

Menopause in the Ancient Greek World.
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Menopause is a complex condition that often arouses strong responses from the women who experience it. However, in the ancient Greek world, menopause is given much less attention in comparison to other reproductive issues. This lack of interest in menopause is highlighted by the high degree of attention placed on all the other phases of a woman's reproductive cycle. Unfortunately, modern scholarship on both women and ancient gynecology has followed suit, focusing much more on the youthful virgins and the childbearing mothers with little notice given to post-menopausal women.

In this paper, I will discuss how menopause was discussed and perceived in ancient Greece. Further light will be shed on the evidence by contrasting it with modern understandings of menopause from Western medicine and society. Western medicine employs a disease model for menopause; it has medicalized this phase of a woman's life, promoting pharmaceutical treatments to return the body to its youthful form (Berger 1999). Conversely, Greek medicine does not consider menopause to be a pathological condition. While much of Hippocratic gynecology is discussed in terms of pathology, the cessation of menses due to old age is believed to be natural.

I will explore the ancient explanations for the cessation of menses. In a surprising contradiction, two of the most discussed symptoms of menopause in Western medicine –hot flashes and night sweats– directly contrast with the condition of the old female body in antiquity (Sievert 2006). As women age, they become drier and colder. These changes to their bodily constitutions account for the cessation of menses, although neither the Hippocratic corpus nor Aristotle directly gives the reasons for menopause (Dean-Jones 1994). Both sets of texts generally agree that women cease to menstruate because they no longer have an excess of nourishment that used to accumulate to form menstrual blood (Hp., *Mul.* 1.1; Arist., *GA* 726b). While this excess diminishes in both men and women, both agree that women age more quickly than men (Hp., *Septim.* 9; Arist., *GA* 775a).

Ultimately, the treatment of menopause and the old female body in general maintain the belief that the male body is superior to the female body. Even though both sexes become colder and drier with age, men retain their superiority because women age faster. Unlike in modern Western society, there is no need for a disease model of menopause or medicalization to create an inferior menopausal body. The menopausal body is already inferior to the reproductive body because of the pro-natalist outlook of Greek medicine. A healthy female body is a fecund one, preferably a pregnant one. This bodily inferiority is in stark contrast to the social freedoms that some scholars believe older women gained as part of aging (Bremmer 1987). It is this perceived inferiority of the post-menopausal body that allows these women a measure of social freedom.

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