

Hormone showdown: You're in charge

By Rodd Stockwell, MD

A woman faces many phases of hormonal change over the course of her life: puberty, menstruation, PMS, pregnancy, infertility, pre-menopause, and menopause. A woman can experience hormone imbalance at each stage; however, she need not be at the mercy of her hormones. Instead, she can take charge of her condition and work towards well-being and optimal health – without drugs that have dangerous side effects, or suffering the consequences of non-treatment.

Understanding hormone imbalance is an important aspect of women empowering themselves toward well-being. To identify hormone imbalance, its causes, and alternative treatments, it is helpful to ask and answer the following questions.

What are hormones?

Hormones are the messengers of the body, a kind of wireless communication system that carries the messages of emotions and physical well-being or stress. Stress hormones are adrenalin and cortisol. Estrogen, progesterone, and testosterone are the so-called sex hormones. Cholesterol and vitamins A and D are the main ingredients needed to make hormones, also called the *building blocks*. Stress hormones and sex hormones work in balance with each other, and the body works diligently to create *hormone reserves*, a well to draw from when it encounters stress.

What is hormone imbalance?

Hormone imbalance occurs when the body does not have enough of the right building blocks to create both stress hormones and sex hormones. When the body is under stress, it extracts hormones from the hormone reserves. The body tries to make hormones to replace the ones it takes from the reserves, but if stress is overwhelming or a woman is nutritionally deprived, hormone imbalance will exact its toll and symptoms will appear.

What are the symptoms of hormone imbalance?

To make a diagnosis of hormone imbalance, a woman would have five or more of these symptoms:

- water retention and bloating
- weight gain
- hot flashes
- low sex drive
- memory loss or confusion
- night sweats
- dry skin

- hair loss
- anxiety
- depression
- irritability
- breast tenderness
- poor concentration
- pre-menstrual syndrome
- fibroids
- vaginal dryness
- fibrocystic breasts
- endometriosis
- breast and uterine cancer

When these symptoms exist, what are the next steps toward treatment?

If a woman identifies with these symptoms, it is essential to seek out treatment. The most healthful treatments are improvements in nutrition and emotional stability, which lead the body toward hormonal restoration and physical and mental well-being.

How does good nutrition help to balance hormones?

For a woman's body to manufacture the right balance of hormones she must eat healthy foods that supply her with the necessary building blocks. Nutrition knowledge is a necessary step in the healing process and essential for the long-term maintenance of well being. A woman must learn about the foods that will help restore hormonal balance and which ones will not. For example:

- **Healthy fats are an essential building block required to make all hormones.** Diets low in fat are harmful to hormone production. Fats from natural sources are best and can help the body regain hormonal balance. Excellent sources of fat, rich in natural minerals and vitamins, include whole milk, beef or chicken broth, and butter.
- **Processed foods, nontraditional soy foods, or those containing trans fats or hydrogenated oils block hormone production.** Savvy marketers have successfully convinced people to eat a diet that lacks nutrients necessary to maintain hormonal balance. Most foods introduced in the last few decades fall into this category. While it is worthwhile to read nutrition labels, some will not list trans fats.
- **Eggs are an excellent source of cholesterol for hormone production.** Our healthy ancestors consumed eggs in great quantities. Reintroducing eggs into a woman's diet is occasionally all that is necessary to restore hormone balance.
- **Fish oils are an excellent source of vitamins A and D and essential for hormone production.** Look for the brands that are mercury and heavy metal free.
- **A woman will receive the highest levels of essential vitamins, minerals, and fats from natural and organic foods.**

- **Establish healthy eating habits with young girls.** This helps to set a woman on the right road to healthy hormonal balance. If girls eat poorly at a young age, they may not build up sufficient hormone reserves to handle physiological or emotional stress.

What is an example of a treatment to help with emotional stability?

Homeopathy is an excellent treatment that provides relief and helps the body to heal using its own resources. Homeopathy is the safe and natural administration of minute doses of medicines derived from plants, animals, minerals, or chemicals that stimulate the body's own defenses. Once a woman is able to gain control over her emotional state, she feels empowered to take on long-term changes such as addressing her relationship to food and improving her nutrition.

What is the holistic approach to hormonal restoration and continued balance?

The holistic approach to helping a woman attain a state of hormonal balance is to look at the whole person: emotions, nutrition, relationships, lifestyle, work habits, and temperament. This approach offers a higher likelihood of optimal results and effective treatment. Often women may need a stepping stone treatment such as hormone replacement therapy or bioidentical hormone therapy to restore hormones to their proper balance. Once achieved, the woman can move toward natural methods to restore balance with homeopathy and nutritional changes.

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