

Natural Hormone Replacement Therapy



A time of Transitioning.....

Many changes occur in a woman's body beginning with perimenopause.

Perimenopause can begin as early as the mid thirties and last until menopause which is 1 complete year with no menstrual cycle.

The menstrual cycle affects all aspects of a woman's physical, mental and emotional well-being. The perimenopausal period can create instability in a woman's body and can impact her on a personal and professional basis.

During perimenopause, the menstrual cycle is erratic because ovulation, (egg release) is erratic. Ovulation is the timekeeper and helps to regulate the menstrual cycle. Women are more likely to have cycles in which they do not ovulate. This disrupts the menstrual cycle and subsequently disrupts women physically and emotionally. The symptoms of abnormal menstrual cycles can be very frustrating. Between the ages of 18-35 the menstrual cycle is usually very predictable and manageable. A woman in her peak reproductive years ovulates regularly and without interruption.

As a woman ages so do her ovaries. The body does not produce new eggs after birth. These aged eggs have more difficulty maturing to a developmental stage where they can ovulate properly. This causes a wide range of effects. Pregnancy is more difficult, birth defects are more frequent, menstrual cycles are irregular, fibroids appear and grow, risk of breast cancer increases, bone loss begins, weight increases and it becomes increasingly difficult to cope with the normal demands of life.

Estrogen and Progesterone

A woman's life is greatly influenced by the fluctuations of two hormones, estrogen and progesterone. When these hormones are in their normal balance life is good.. When they are out of balance, problems follow. In order to understand the consequences of estrogen and progesterone imbalance, we must first discuss the normal functions of estrogen and progesterone.

Estrogen is a hormone. Hormones carry messages to different organs. These messages are different for each organ. The estrogen message to the uterus is to grow. The uterine lining is instructed to grow and replace the lining that was shed during the previous menses. Estrogen's message to the breast is grow. Breast cells (normal and abnormal) increase in number and rate of multiplication under the influence of estrogen.

Bone reabsorption is decreased by estrogen. Bone is constantly being broken down and replaced. Estrogen is needed to maintain a proper rate of bone breakdown.

The vagina and female bladder's proper function are maintained under the influence of estrogen. Estrogen keeps the vagina moist and prevents the bladder from leaking urine.

In adolescence estrogen is responsible for developing female sex characteristics. Estrogen causes breast to grow and the development of female sexual organs.

Estrogen decreases the function of thyroid hormone which decreases metabolism which can lead to weight gain.

Estrogen also affects the brain. Estrogen's effect on the brain is very tenuous. If estrogen is too high or low, depression, anxiety, insomnia, decreased sex drive and decreased concentration can result.

Progesterone

Progesterone is a hormone produced by the ovary. It also carries messages to other organs. The messages are directed to the same organs as estrogen but the messages are different. Progesterone instructs the uterine lining to stop growing and start developing and maturing to prepare for a possible pregnancy.

Progesterone is produced for fourteen days after ovulation. If there is no pregnancy, progesterone decreases, which signals the beginning of menses. Progesterone decreases breast cell growth. Progesterone is involved in the maturation of breast cells and *decreases* the rate of multiplication. This is important in the prevention of breast cancer. While estrogen decreases the rate of bone breakdown, progesterone stimulates cells responsible for making new bone to replace old bone. Progesterone increases the activity of thyroid hormone. Thyroid hormone increases metabolism, and utilizes the fat stored under estrogen influence for energy. Progesterone stimulates normal sex drive, and it is a natural diuretic. It decreases water retention and swelling prior to menses. Progesterone decreases uterine muscle contractions which cause menstrual cramps by promoting uterine muscle relaxation. Progesterone is a natural antidepressant and prevents anxiety.

Some women have symptoms during this time that can be very difficult. Some of these symptoms include:

- **Changes in your menstrual cycle – missed periods**
- **Hot flashes** (power surges -- sudden rush of heat from your chest to your head)
- Palpitations, skipped heartbeats
- Internal shaking / tremor-like feelings
- Night sweats
- **Vaginal dryness**
- **Dry skin and skin changes**
- Itching
- Formication (feeling like ants are crawling on your body)
- **Insomnia and other sleep disturbances**
- **Mood swings**
- Allergies, sinus problems
- Wheezing, respiratory problems, coughing
- **Depression**
- Anxiety
- **Panic attacks**
- Crying for no apparent reason
- General irritability and/or anger
- **Hair thinning or loss**
- Pain during sex
- More urinary infections
- **Urinary incontinence**
- **Decreased or non-existent libido**
- Increase in body fat, especially around your waist
- Forgetfulness, brain fog, problems with concentration and memory



Though we think of declining estrogen as the hallmark of menopause, it's actually common for women to experience surges of abnormally high estrogen levels during the menopausal and premenopausal periods, as well as earlier in life. Dr. John R. Lee has done extensive research into this phenomenon. It is his belief and Ward Drugs that an excess of estrogen, coupled with a deficiency of progesterone (the counter hormone to estrogen), is the common denominator for a lot of female troubles. Dr. Lee has pioneered the use of natural progesterone as an aid to dealing with this syndrome.

Estrogen dominance can start early on in a women's menstrual cycle. Young women who suffer from this enter menarche with tremendously difficult periods, and doctors sometimes give these teenage girls birth control pills to help regulate the frequency and severity of their periods.

Some women will develop the estrogen dominance syndrome much later in life, sometimes as a result of diet, liver impairment, or environmental factors or also as a result of anovulatory cycles before menopause — that is, menstrual cycles in which no ovulation has occurred. [Ovulation is necessary in order to produce the corpus luteum, (which means "yellow body") that is found on the surface of the ovary after ovulation. Surrounding the ripening egg, the corpus luteum remains after ovulation to produce progesterone for the last half of the menstrual cycle. Without ovulation, less progesterone is produced, which can cause estrogen imbalance in some women.

Diseases or problems that are thought to be related to or affected by excess estrogen and deficient progesterone in women are:

- Weight gain
- Fibrocystic breast disease
- Certain types of PMS
- Migraines
- Menstrual disturbances—irregular and heavy bleeding.
- Endometriosis, the uterine tissue disorder, which is helped by the use of estrogen blockers.
- Fibroids, a sign of excess proliferative capacity of the uterus, which may not be balanced with sufficient progesterone.
- Ovarian cysts

*For one woman,
menopause hardly messed with her hair.
For another,
it was like the sky falling.
She gave a vivid description
of having to change her sweaty sheets
two or three times a night."*



Causes of Estrogen Dominance Syndrome

Besides the natural hormonal fluctuations of menopause, certain lifestyle choices and conditions can also contribute to estrogen dominance syndrome, especially a low-fiber diet, overloading the liver with internal toxins, and absorbing toxins from the environment.

Low-Fiber Diet

A low-fiber diet causes estrogen levels to be higher, while a diet high in fiber results in decreased estrogen levels in the bloodstream. Why? Excess estrogen is excreted in the bowel. When stool remains in the bowel for a longer time, the estrogen is reabsorbed. Studies have shown that women on a vegetarian/high-fiber diet have lower levels of circulating estrogen. Lower levels of estrogen mean less estrogen stimulation of breast tissue, for example, which reduces the risk of breast cancer.

Overloading the Liver

The liver is a filter of sorts. It detoxifies our body, protecting us from the harmful effects of chemicals, elements in food, environmental toxins, and even natural products of our metabolism, including excess estrogen. Anything that impairs liver function or ties up the detoxifying function will result in excess estrogen levels, whether it has a physical basis, as in liver disease, or an external cause, as with exposure to environmental toxins, drugs, or dietary substances.

Estrogen is produced not only internally but also produced in reaction to chemicals and other substances in our food. When it is not broken down adequately, higher levels of estrogen build up. This is true for both men and women, although the effects are more easily recognized in men. Alcoholic men with impaired liver function develop a condition called gynecomastia, with estrogenic characteristics including enlarged breasts, loss of male pubic hair, and eunuch-like features.

In like manner, the estrogen dominance syndrome can be evoked in women by too much alcohol, drugs, or environmental toxins, all of which limit the liver's capacity to cleanse the blood of estrogen. It has been found that circulating estrogen levels increase significantly in women who drink. In one study, blood and urine estrogen levels increased up to 31.9 percent in women who drank just two drinks a day. Consequently, breast cancer risks are higher for women drinkers. Not surprisingly, osteoporosis rates are lower.

Environment

We live in an estrogenic or feminizing environment. Certain chemicals in the environment and our foods, one of which is DDT, cause estrogenic effects. Although banned in 1972, DDT, like its breakdown product DDE, is an estrogen-like substance and is still present in the environment. Chlorine and hormone residues in meats and dairy products can also have estrogenic effects. In men, the estrogenic environment may result in declining quality of sperm or fertility rates. In women, it may lead to an epidemic of female diseases, all traceable to excess estrogen/deficient progesterone.

What are Natural Hormones?

Natural hormones are manufactured to have the same molecular structure as the hormones made by your own body. By contrast, synthetic hormones are intentionally different. Drug companies can't patent a natural structure, so they invent synthetic hormones that are patentable (Premarin, Prempro and Provera being the most widely used examples).

Though natural hormones have been around for years, most practitioners are unfamiliar with them. There are several branded versions now available for use in the kind of hormone replacement therapy ("HRT") typical of synthetic hormones. This is generally a one-size-fits-all dosage regime.



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