

How Imbalanced Hormones Affect a Woman's Health and Weight . . .

And what she can do about it!



Introduction

Women are defined by their hormones. At puberty women begin hearing words like adolescent, pre-menstrual, and menstrual cycle. Next, the words PMS enter their vocabulary, followed by child-bearing years. Later it is words like perio-menopausal, menopausal and hot flashes. All of these words indirectly refer to a woman's hormones. Of course, there are many jokes and comments made about women's emotional state during all phases of her life. Yet, with all the "awareness" and discussion about the various hormonal issues women have throughout their lives, most women know little or nothing about how hormones actually work, how they change over their lives and, as it relates to Healthy Inspirations, how hormones can affect a woman's weight and weight loss efforts.

This manual is designed to introduce you to the fundamental concepts regarding hormones and how they affect a woman's weight and health. Further, it will educate you as to the phyto-hormonal (plant material based) creams being offered at selected Healthy Inspirations Centers as a solution to hormonal challenges. Finally, it will answer any questions you or the clients may have regarding these creams.

Hormones: An Overview

Webster's dictionary defines a "hormone" as "a product of a living cell that circulates in body fluids and produces a specific effect on the activity of cells remote from its point of origin." In simpler terms, hormones are chemical messengers that tell cells what to do. Of course, men and woman have different hormones that support their gender functions, the most commonly known as estrogen for women and testosterone for men. But there are other hormones that are important to the weight loss equation—especially in women. These include progesterone and cortisol. Let's take a look at how all these hormones affect a woman's weight.

Estrogen. It is a hormone that causes the body to hold onto fat and retain fluid. Estrogen is normally dominant during the first half of a woman's menstrual cycle, which is why bloating and fluid retention are common. Although one always hears the term estrogen as a single hormone, there are actually 3 estrogens; estriol, estrace and estrodial. Each of these hormones plays a slightly different role in a woman's body (a specific hormone test would break down someone's individual level of all three).

Progesterone. It is a hormone that is a fat burner and natural diuretic. During the second half of a woman's menstrual cycle progesterone rises to complete the cycle. Progesterone is the opposing hormone to estrogen.

Cortisol. It is a hormone that is produced when under chronic stress and is needed by the body to buffer it from stress. Cortisol usage by the body can ultimately affect

progesterone levels (more on this later). Also elevated cortisol or stress hormones will tend to block thyroid hormones from doing an efficient job.

Since estrogen and progesterone are opposing hormones, their balance is a delicate one. When a woman's progesterone levels drop (for a variety of reasons, which will be discussed throughout this booklet), her hormones get out of balance. This imbalance can result in any number of symptoms, which could include:

- PMS
- Mood swings
- Bloating
- Weight Gain
- Depression/Anxiety
- Food cravings
- Low energy
- Insomnia
- Headaches
- Endometriosis
- Vaginal Dryness
- Thyroid issues
- Lack of libido
- Inability to calm down
- Mid section weight gain
- Digestive problems
- Constipation
- Diarrhea
- Fluid retention
- Fibromyalgia
- Chronic fatigue
- Joint pain
- Hair loss
- Poor mood
- Lack of concentration

How do a woman's hormones become imbalanced?

Although it is a simplification, there are two primary ways a woman's hormones become imbalanced:

1. During the aging process, a woman's natural hormone reserves are declining and eventually are depleted. Women refer to this as menopause (and pre-menopause). This can begin happening in one woman at the age of 40 and another at 60 depending upon heredity and the lifestyle she has led. Therefore, it is not just the time clock that is affecting this depletion but also the abuse of one's body over time. During this process a woman's progesterone (fat burning and natural diuretic) levels are dropping. This causes "estrogen dominance." In overweight women, more severe symptoms can arise from "estrogen dominance."
2. During times of chronic stress the body runs out of the raw materials needed to produce cortisol. As a result a woman's body "steals" progesterone to convert it into the needed cortisol. The result is a decreased level of progesterone and ultimately "estrogen dominance."

How a hormonal imbalance affects a woman's weight

As it relates to her weight, whether it be due to hormonal swings during a menstrual cycle, menopause or stress, when a woman becomes "estrogen dominant" it will cause a woman to *put on* and *hold onto* more fat and retain fluids (because she does not have a balanced amount of progesterone to act as a normal diuretic and fat burner). This may be a short-term thing the week before her period (bloating, swollen or tender breasts), or it could be a long-term problem due to menopause or chronic stress situations (weight gain, mid-section fat deposits).

Although many women experience estrogen dominance during their menstrual cycle, menopause or when under chronic stress, being overweight in and of itself usually means that a woman is estrogen dominant. This is because body fat results in a greater level of estrogen in a woman's body, exacerbating the weight problem. Therefore, a woman who has been fighting weight problems her entire life will experience great benefits by balancing her hormones.

How being estrogen dominant affects other areas of a woman's life

In addition to adversely affecting weight, there are other areas of a woman's life that are affected with estrogen dominance.

Mood

Hormonal imbalances will directly affect mood. There is evidence out there that shows that excess stress (producing excess cortisol) will tend to wear away serotonin and melatonin levels causing neuro-chemical shifts leading to increased risks for anxiety and depression. For individuals who have been diagnosed with an emotional condition that requires psychotropic drugs (mood enhancing, like Prozac), it is common that they also are imbalanced hormonally, which is most likely exacerbating the problem.

Hot flashes

As was mentioned, most women today go through life with slightly lowered progesterone levels simply because of chronic stress. Therefore, by menopause a woman usually has bottomed out in the raw ingredients to make progesterone. What is responsible for hot flashes, however, isn't the depletion of progesterone but rather the bottoming out of her estrogen levels as well.

Cholesterol

During menopause it is a common problem among women to have their cholesterol levels rise even when they are eating correctly and exercising. This is because, in addition to lowering progesterone levels, long-term stress tends to wear on the body's reserves of other "mother hormones", such as DHEA and pregnedalone, which are made from cholesterol. In reaction to this decrease the body tends to produce (by itself or independently of what you eat) more cholesterol to make up for these

hormone depletions. This number will usually fall when she gets her hormones back to the right levels.

Blood Pressure

Long-term stress and elevated cortisol levels also affects the body's electrolytes (potassium, chloride and magnesium), which will tend to affect the heart and blood pressure adversely.

Sleep

The hormone melatonin builds throughout the day helping you to sleep as your natural levels of cortisol (your stress hormone) fall. If your cortisone levels remain high from excess stimulation of the adrenal gland throughout the day, your melatonin levels might not hit their peak making it harder to sleep at night.

In addition, hot flashes will often wake a woman at night, interrupting her sleep patterns. Lack of or interrupted sleep makes a person irritable and negatively affects energy levels, often resulting in sugar food cravings for energy. Poor eating can lead to blood sugar imbalances as well as weight gain. This can be a vicious cycle.

Sex Drive

Although it is thought of as a male hormone, women also need testosterone for part of her sex drive as well as her drive to complete tasks. Lowered testosterone levels in both men and women result in a lower sex drive. Balanced hormones will improve a woman's sex drive but in the overall balancing of hormones, testosterone holds the lowest priority as far as rank goes in a woman's body, compared to other female sex or reproductive hormones.

Digestion/Bowel Functions

As has been discussed previously, when the body is under a lot of stress and its' cortisol levels rise, the body goes into a natural "fight or flight" response. This causes all of the blood to go to the muscles for us to run or take action. (Which was great when we were running from a lion or bear back hundreds of years ago, but isn't necessary when we are simply sitting in traffic or trying to meet a deadline at work). As more blood is directed towards the muscles, the result is that other areas of the body get less blood flow; the digestive system is one of those areas. Specifically, less blood flow to the area results in a slowing of the digestive system in breaking down food and a slowing of the peristaltic action (milking action) of the stomach, which increases the time it takes for food to move through the intestinal system towards elimination. This can cause constipation as waste slows down and dries in the system, making it harder to eliminate. In severe cases it can cause such irritation that an individual can get irritable bowel syndrome or diverticulitis. Cortisol build up from stress exacerbates this cycle, which is why daily exercise is so important so as to help burn up the excess stress hormones that the body has produced.

Endometriosis/Cysts/Cancers

Estrogen dominance has also been shown to contribute greatly to endometriosis and ovarian cysts. In addition, most female related cancers are exacerbated by an estrogen dominant situation and some research suggests that cancers can spread easier through the body when a woman is in a hormonally imbalanced state.

How does a woman balance her hormones?

As has been noted, there are a number of factors that can influence the degree to which a woman's hormones are imbalanced. It makes sense, then, that there are a number of things that a woman can do to help balance her hormones, many of which involve living a healthy lifestyle. Let's review these things.

A Balanced Diet

Specifically, a diet that keeps blood sugar steady will keep insulin in balance. When insulin is in balance it helps to keep one's cortisol levels down. This is why many people who begin to eat healthy feel calmer. Of course, the Healthy Inspirations meal Plan is designed to maintain blood sugar throughout the day.

Regular Exercise

As was discussed earlier, increased body fat is responsible for increased estrogen levels and a greater possibility of estrogen dominance. Regular exercise helps to control this by burning body fat and building lean muscle mass. In addition, once an individual exercises, their body releases a hormone called serotonin, which is a "feel good" hormone. Although this hormone is not directly related to weight gain, it certainly has a substantial indirect influence because when a woman doesn't feel good she tends to eat, which leads to weight gain. Weight gain can lead to depression and stress, which exacerbate the problem.

Decrease Stress

In addition to good nutrition, reducing one's stress level will help to keep hormones in balance because it will help to eliminate cortisol build up in the body at the wrong time. The Healthy Inspirations relaxation treatments are one way for clients to reduce their stress level.

Proper Supplementation

Proper nutrition, exercise and management of stress are all foundational to good health and can aid in keeping a woman's hormones balanced. The bigger challenge, however, is when a woman's hormones are already imbalanced; often diet, exercise and stress management are not enough. Some women require more assistance and this is where hormone therapies come into play.

Hormonal Therapies; an overview

When it comes to available therapies there are two different categories of hormone supplementation: synthetic and non-synthetic (meaning natural). Within those categories there are various types of treatments available. Let's discuss them very generally.

HRT/ERT

Perhaps the most recognized synthetic hormonal treatment available is HRT/ERT (hormone replacement therapy or estrogen replacement therapy). To create these products, chemists take natural hormones and convert them into synthetic products that can be patented and dispensed by doctors.

Several years ago, a significant report was released that linked HRT/ERT to an increased risk of heart disease. In addition, reports have indicated that synthetic hormones may exacerbate possible cancers in a woman's body, as one of its roles in cell proliferation. As a result, many doctors pulled their patients from using HRT/ERT leaving most women confused and with limited choices as to treatment of their imbalances.

A study done by the World Health Organization showed that women taking synthetic HRT such as Premarin and Prempro had more heart attacks, strokes and blood clots than women taking a placebo. There was no increase in clotting factors or any negative side effects of using natural progesterone creams in the 2004 University of Texas Healy Center at Tyler study.

Hormone Balance by Carolyn Dean, M.D., N.D., 2005

Micronized progesterone

Another form of synthetic treatment is micronized (slow released) progesterone. This product is most commonly found in pill form and is taken in through the lymphatic system and the tiny capillaries of the small intestine. This product can also be made in a sub lingual (under the tongue) form so it bypasses the liver. These are also prescribed by a doctor and are not very popular.

What is interesting about synthetic progesterone is that it actually has the exact opposite affect of natural progesterone when it comes to a woman's weight. Remember, natural progesterone acts as a mild fat burner and diuretic but studies have shown that synthetic progesterone causes fluid retention and slows down fat metabolism. Natural progesterone, though, can't be patented so drug companies had to slightly change the molecular structure in order to patent it for sale.

Bio-identical hormones

Biologically identical hormone treatment is probably the most popular non-synthetic hormone therapy available. It is called bio-identical because the product is produced

from plant sources (soy and yam) that are similar to the hormones found in our bodies. It is natural but it has been converted in a lab setting.

A woman's cell receptors respond to these plant sources the same way as natural hormones. These plant sources are compounded at a pharmacy at a doctor's request and estrogen and progesterone are typically used. As a result, the product must be prescribed by a doctor.

Individuals who use these creams are instructed apply the product to the fatty areas of the body and rotate where they are applied. The reason for this is that because the creams are not making their way directly into the blood stream they can build up in the fatty layers. This can cause an overdose in hormones leaving a woman feeling worse than prior to using the product.

Women who have never taken HRT can still develop cancers because their body still has too much (estrogen) plus the added xenoestrogens from the environment. It is not fully clear whether taking extra natural (bio-identical) estrogen is needed or safe. Only natural progesterone has been proven safe at this point.

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USP Progesterone Creams

These products are low in strength and contain mineral oil, which hinders their absorption. Exposure to oxygen over time de-natures this product making it even less effective.

Wild Yam Creams

Wild yam is an excellent product for use in a hormonal product because Mexican Wild Yams are one of the best sources of phyto-estrogens. When used alone, though, the product is not effective because yam cannot be made into progesterone by the body, only in a lab setting.

The Healthy Inspirations Solution

The products being offered by Healthy Inspirations Centers are all natural creams that utilize many phyto (plant) sources that act as hormonal precursors. This means that the body will use the raw materials in the cream product to make its' own hormones and re-balance itself. There are two different products being offered; Adrenal Cream and Female Support Cream. The products come in a pump form that squirts out a single dosage, which is then rubbed into thinned skinned tissue on the body 1-2 times a day as is necessary according to one's symptom level.

Adrenal cream

As was previously discussed, chronic stress causes the body to use up all of its' raw ingredients to make cortisol. Because cortisol is needed to deal with stress, the body "steals" progesterone in order to make more cortisol. The result is estrogen dominance. The Adrenal Cream will help calm the adrenal glands while also building the adrenal glands to prevent progesterone loss.

Ingredients: Water, Maca Extract, Glycerine, Octyl Salicylate, Glycerol Monolaurate, Glycerol Stearate / PEG 100, Cetearyl Alcohol / Cocoa Glucoside, / Caprylic Triglyceride, Safflower Oil, Purified Lecithin, 7 -Keto DHEA, Di-Indolylmethane, Thioctic Acid, Vitamin E, Glutamine, Pregnenolone, Cellulose gum, PEG 30, Glyceryl Cocoate, Phenoxyethanol, Methisothiazolinone.

Female Support Cream

This cream is designed to bring a woman's hormones back into balance, prevent "estrogen dominance" and act as a mild fat burner and diuretic. Users will notice a reduction in many PMS symptoms as well as a reduction in hot flashes and other menopausal symptoms.

Ingredients: Progesterone, 7-oxo DHEA

Other Ingredients: Purified Water, Wild Yam Extract, Glycerine, Octyl Salicylate, Glycerol Monolaurate, Glycerol Stearate/PEG 100, Cetearyl Alcohol/Cocoa Glucoside, Caprylic/Capric Triglyceride, Canola Oil, Purified Lecithin, DiIndolylmethane, Cellulose Gum, Phenoxyethanol, Polysorbate, Paraben Esters.

How are these creams different than others?

Because there are other hormonal creams on the market, one may ask, "How are these creams different?" There are several very important and significant differences.

1. These creams supply the body with all natural raw materials so that the user's body can create its' own needed hormones that will bring it back into balance.
2. Only the purest and highest quality ingredients are used in the creams.
3. Because there is still no real evidence about the safeness of natural estrogens, there are no estrogens in these creams. Because natural progesterone has been proven to be safe long-term, it is the main ingredient in the Female Support Cream.
4. The ingredients in these creams are water soluble and are cleared by the body in 18-24 hours when any excess cannot be used for the day. Cheaper creams do not use a base that is truly trans-dermal and the ingredients can tend to build up in the system over time (like fat soluble vitamins like A, D, and E can tend to do if you take too much of them) and this can cause toxicity and further imbalances. Because of this it is unnecessary to have a woman's hormone levels tested prior to

using the creams. If someone wants to have their hormone levels tested that is fine, it just isn't "necessary."

5. These creams use a liposome delivery system, which means they work in a transdermal way similar to the patch for smoking cessation. Therefore when applied, the creams enter the blood stream and are time released. Because they go right into the blood stream and bypass the liver, they work better with less stress on the liver.

Frequently Asked Questions

How long will I be using the creams?

We are trying to normalize specific aspects of hormonal balance. Many factors (diet, exercise and stress management) will influence the period of time necessary for the program to accomplish this goal. Most people observe a change and a decrease in their symptoms within a few weeks and then the body can adjust and start to balance its own production of hormones. The average time for normalization is 6 months. After this you can cut dosage in half and see if you still have relief of all your symptoms, if so continue like this for a few more months. Then your dosage may be adjusted according to symptoms. Remember you can't overdo it as the body will only use what it needs and the rest of the creams will be cleared (like vitamin B or C-no toxic affects) from the body. Overuse will only waste the creams.

Should I have my hormone levels tested before starting the creams?

If you have "normal" estrogen dominance symptoms (PMS, irritability, anxiety, menopausal symptoms, etc.) you do not "need" to have your hormones tested before using the creams. Remember, since the creams are natural and are simply giving the body the raw materials it needs to balance out its' own hormones, anything your body doesn't use will be excreted within 24 hours. However, if you have a more complex problem (infertility, ovarian cysts, pituitary tumors or were on synthetic HRT), you may want to see your health care provider and ask for a test to see exact levels before using the creams. Then, if you would like you can retest in several months to see if there has been any improvement. Keep in mind that if your health care provider doesn't request it, testing can be expensive. Most doctors still use blood tests but many are now learning the benefits and quality of saliva testing.

Who should not use the creams?

Although the creams are all natural, it is recommended that women not use the product if they are pregnant or are breast feeding while it is the baby's sole source of nutrition. In the 8 years of working with the products, there have been no known drug interferences. Certainly, if you have a major female related illness, it is best to talk to your health care provider before using any product—natural or synthetic. If you have any doubt about whether or not you should use the creams, consult a physician before purchasing them.

If I have had a partial or full hysterectomy, do I still need the creams?

Whether you have your ovaries/uterus or not, you still need to balance your hormones. In fact, even though a woman's reproductive organs are no longer producing estrogen, other parts of her body "step up to the plate" to produce the needed estrogen. By providing the body with the raw materials necessary, the hormones will get into balance. As it relates to the protocol, a woman with a partial or full hysterectomy is treated the same as if she had gone through menopause.

If I use the creams, will I get my period again?

Many women today are reporting that their menstrual cycle is stopping or being extremely sporadic as early as their mid 40's but that they still go through a number of days each month where they don't feel well. In many cases what is happening here is that the woman is ovulating but because of imbalanced hormones she is not having her menstrual cycle. This is typically because her hormones are so out of balance that the body is literally "not letting" her reproduce. This is nature's way of only allowing healthy species to reproduce. If a woman is still ovulating and her hormones get back into balance, she will begin to menstruate again. Although some women dread the thought of this after not having to "deal" with her period for some time, one medical statement usually shifts their perspective; when a woman is menstruating, her body is reproducing cells at a level that will allow her to sustain a life; when a woman's body naturally goes through menopause, it signals the cells that she is entering the last cycle of life and her body begins the dying process at the cellular level. Although certainly an inconvenience, if a woman's hormones are in balance, her menstrual cycle should not be some dreadful thing because she no longer has huge emotional swings or physical symptoms.

Can I use the creams if I am on birth control pills?

There is no higher risk of getting pregnant on the hormone creams while on the pill as there is with just using the pill alone, which is a 1-2% chance of pregnancy.

Can I use the creams if I am on HRT now?

Although there have been many studies released showing the dangers of HRT, some women decide to stay on it because the severity of their symptoms are such that it warrants the risk. In addition, some doctors still prescribe it for a variety of patient reasons. If you wish to discontinue current HRT therapy, it is advised that you speak with your doctor so that a weaning off process can begin. Since the product is providing your body with the raw materials to make the necessary hormones, you may begin using the creams immediately to help manage the symptoms as you come off the HRT. Of course, follow any directions your primary care physician may give you during this process.

If I am on thyroid medication, will the creams help me?

Although there is no direct interaction between your thyroid and reproductive hormones, by balancing your stress and reproductive hormones with the creams your thyroid hormones are able to function better. Many women report needing less thyroid medication after utilizing the creams for a period of time. Discussing regular testing with your primary care physician is a good idea.

Can I use the creams if I am on any anxiety or depression medication?

Many times when people suffer from anxiety and depression there is an underlying hormonal imbalance that is affecting their overall mood. The most common example of this is post-partum depression. Using the creams in conjunction with your medications is safe and will help balance your body. Many women report that their depression and anxiety decreases dramatically.

Taking the Next Step

If you (or someone who lives with you) believe your hormones are out of balance, the next step is to visit or call your local Healthy Inspirations Center that is offering these creams. Take a quick, two-minute questionnaire to determine if your hormones are imbalanced and, if so, how out of balance are they. The categories are very mild, mild or severe. Once the level of imbalance is determined, you can purchase the cream or creams that suit your symptoms. Next, you will be given a specific protocol for usage, along with all the information materials that detail the simple application process and timing. Finally you will begin to use the produce and begin enjoying the joys of living with balanced hormones.