

MINNESOTA Good Age

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MACROBIOTICS *and* MENOPAUSE

A local author thinks they go hand in hand

BY MONICA WRIGHT

Gabriele Kushi knows that many people find macrobiotics unfamiliar and intimidating. But she hopes more women will look to a macrobiotic diet for relief from something equally daunting — menopause.

“If you make up your mind and if you give yourself time to change, especially during menopause, macrobiotics will give you a healthy, natural lifestyle,” explains Kushi.

Kushi's new book, *Embracing Menopause Naturally: Stories, Portraits, and Recipes*, (SquareOne Publishing, 2006) uses macrobiotics, a lifestyle that emphasizes balance and a more natural diet, to give women a do-it-yourself approach to managing hot flashes, insomnia, and other symptoms. Kushi, a native of Germany who has lived in the Twin Cities since 1984, learned about macrobiotics in the 1970s and trained to be a macrobiotic instructor, personal chef, and educator at the Kushi Institute in Massachusetts. (Kushi met and married the son of the school's founders while studying there.)

Several years ago, as Kushi was developing macrobiotic recipes to deal with her own menopause symptoms, she came up with the idea of creating a book that combined personal stories, healthful information, and macrobiotic recipes. At the time, doctors were identifying a growing number of risks linked to hormone-replacement therapy, and Kushi realized women were looking for a more natural way to handle the changes their bodies were going through.

“Women were educating themselves about [hormone replacement] and weren't as reluctant to try something else,” says Kushi. Women were also eager to share their menopausal experiences with Kushi, whose book features the stories of Native American, African American, Asian, Hispanic, and Caucasian women. “I wanted a book where every woman could find something in the stories and cultures that she could relate to.”

Many of the women comment on how little their mothers discussed menopause, and Kushi hopes her book will open the door for more discussion. “I still meet women who say they don't know who to talk to, that they don't have women friends they can connect with on this topic. In my book, women come together and talk about intimate, important issues.”

Kushi also sees herself as “the Rachael Ray of 30-minute natural meals,” making a strict macrobiotic diet accessible and practical for busy



PHOTO BY ROBB LONG

Chef Gabriele Kushi believes in the healing power of a macrobiotic diet: lots of cereals, beans, nuts, and veggies; no meat, dairy, or refined foods.

women. That dietary framework means avoiding meat, dairy, alcohol, coffee, sugar, tropical fruit, and honey; and focusing instead on whole cereals, beans, nuts, vegetables, local fruits, and plenty of soy products. Macrobiotic practitioners also pay special attention to how food is prepared and which foods should be eaten during certain seasons.

Kushi suggests implementing aspects of the diet gradually. “Doing a radical withdrawal from pizza can be difficult, but you can start however you want to,” she says. “Some people change from eating white bread to whole grain bread, or they make two or three macrobiotic meals a week to start incorporating it into their diet.”

The benefits to menopausal women (including peri- and post-menopausal women) are, according to Kushi, tangible: hot flashes diminish, depression subsides, and energy increases. But Kushi warns that none of these things happens overnight.

“In our society, we're used to taking a pill and having things go away quickly. When we do something naturally, it works with the rhythm of nature, so it takes longer. It's not like a magic bullet, but macrobiotics can even out symptoms,” says Kushi.

Whether or not women adopt the macrobiotic diet, Kushi says the most important thing to take away from her book is that menopause shouldn't be associated with the typical negative labels of becoming older, unattractive, and less vital. “It's always hard for women to be who they are at any age because of the pressures of society, but menopausal women have the right to really guide society because they've had the experience of raising children and living their lives,” says Kushi. “The country and even the planet would be better off if they did.”

Find a macrobiotic recipe from Kushi's book at MNGoodage.com.