traditionally celebrated as an important & positive time in a women's life.

Oriental wisdom sees menopause as **the second spring**, a deep energy shift - a time to heal, rebalance our energy & undergo transformation.

We no longer have to focus on bearing children. Our inner energies refocus on preserving our life, bringing forth our creativity & wisdom. We reawaken our true female power. **The dawning of the Sage - Wise Women - The Matriarch**



So why do we suffer now?

In the last 100 years especially, women have fought hard to be on an “equal” footing to men. Women now have the vote, can study & hold major senior positions in all professions, unthinkable before.

Women are now busier than ever, running the home, caring for children, maybe elderly parents, a partner/husband as well as holding down a full time job.

But we have earned this “equality” at huge physical cost. A busy, busy, rush, rush lifestyle generates internal “heat” & consumes “yin” as we force ourselves to develop the more masculine “yang” dynamic energy.





What is Yin & Yang?

This is a 3500 year old relational concept within Chinese culture to describe how the universe is composed of competing, dualistic & complementary forces. Dark & light, Night & day. Hot & cold. Passive & active.

Everything is described as having a place or balance within this ever changing spectrum.

This symbol describes the ever changing from yin to yang & that within yin you have yang & visa versa

Balance of yin & yang is important - In health if you have a deficiency of yin you will have an excess of yang symptoms & visa versa.

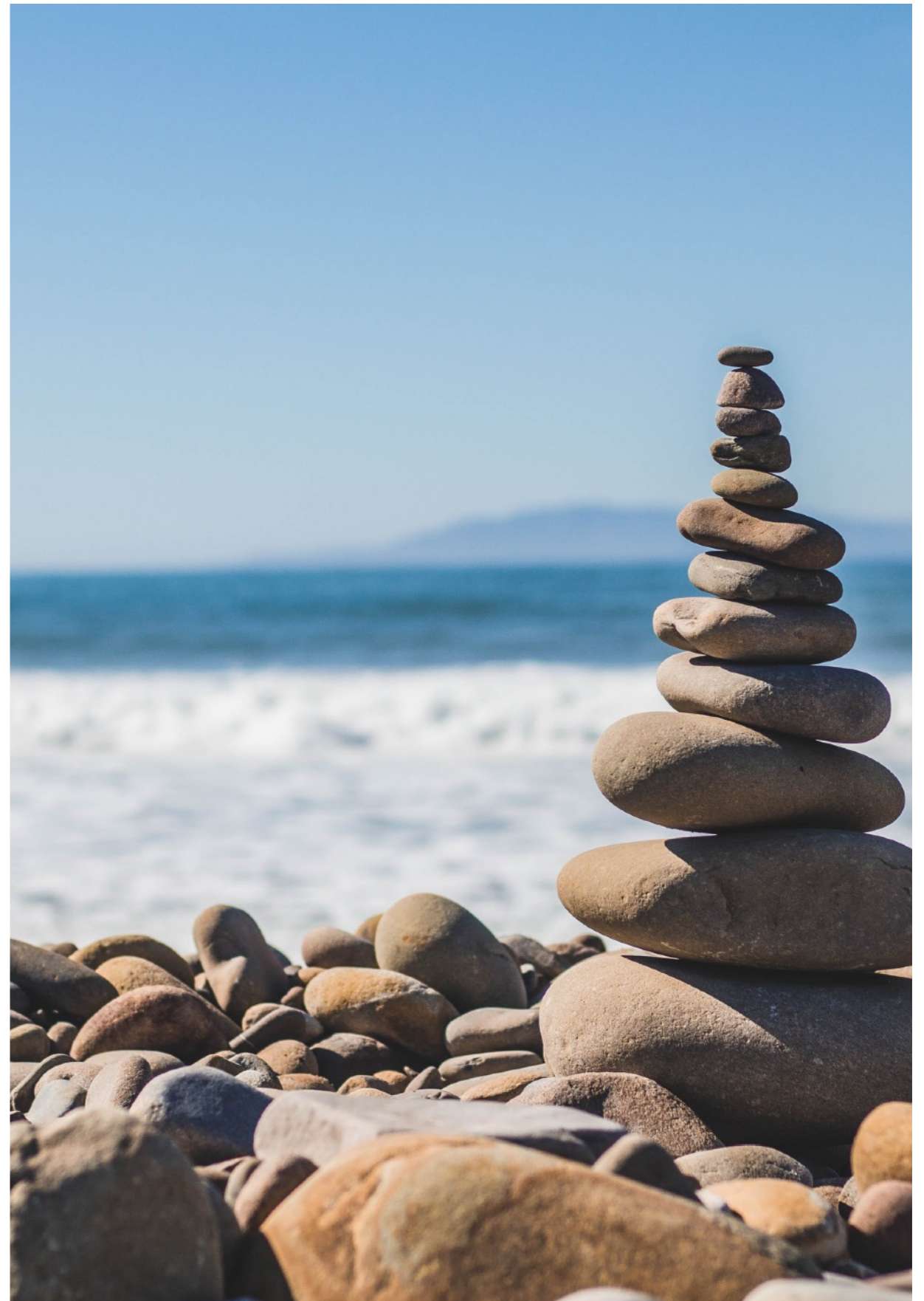
What happens energetically

In order to maintain health both yin and yang must be in balance.

Yin is water, cooling & absorbing, reflected in blood, lymph, synovial fluid, juices & substances. Yin nourishes, moistens & softens the tissues & organs, calms our nerves & ensures restful sleep.

Yang is fire, it is dynamic & gives us drive. It has a warming effect, gives us energy, 'joie de vivre' promotes the energetic functions of the tissues & organs.

Both are equal parts of a whole, interdependent & health is only when they remain in balance.



Why is this effecting us now?

Modern living is liberating for women but it has a knock on effect physically so we have to pay attention to rebalance ourselves. **Menopausal symptoms are a severe imbalance of our internal yin/yang circuit.**

Despite our technically equal status the male system we have inherited is very “yang” in nature. To succeed in this male world we have to learn to behave like men - this forces our bodies to be more yang in nature which goes against our more yin nature physically.

We drain our yin reserves with this more yang lifestyle. Too much yang **creates heat** in the female body which is why most menopausal symptoms are heat & dryness related.





How do we clear this heat?

Menopause occurs at the end of the menstrual cycle. **The menstrual flow is an opportunity each month to clear the bodies excess heat & toxins.** This is one reason why many women can suffer painful or heavy periods. When menopause approaches & the flow stops & we are still being too yang, the body has to find other ways to clear this excess heat.

Heat & inflammation is dangerous to our organs if kept within the body. So one way to **eliminate this heat** is for the body to move to the skin our largest excretory organ **releasing this excess heat as sweat.** We sweat at night because this is the yin time of day. **Hot flushes, vaginal dryness, thinning hair & osteoporosis** are all signs of internal heat.

Hormones & the kidneys

When you approach menopause the body starts reducing our hormone levels to conserve energy in preparation for prolonging life into old age. This is normal & healthy! In Chinese medicine Oestrogen is seen as yin & Progesterone yang. So once your hormone levels fall the yin yang balance is massively amplified. If your yin reserves in the body are no longer able to balance & anchor the yang in the body the result is more heat & dry symptoms.

Modern living puts excessive strain on our **kidneys** which disrupts our natural cycle of female life & fertility. (See kidney guide) In Chinese medicine the kidneys are responsible for the ageing process, fertility, controlling the cooling element of the body, our energy reserves & yin/yang balance. **So it is vital to care for the kidneys in order to transition through menopause smoothly.**



Hormone treatments

Modern living means we might choose to take **contraceptives** to block our natural cycle for the sake of our careers. We might then need to resort to **IVF** drugs to help us conceive. Then when we do give birth, society throws us back into everyday life before we have had time to fully recover, exhausting our energy reserves even further. Then we take **HRT** to help us through the menopause. Whilst for many women HRT is a “lifesaver” in terms of masking the symptoms in the short term, it does not treat the underlying cause - **depletion of kidney energy**. HRT tricks the body into thinking you are still fertile & there are many known side-effects.

Modern lifestyle has given us great “freedom” but it comes at a huge price health wise. Sooner or later we have to address the imbalance.





What will increase symptoms

- * **Overwork;** working long hours with insufficient rest, lack of movement & then eating under stress weakens **kidney-yin**.
- * **Emotional stress;** when experienced over many years, **kidney-yin** is weakened by fear, anxiety & guilt. Whereas **liver-Qi** becomes stagnant by recurrent feelings of anger, frustration & suppressed emotions.
- * **Smoking;** injures **lung-yin, dries blood & fluids** within the body. Over time it weakens **kidney-yin**. It also aggravates feelings of grief, sadness & worry.
- * **Eating irregular meals & dairy;** consuming a poor diet & dairy weakens **spleen-Qi**. Can cause the formation of phlegm. As a result slower metabolism, tiredness, oedemas and other symptoms can occur.
- * **Coffee & alcohol;** they are both yang in nature so **heating & drying**, if consumed on a regular basis can make menopausal symptoms worse



How to rebalance

Basic treatment principles:

- 1) Nourish your **yin** energy
- 2) Clear the **heat**
- 3) Support the **kidneys**
- 4) Rebalance yin & yang

In Chinese medicine menopausal symptoms are primarily seen as being **kidney yin deficiency** but can also be kidney yang deficient too.

Either way the **kidneys need support**, nourishing & rebalancing of both **kidney yin & yang**.

- 5) See the **kidney guide** <https://www.nona-taylor.com/resources> for more details how to do do this.

Tips to smooth the menopause

‘Let food be thy medicine’ - Hypocrites

- 1. Consume mineral rich foods & water;** These are especially good for nourishing kidney-yin. Think dark green leafy vegetables, lentils, seaweed, wild caught fish, fermented foods, miso, bone or vegetable broth, black sesame, amaranth or quinoa.
- 2. Eat foods with a slightly cooling & refreshing quality;** Preference is for cooking methods like **soups, stews & compotes** as this helps to combat symptoms of dryness & heat. Eat all vegetables & fruit especially soybean, dandelion, radicchio, chicory, avocado, beetroot, carrot, pumpkin, red berries, goji berries, apples & pears.
- 3. Reduce coffee & alcohol;** Ideally avoid both if suffering from symptoms of heat and dryness. Both have heating & drying properties, weaken kidney-yang and if consumed regularly promote liver-Qi stagnation.



Eat mineral rich green leafy vegetables at each meal.

- 4. Eat regular & at similar times;** This is important to calm the nervous system and keep blood sugar levels balanced. During menopause the body is going through a lot of changes, regular eating helps the body find balance
- 5. Drink mainly hot water & herbal teas;** Hot water strengthens the digestion & helps to flush away any toxins. There are a number of common herbal teas said to support women in menopause depending on your symptoms such as black cohosh, sage, blackcurrant leaf, dandelion, passionflower, peppermint.

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6. Avoid spicy herbs; They have a heating and drying effect in the body especially chili pepper, pimento, dried ginger, curry, horseradish and garlic, these are best avoided. The mid range warming spices such as cinnamon, fennel, nutmeg & fresh ginger can be eaten in moderation but should be avoided if there are hot flushes & night sweats

7. Avoid drying & heating drinks; If suffering symptoms of heat & dryness avoid green & black tea, chai tea, ginger tea, red wine, high percentage alcohol, hot chocolate or cacao milk.

8. Avoid grilled, fried or deep fried foods; These preparation methods have a heating effect & thus are best avoided. They can heat up the body & thus worsen symptoms like insomnia, irritability, hot flushes & night sweats. It is better to boil, steam or bake food.



Rose or ‘Mei Gui Hua’ is traditionally taken for stagnation of Qi especially of the stomach & liver & to a lesser extent the lungs

9. Avoid foods that have a hot & drying effect; Apart from the spices & drinks already mentioned the following foods should be avoided as well; red meat especially lamb, game, processed meats like salami, prosciutto, charcuterie & blue cheese.

10. Sugar in any of its forms is extremely heating so avoid all sweets, biscuits, cakes etc... If you feel you need a sweetener use a little natural local honey, high grade maple syrup, coconut blossom nectar or dates. Highly refined white sugar, high fructose corn syrup or artificial sweeteners are not your bodies friend!

General advice:

Any symptoms of ill health will always relate to one of the five main organ/meridians within the body, **lungs, heart, spleen, liver or kidneys**. In Oriental medicine the meridians are named after internal organs & the scope of function is far greater than what is assumed within the western concept or understanding, as it extends along the pathway of the meridian & effects us physically, mentally, emotionally & spiritually. Imbalance manifests energetically on subtle levels (spiritual, emotional, mental) before it becomes physical. So when we use the term of say liver/heart/kidney imbalance it does not mean the organ is diseased. But if imbalance remains eventually disease will develop.

If we can learn to read the subtle signs daily, of the imbalances within our body system, we can **prevent** a more serious condition developing, by rectifying the energetic imbalance early on.

Please see the individual guides on the **5 main organs** for advice on how to support them.

<https://www.nona-taylor.com/resources>



Self massage using a Gua Sha stone or even a jam jar lid or ceramic spoon can help to improve circulation of Qi and blood, release toxins & stagnation caught in the tissues, clear residual heat, relax and de-stress the system.

Stress:

Is a big factor in the development of menopausal symptoms. Consequently taking up a practice of any of the following: **breath exercises, meditation, Qi kung, Kum Nye, massage, Yoga, tapping or Gua Sha** will all help to:

- * Engage your parasympathetic nervous system.
- * Calm the sympathetic nervous system.
- * Regulate blood flow
- * Reduce “heat” to “cool” the body.
- * Strengthen the organs.

There are regular free meditation classes on line.

<http://www.dzogchenbeara.org/events/>

Meditation

Taking up any simple meditation technique even for 1 minute will make a difference.

Breath work:

A simple exercise is to breathe into your lower abdomen. There is a Qi Kung saying “**Where the mind goes, the Qi will follow**” - Our minds tend to run wild, ‘monkey mind’, following any thought that comes into our head!

With this exercise bring your hands to your lower abdomen along with your attention. Breathe in and feel the belly move out - use the inhalation to really guide your mind to your lower belly & imagine you are **smiling** within. This will bring positive Qi to nourish all your organs at a core level, calm your mind & nervous system.

At night before sleep you could again rest your hands on your lower belly - gently inhale noticing your hands move up, then back down as you exhale. Count say to 3 as you inhale, hold your breath for 3 & exhale for 3-5 counts. Keep your attention on an **internal smile in your lower belly**. The extended exhalation can help to further calm & settle the mind & body before sleep.





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‘ My wish is to
inspire you to
heal yourself
naturally’

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