

Alternative Therapy Trends among Korean Postmenopausal Women

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Dear Sir,

Korean women are also interested in alternative therapies for postmenopausal or perimenopausal symptom relief or health improvement. There are also no guidelines for postmenopausal women who want to consider alternative therapies in Korea. The sales market for hormones in Korea, as in other countries, changed after the publication of the Women's Health Initiative (WHI) results in 2002. According to a Korean multicenter study of hormone awareness in women, before the 2002 publication of the WHI study, women's knowledge about menopause was low.¹ In 2009, however, postmenopausal women were very interested in menopause and had an increased awareness of menopause.¹

After publication of the WHI results, the hormone market decreased; however, postmenopausal women are very interested in menopause therapies.¹ The incidence of women receiving regular checkups to detect breast cancer was 35.0% in 2002.¹ In 2009, the rate of general checkups was 82.3% because of the fear of cancer.¹ In 2002, only 9.3% of women refused hormone therapy. In 2009, 31.8% of women refused hormone therapy, according to a survey of the impact of the WHI results.¹ Korea relies heavily on the traditional Korean medicine market, or herbal medicine market, particularly Korean Red Ginseng products. Other products include nutritional supplements and products containing aloe, omega-3 fatty acids, glucosamine, gamma-

linolenic acid, chlorella, yeast, or lactic acid.² In 2010, alternative medicine earned 10671 million won.²

In 2010, five products for postmenopausal women's health with proven functional ingredients were registered in Korea.² They contained combined estrogen receptor ingredients (Beksuo), pomegranate extract/concentrate,¹ and pagoda tree fruit extract functional foods.^{1,2} Research on relief of menopausal symptoms has progressed with studies on the activation of estrogen receptor alpha in herbal products. Functional foods are widely sold to the public and are very popular. However, health foods such as the estrogenic activity product used for menopausal symptom relief should be required to have proof of safety and efficacy.

The general population believes in herbal medicine or health functional products. Because of the fear of breast cancer, the general population has increased the use of herbal hormones, Chinese medicines, and health functional products. However, the need for data on safety and efficacy and the development of guidelines for the use of these alternative medicines constitute a big challenge for Korea.

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Conflict of Interest

No potential conflict of interest relevant to this article was reported.

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