

“M” THE WORD

By Linda
Jacobson-Kossoff

Education, targeted treatments and a new attitude toward aging are helping menopausal women find the skincare support they need.

THEY SAY “POTATO” AND WE SAY “POTAHTO.” They say “mature” and we say “menopausal.” With approximately 30 million women in North America older than 50 and the first flock of baby boomers hitting 60, most women believe it’s time to ditch the euphemisms and embrace the fact that they’re entering the cramp-free phase of their lives. Indeed, with the average female lifespan hitting 80, there’s no reason for women to associate menopause with their own decline. And there’s no reason for the skincare world to mince words when treating this eager and economically solvent demographic.

Dr. Howard Murad, founder of Murad and pioneer in the treatment of a wide variety of specific skin conditions, describes three types of aging: 1) intrinsic, which is genetic and includes the kinds of aging the body is programmed to experience; 2) extrinsic, which is environmental and includes the effects of sun, smoke and stress; and 3) hormonal, which, according to Murad, “is superimposed upon the other two.”

While intrinsic aging is unavoidable and extrinsic aging is preventable, when it comes to skin, hormonal aging is a little of each. Yes, many women entering or in the throes of menopause can and do attempt to replace their lowering hormone supply with hormone replacement therapy, but recent research findings that question the safety of HRT are making this less of a viable strategy. Many women don’t even have the HRT option due to high cancer risk factors, and many more simply don’t want the therapy. Certainly, women going through uncomplicated menopause are ill advised to undergo HRT for the sole reason of “saving their skin.”

Fortunately, there are alternative skincare strategies for menopausal and/or perimenopausal (transitioning to menopause) women. Perhaps even more fortunately for our industry, spa clients in particular often seek out these alternatives. It only makes sense that today’s spa professionals be ready to help these clients understand, discuss and address their unique skincare challenges.



[The “M” Word]

Clients in menopause and perimenopause will need treatments aimed at combatting dryness, slowed cell turnover and thinning skin.



“M” IS FOR METAMORPHOSIS

Menopause and perimenopause have a specific effect on the skin that’s distinct from the general effects of aging. This doesn’t mean that some of the same treatments can’t be successfully used for both—they can—but it’s important to understand the distinction so you can achieve optimal results for your menopausal clients.

The average age of actual menopause (when there has been no menstruation for 12 consecutive months) ranges from the early to mid-50s. Leading into this time, estrogen levels have already been declining, giving rise to the typical symptoms of hot flashes, night sweats, sleep disturbances and mood swings, among many others. In the skin, lowered estrogen takes its toll, adversely affecting dermal cellular metabolism leading to lowered collagen and water content, and changes in the concentration of glycoaminoglycans. These internal changes present themselves externally as dull, sagging skin.

Following menopause, vascular activity and blood flow velocity (previously demonstrated in hot flashes) slows. The glow is gone. To make matters worse, at this stage, fluctuations in androgens can lead to excessive growth of hair (hirsutism) on the face and body.

Ben Kaminsky, a pharmaceutical research chemist and co-founder of B. Kamins, Chemist, began exploring these unique skincare challenges in the early 1990s, when his own wife was going through menopause. “She chastised me for doing things for everyone else and not for her,” recalls Kaminsky. “So I took her needs seriously and told my group to look into hormone deprivation and skin. They all groaned. The word ‘menopause’ just wasn’t out there. Estrogen treatments were being used for things like osteoporosis but no one was paying attention to skin—you don’t die from wrinkles.”

Some published studies began to grab Kaminsky’s attention. One study clearly linked perimenopause and menopause with a dramatic loss of sebum. Another study showed the connection between reduced estrogen and collagen breakdown. “We realized that if we were going to treat this topically, we couldn’t address every symptom of menopause, so we identified symptoms we could address: dryness, mottled complexion due to slow cell turnover and thinning.” Thus the B. Kamins line of products to treat menopausal skin was introduced, with an emphasis on protective ingredients such as antioxidants and sunscreen.



Although many skincare ingredients can help with menopausal skin symptoms, only a handful of companies are actually target-marketing menopausal women.



“M” IS FOR MULTIFACETED

Over the past 10 years, increased understanding of the skin and sophisticated technology and delivery systems have advanced the cause of caring for menopausal and perimenopausal skin. And while many skincare companies offer product lines containing ingredients that can meet the need, only a handful are target-marketing to menopausal clients. One notable contributor is Dr. Stuart Kaplan, a Beverly Hills, California-based dermatologist whose practice brings him face to face—literally—with this challenge every day. “I was seeing redness, dryness, acceleration of fine lines and wrinkles, increased sensitivity, itching, breakouts and unwanted facial hair growth in much younger women, some just in their 30s,” Kaplan notes. “At this time, doctors were learning that perimenopause could last a decade before menopause actually started. But women didn’t realize that estrogen loss causes skin changes that are entirely separate from those caused by chronologic aging or environmental damage.”

Kaplan developed a product line, kaplanMD| For Transitioning Skin, that features a Phytogetic Triactive Complex of black cohosh, grape seed extract and soy isoflavones to “mimic the effects of estrogen.” The line, which includes a cleanser, serum, toner, day

cream with SPF, night cream, eye cream, exfoliant and masque, employs a patented microsphere time-release delivery system designed to enable different degrees of penetration for individual ingredients.

Murad is “inviting menopausal skin to a ‘Resurgence’” with its product line of the same name. Specifically formulated to combat hormonal aging symptoms, the topical treatments include a cleanser, retinol/vitamin C cream, moisturizer with SPF, serum, night cream and eye cream. The ingredient emphasis is on antioxidants, anti-inflammatory agents and hydrators, with a few plant-based oils to protect barrier function, natural phytoestrogens to firm and glycosaminoglycans to inhibit collagen breakdown. Murad personally recommends an occasional application of sulfur for the cyst-like breakouts that offer occur in this group, and a product with the ingredient capislow, shown to inhibit facial hair growth. “When dealing with women in this phase, you need to treat the cause. It takes a comprehensive, inclusive approach,” Murad says.

B. Kamins remains involved in this aspect of skin care, having evolved along with the changing science. “There has been a raised awareness of the architecture of skin, so we understand better how to

make effective topical preparations,” says Kaminsky. “We use biologically active materials that attach themselves to receptor cells.” B. Kamins’ current offerings in this arena include a gentle cleanser that leaves the acid mantle on fragile menopausal skin intact, a nutrient replacement cream, a therapeutic moisturizer, topical glycolic solutions for occasional help in cell turnover, an eye treatment and a body lotion.

The use of phytoestrogens—chemicals produced by plants that act like estrogens in animal cells and bodies—in topical skin care for menopausal clients has sparked some gentle debate. Phytoestrogens mainly fall into the class of flavonoids and of these, the one we know the most about is isoflavones, which are commonly found in soy and red clover. Some evidence suggests that phytoestrogens can help “balance” hormone levels throughout the body; however, researchers are still exploring the possible functions and roles of phytoestrogens in health care.

Kaminsky, with his pharmaceutical background, hasn’t embraced the notion of phytoestrogens in topical skin care. “We use strategies that deal with the initial problems of elastin and collagen fiber loss

“M” IS FOR MARKETING

From a business standpoint, is it wise to invest in services and promotions for the menopausal woman? Consider the following facts about the mature market:

- By 2010, 43% of the U.S. adult population will be more than 50 years old and 80% of the country’s assets will be concentrated in their hands. (*MarketingProfs.com*)
- The 50-plus woman has typically reached a point in her life where she’s ready to spend money on herself; also, she now has the time. (*BrandDemand.com*)
- Forward-thinking companies are turning their attention to the mature woman, with ventures such as Gap’s Forth & Towne retail concept and L’Oréal’s featuring of actresses Catherine Deneuve and Diane Keaton (both age 61) as spokespeople. However, the majority of companies are overlooking this demographic, leaving the field open for businesses that have detected the upcoming trend.
- Business researcher Guideline (www.hoovers.com) forecasts that products for aging faces and bodies will become a \$56 billion market in 2007 (up 50% since 2002).
- The trend also holds in Europe, where consumers age 55 and above will grow by 60% in the next 15 years. (*BrandDemand.com*)

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and inability of the stratum corneum to perform normally," he says. "We worry about strategies that seek to repair 'appendages.' It's more about understanding where the client is, her particular symptoms, if she has been yo-yo dieting, if she's on medications, etc."

Murad, who also takes an all-inclusive approach, uses phytoestrogens in some of his products but is cautious when making nutritional recommendations. "It can be helpful to adopt a diet that's rich in amino acids and phytoestrogens, but only under a doctor's guidance," he warns. Both Murad and B. Kamins have created in-spa facial protocols featuring their products to help skincare professionals treat perimenopausal and menopausal clients.

Armed with quality products and advanced knowledge, estheticians are in a great position to help their mature female clients weather their transitions with optimal skin health. Jane Aransky, owner of La Residencia spa in Newton Falls, Massachusetts, finds nothing more gratifying. "My client population is older because I've been in this business for 30 years and they've just stayed with

me," she says. "Our estheticians need to handle these clients' skin with great care. We see rosacea that's exacerbated by the flushing of hot flashes, and we know the retinols will be too irritating. We see adult acne around the jaw and chin, possibly caused by the emotional stress that comes with hormone depletion. We're prepared with advanced therapies like ultrasound with vitamins, peels, IPL, LED and even outsourced laser work. And we're always ready to refer to a dermatologist when necessary."

Anca Markie is owner of Richmond, Virginia-based Spa Epidauros, where the average client is a woman between the ages of 35 and 55. Markie's approach for menopausal clients focuses strongly on aromatherapy. The spa's Wise Woman Facial (listed under "menopause" on her spa menu) features balancing and calming oils like sandalwood, clary sage and rose geranium to help counteract flushing. A deep yet gentle cleansing mask is also key. "We see a lot of these perimenopausal and menopausal women having problems with congestion of the skin," she notes.

“M” IS FOR MESSAGE

Kaminsky remembers going to a trade show in Las Vegas in 1997 with his menopausal skincare preparations and discovering he might have an uphill battle in the image department. It seemed that many women were less than delighted to place a jar with the word “menopause” on their nightstands. “We were asked to rename the products and I refused,” Kaminsky says. Murad can recall the results of a focus group study on his products that showed the group to be split 50/50 on the use of the “m” word, and the company ultimately went with the phrase “hormonal aging and imbalance.”

But attitudes about aging are changing, and changing fast (see “Aging Comes of Age,” page 100), and skin professionals need be ready to embrace their menopausal clients with open arms and a message that says, “This is the beginning of a new, potentially fabulous time in your life.” Aransky, who has a master’s degree in counseling psychology, seizes every

opportunity to remind her clientele of their tremendous beauty and value—and sense of humor. “Every time I do a facial on a menopausal client I’m taking a blanket off, then putting it back on, then taking it off,” she says. “We all laugh about it.”

“We don’t even use the term ‘antiaging’ at our spa,” says Markie. “It’s all about ‘healthy aging.’ Why fight it? At 50, you know it’s happening. And we don’t have trouble using the word ‘menopause.’ Most of our clients don’t either, though we don’t bring it up unless they do.”

“If we as estheticians tip-toe around this, the clients are going to feel it and feel less than worthy,” says Aransky. “My experience is that people are becoming pretty free in talking about menopause. It’s a natural thing. It’s a beautiful thing. I believe in the joy of aging.” ●

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