

BALANCING HORMONES NATURALLY

A holistic approach to women's hormone-related health concerns...

PROBLEM: There is an epidemic in this country of women suffering from various hormone-related issues: bloating, weight gain, headaches, fatigue, depression, mood swings, loss of libido, PMS, impaired thyroid function, impaired immune system function, infertility, osteoporosis, hypertension, fibrocystic breasts, endometriosis, uterine and ovarian cysts, tumors, and cancer, pituitary cancer, and breast cancer.

Last year there were nearly 200,000 cases of breast cancer alone diagnosed in the U.S., with nearly 50,000 deaths. We all know many women who have had to deal with this disease.

I want to give you the knowledge to understand the basic hormonal workings of your body, and some suggestions on how to best reach and maintain a state of hormonal health and balance.

The 2 main hormones we'll be discussing are estrogen and progesterone. Actually, that's an oversimplification, as the body produces 3 different types of estrogen: estradiol, estriol, and estrone; all with different functions in the body. And the estrogen found in birth control pills or HRT is a synthetic molecule, with different functions than any of the natural ones. Then there are the phytoestrogens (biologically active estrogens found in food), and xenoestrogens (highly potent and toxic estrogens found in our food supply and living environment). The body only makes one progesterone hormone, but again; the progesterone found in birth control pills or HRT is also a synthetic, altered hormone, and should correctly be referred to as a progestin.

Why would birth-control pills and HRT be comprised of synthetic molecules not found in a woman's body? The answer, sadly, is that natural hormones cannot be patented; and are therefore infinitely less profitable than synthetic ones. Premarin, a combination of synthetic estrogens made from horse's urine, generates over a billion dollars in sales per year.

These molecularly-altered hormones are actually toxic to the body, causing an epidemic of health problems in women around the world...ranging from annoying to fatal. Although they share some actions and characteristics of the natural hormones, they come with an alarming array of side effects.

Most doctors are unaware that there is even a difference; or that the natural hormones are easily available, inexpensive, easy to use, and effective. Why is that? Unfortunately, medical schools and the medical journals are both highly dependent on money from the pharmaceutical industry. So doctors often receive biased, skewed information on this and other important subjects

A review of the basic hormonal cycle in women is in order. In premenopausal women, the first 2 weeks of their menstrual cycle is dominated by the estrogens; and the last 2 weeks are dominated by progesterone. If no pregnancy occurs, progesterone levels drop, and the uterine lining is shed...resulting in menstruation. If pregnancy occurs, progesterone levels remain high, and will increase dramatically throughout pregnancy.

Many women in industrialized countries will cease to ovulate 10 or more years before reaching menopause, but will continue to menstruate. These are called “anovulatory cycles”. When there is no ovulation, there is no progesterone production; and the woman enters a hormonal state known as “estrogen dominance”.

In post-menopausal women, the level of estrogens drops 40 to 50%, to a level that does not induce the menstrual cycle. And because there is no ovulation or pregnancy, there is virtually no progesterone production at all.

Menopause has been treated in this country as a disease of estrogen deficiency; when in fact, most post-menopausal women produce sufficient estrogen. It is the progesterone that is lacking, again creating the hormonal situation known as “estrogen dominance”.

There seems also to be a dramatic difference between the experience of menopause by women in industrialized countries vs. that of women in non-industrialized countries.

There are several reasons for this:

1. Estrogen levels are directly related to caloric intake; so women in industrialized countries generally have higher estrogen levels. This results in a much more dramatic drop in estrogen levels at menopause.
2. Women in industrialized countries are heavily exposed to xenoestrogens, the highly toxic petrochemical estrogens that find their way into our food supply and living environment. These xenoestrogens are many times more potent and toxic than their natural counterparts, and their stimulation of the ovaries causes them to “burn out” prematurely. This is the main reason for anovulatory cycles and resultant estrogen dominance in pre-menopausal women.

This situation of estrogen dominance is largely responsible for the myriad of symptoms and health problems experienced by so many women today. These include bloating, weight gain, headaches, fatigue, depression, mood swings, loss of libido, PMS, impaired thyroid function, impaired immune system function, infertility, osteoporosis, hypertension, fibrocystic breasts, endometriosis, uterine and ovarian cysts, tumors, and cancer, pituitary cancer, and breast cancer.

The main reasons for estrogen dominance are as follows:

1. Birth control pills with excessive estrogen component
2. Pre-menopausal anovulatory cycles
3. Estrogen replacement therapy
4. Xenoestrogens leading to premature follicle depletion
5. Hysterectomy (induces subsequent ovarian dysfunction/atrophy)
6. Post-menopause (especially in overweight women)
7. Sedentary lifestyle and poor diet

It is important that the estrogens and progesterone are in balance in the body, as in many cases they have opposite but complimentary effects in the body. Let's take a look at some examples:

ESTROGEN

Cell division in breasts
Increases body fat
Water retention
Depression
Blocks thyroid hormone activity
Incr. risk of blood clots, strokes
Decreases sex drive
Decreases oxygenation of all cells
Incr. likelihood of fibrocystic breasts
Incr. likelihood of uterine fibroids
Incr. likelihood of endometrial cancer
Incr. likelihood of breast cancer
Sl. decr. osteoclast activity > menop.
Decr. vascular tone (migraine hAs)
Incr. risk of gall bladder disease
Incr. risk of autoimmune disorders
Incr. histamine release (allergy sx.)
Incr. incidence of hypertension
Alters mineral balance (>Ca⁺⁺, <Zn),
causes >>rxn. to stress = mood swings
and depression

PROGESTERONE

Protects against fibrocystic breasts
>use of fat for energy + thermogenic
Diuretic
Antidepressant, calming effect
Facilitates thyroid hormone activity
Normalizes clotting
Increases sex drive
Increases oxygenation of all cells
Decr. likelihood of fibrocystic breasts
Decr. likelihood of uterine fibroids
Decr. likelihood of endometrial cancer
Decr. likelihood of breast cancer
Increases osteoblasts (builds bone)
Normalizes vascular tone
Decr. risk of gall bladder disease
Decr. risk of autoimmune disorders
Inhibits histamine release
Decr. incidence of hypertension
Normalizes mineral balance
Supports adrenal gland function
Precursor for many hormones
Survival of fetus (RU486 blocks prog.)
Incr. survival rate after brain injury
Promotes restful sleep

XENOESTROGENS:

The primary oral sources are animal fat and milk fat. Meat animals are routinely given estrogen to fatten them up for slaughter, and they are fed grains with pesticide residue. Milk cows are given estrogens to increase their milk supply. These highly potent and highly toxic xenoestrogens are then stored in the animals' fat, to later be ingested by us.

Other sources of xenoestrogens are pesticides and other petrochemical household products, and from cooking with plastics. Some well-known xenoestrogens are DES, DDT, dioxins, and PCBs.

Some of the toxic effects of these xenoestrogens don't show up until later generations, such as with DES. Mens' sperm production has declined by roughly 50% since 1940. Animals in nature exposed to xenoestrogens demonstrate drastically increased reproductive problems. Males are born with small penises, and are infertile. Who knows what effects these toxins have on our unborn babies, and how they will affect future generations?

NATURAL PROGESTERONE vs. SYNTHETIC PROGESTINS

Precursor for <u>many</u> other hormones	Cannot be used as a precursor
Many beneficial effects	Different and often harmful effects
Easily metabolized + excreted	Poorly metabolized, difficult to excrete
Decreases risk of breast cancer	Increases risk of breast cancer
Calming effect on mood	Fosters depression
Does not cause birth defects	May cause birth defects
Increases libido	No effect
Improves lipid profile	No effect
Stimulates new bone formation	Mild effect
Improves sleep patterns	No effect
Normalizes blood clotting	Increased risk of blood clots/stroke
No effect	Increases acne
Normalizes allergic responses	Increases allergic response
Protects against endometrial cancer	Protects against endometrial cancer

Natural progesterone is 20x more concentrated in brain tissue than in other parts of the body. And while its functions in the brain are not fully known, it is clearly important.

THE ADRENAL GLANDS

The adrenal glands are located on top of the kidneys, and are about the size of a large lima bean. They are critical for our ability to deal with stress. Animals with their adrenal glands removed will live a near-normal lifespan if provided with good nutrition, and kept in a stress-free environment. However, if subjected to physical, nutritional, or emotional stress, they will quickly die.

The inner part of the adrenal glands (the adrenal medulla) produces our “fight or flight” hormones...adrenaline and noradrenaline (also known as epinephrine and norepinephrine). The outer part of the adrenal glands (the cortex) produces 3 classes of hormones that regulate dozens of ongoing bodily functions.

The glucocorticoid hormones cortisol and hydrocortisone play major roles in regulating blood sugar, and help regulate carbohydrate, fat, and protein metabolism. Exhaustion of these hormones due to stress can lead to fatigue, weight gain, muscle wasting, low blood sugar, thinning skin, and other signs of aging.

The mineralcorticoids, most notably aldosterone, regulate mineral balance in the cells. Excessive release of these hormones due to stress can lead to high blood pressure, chronic water retention, and potassium and magnesium deficiencies. Mg is the most important cofactor for optimal enzyme function, so a deficiency will have a domino effect in our bodies.

The androgen hormones are also known as the sex hormones. They are all produced in the adrenal cortex, although not exclusively. Both cortisol and aldosterone are made from progesterone. Can you see how a deficiency of progesterone can wreak havoc in the body? And how a deficiency of progesterone can be caused by stress...as the progesterone is used for “emergency” hormones rather than other important pathways, such as balancing and opposing estrogen?

There are many “adrenal support formulas” available; but the most important nutrient to ingest is undoubtedly Vitamin C. The adrenal cells have the highest rate of Vitamin C usage in the entire body. Supplementing 2 to 4 grams per day is a good idea.

OSTEOPOROSIS

Osteoporosis is a very serious problem in the United States and other industrialized countries. It is the most common metabolic bone disease in the U.S., with roughly half of all women over 50 having very significant osteoporosis. 4 out of every 10 women in the U.S. will fracture a hip, their spine, or their forearm at some point in their lives because of osteoporosis.

It is not usually a calcium deficiency problem; but is due to excessive bone loss.

It is not due to estrogen deficiency or menopause, as the accelerated bone loss often begins 10 years before menopause, when estrogen levels are high. Estrogen does slow bone loss somewhat in the first few years after menopause. Outside of that time frame there is no proven effect.

It is linked to low levels of progesterone. Synthetic progestins have a very mild positive effect on bone deposition, but in the end have a negative effect, as they block natural progesterone.

NATURAL APPROACHES TO PREVENT OR TREAT OSTEOPOROSIS:

Use natural progesterone cream if indicated.

Use natural estrogen (estriol) cream if indicated (usually not necessary)

Moderate protein intake, and try to take with calcium source.

Supplement with appropriate vitamins and minerals: Vit. C (2-4g/day), Vit. D (400IU/day), Calcium (1000mg/day), Magnesium (500 mg/day), Vit. B6 (50mg/day) (both Mg and VitB6 are critically needed for enzymes which create bone), Beta Carotene (15mg/day), Zinc (20-30mg/day).

Get chiropractic care as needed.

Perform weight-bearing exercise regularly!

Avoid:

Excessive meat/protein consumption (pulls calcium from bone), sodas (leaches phosphorus from bone), alcohol (increases risk dramatically), cigarettes, diuretics (some leach calcium, others cause nocturnal urination), flouride (causes pathological changes in bone)

Best Bone Density tests are DPA or DEXA. QCT involves excessive x-ray exposure.

BREAST CANCER: Breast cancer is the most diagnosed cancer in women in the U.S. (175,000/yr), with 44,000 deaths per year.

It is estimated that it takes 8-10 years for a single cancer cell to become a palpable lump. Mammograms may shorten diagnosis time by a year or two, but are not reliable.

Risk Factors:

- *Diet high in “bad fats”
- *Exposure to xenoestrogens (from animal fat, milk fat, pesticides, pollution, etc.)
- *Diet lacking in plant-based nutrients, antioxidants, fiber, and phytoestrogens
- *Lack of exercise and daily energy expenditure
- *Stress—leading to adrenal exhaustion and hormonal imbalance
- *Being overweight (leads to estrogen dominance, which leads to further weight gain)

PMS: PMS is a very real, physical problem. Symptoms include bloating, weight gain, headaches, back pain, irritability, depression, fatigue, breast swelling and tenderness, loss of libido. Do you see that this is almost the same list as for estrogen dominance?

In all likelihood most of these symptoms are either directly or indirectly related to progesterone deficiency. They are almost certainly aggravated by stress, which leads to adrenal exhaustion and hormonal imbalance (including unstable blood sugar problems and progesterone deficiency).

Risk factors:

- *Progesterone deficiency
- *Stress with resultant adrenal exhaustion (leads to hormonal chaos)
- *Diet low in fiber (fiber binds estrogen, and prevents it from being “recycled”)
- *Impaired thyroid function (often due to estrogen dominance)
- *Stopping birth-control pills (ovaries are “asleep”)

Some natural treatment options include: supplementing with natural progesterone, tryptophan, herbs, vitamins and minerals, homeopathy, acupuncture, exercise, meditation, massage, and chiropractic care.

FIBROCYSTIC BREASTS

Almost always due to estrogen dominance. Use natural progesterone cream (20-30 mg), Vit. E (600 IU), Magnesium (300 mg), and B6 (50 mg)

HYSTERECTOMY: 600,000 operations are performed each year. Almost all are unnecessary unless there is cancer present. If you have already had one, consider finding a doctor who will help you successfully wean off of HRT, and begin using natural estrogen and progesterone.

MAKING POSITIVE CHANGES

Achieving health and hormonal balance requires lifestyle changes. For some of us, the required changes are not too intimidating. But for many, they may seem very unfamiliar, drastic, uncomfortable, and overwhelming.

Have you noticed that people hate to change...that they fear change? How many people stay in abusive relationships or unfulfilling jobs because they fear change? We fear the unknown. We hate getting out of our comfort zones! To get to the point where we are actually ready and able to change, our desire and commitment to achieve the desired result must outweigh our natural aversion to change and discomfort.

Here are a couple of quotes that I'd like to share with you:

“If you do what you've always done, you'll get what you've always gotten”
“It is insanity to continue to do the same thing and hope for a different result”
“As a person thinks and believes in their heart, so shall it be”

With these things in mind, here is a list of changes you can make that will absolutely have a positive influence on your health and hormonal balance:

- *Gradually eliminate unhealthy food from your diet.
- *If you smoke, quit.
- *Minimize alcohol intake.
- *Avoid trans-fatty acids (especially cooking oils, margarine, pastries, candies). They lead to cell wall dysfunction, immune dysfunction, hardening of the arteries, and cancer. Instead use first cold-pressed extra virgin olive oil as much as possible. If a “lighter” oil is necessary, use unrefined coconut oil or canola oil.
- *Fish and fish-oil capsules are an excellent source of “good fats”
- *Eat whole, unprocessed foods as much as possible.
- *Minimize milk consumption (xenoestrogens in milkfat, + allergies to milk proteins).
- *Increase the fiber in your diet.
- *Take vitamins and minerals (Vit C, E, B-complex, and Mg are especially critical).
- *Take probiotics, especially after antibiotic use.
- *Drink more water.
- *Get more sleep.
- *Exercise more.
- *Find ways to de-stress, including removing stress to your nervous system with chiropractic care

RESOURCES

For further information on this subject, I highly recommend
“What Your Doctor May Not Tell You About Menopause”
ISBN# 0-446-67144-4
By John R. Lee, M.D.

For sources for natural progesterone cream, the internet is your best bet. Get 3%
progesterone cream, and make sure it says USP (pharmaceutical grade). Search under
“natural progesterone cream”.

An internet search for “bioidentical hormone replacement” should bring up some
practitioners in your area that are knowledgeable in this area, and provide
individualized natural hormone replacement treatment.