

Progesterone - Are You Thinking of Using It?

Most women know that progesterone is a sex hormone that is produced in the menstrual cycle, and is good for them. It seems that it has been the rage for women to purchase progesterone creams because of the benefits that have been touted about it. However, I find that many women are unaware of the role of progesterone in the menstrual cycle, the effects it has on the body in beneficial way, and if overdosed, the ill side effects.

As it turns out, progesterone may not be the panacea to whatever ails you. There may be deeper underlying issues that need to be addressed as well; as any imbalance in the body, including sex hormones, is a signal that there is something disrupting the body's natural tendency towards homeostasis (a steady state in the internal environment of the body maintained by various feedback and control mechanisms, i.e.: temperature, electrolyte balance and respiration).

First, where does progesterone come from? The menstrual cycle can be divided into two phases: the follicular phase which is roughly about the first half of the cycle, and the luteal phase which is the second half. The first day of menses is the early follicular phase, and is also considered the beginning of your cycle. This is where estrogen peaks and ovulation occurs. The second half of the cycle is where progesterone is released from the corpus luteum, the rupture that was formed on the ovary from the egg being released at ovulation. The corpus luteum is stimulated by a hormone from the pituitary gland, and large quantities of progesterone are released. Then, about 2 to 3 days before your period starts, both hormones decrease sharply. This causes the shedding of the endometrium (the inside lining of the uterus)-the menstrual blood.

As you can see, the menstrual cycle is a balancing act between estrogen and progesterone. Estrogen is released in the first half, and progesterone the second half. If there is a low output of progesterone in the second half of the cycle, a woman can experience premenstrual syndrome as well as a myriad of other problems. These may include infertility, early onset menopause, uterine fibroids, ovarian cysts, endometriosis, fibrocystic breast condition, irregular menses, and painful periods. Also, postpartum depression is due, in part, to a relative depletion of progesterone to estrogen.

Progesterone also counteracts the ill effects of estrogen; one of which is the stimulation of cellular proliferation. For example, it was discovered in the early days of hormone replacement therapy that estrogen, if not given with progesterone to a woman who still has a uterus, has a tremendously higher risk to develop cancer. However, progesterone has incredible benefits besides its use in hormone replacement therapy.

In the cycle, progesterone maintains the endometrium so that a fertilized egg can implant. Progesterone is also produced in large amounts by the placenta to assure the survival of the embryo. It has been said that progesterone can even increase the intelligence of the fetus. Progesterone also increases blood supply of oxygen and improves circulation, both of which are important in pregnancy.

Another thing that progesterone does is not only sustain bone density as estrogen is known to do, but it can actually promote the growth of new bone. Estrogen is really promoted for preventing osteoporosis, but in reality, progesterone does more for bone integrity than estrogen does.

Progesterone can also help with regulating weight, is a natural diuretic, decreases a tendency toward blood clots, helps normalize thyroid function, as well as protect against fibrocystic breast condition and endometriosis.

What usually motivates a woman to seek out progesterone creams, or any other form of progesterone, is usually premenstrual syndrome. If a woman administers the cream during the second half of her cycle, it may help with some of the

premenstrual discomfort. After a while however, she may still be experiencing discomfort, the symptoms may return, or some other discomfort will surface, and she may think that she needs more progesterone to fix the problem.

This "if a little is good, then more is better" approach with progesterone cream might not be what your body needs. I have seen labs come back on women I've ran hormone tests on with over 20 times the acceptable range of progesterone in their bodies!

It is very possible that self-administering a progesterone cream can cause problems. This is because with a cream, it is difficult to control the dose. Also, the amount of actual progesterone in any given cream could be anybody's best guess. There have even been instances where a progesterone cream purchased over-the-counter did not contain any measurable progesterone at all! When there is excessive progesterone in the body it may contribute to all kinds of problems such as depression, fatigue, water retention and weight gain, decreased libido, hyperinsulinemia, and it can cause excessive corticosteroids (hormones produced by the cortex of the adrenals) which may affect metabolism and other bodily functions.

Progesterone is a part of an intricate balance of many hormone functions, including adrenal hormones. What that means is that progesterone deficiency may be caused by depletion in another hormone pathway. To treat correctly, the systems that are involved with progesterone output should be examined.

Nutritional insufficiencies could also affect progesterone production; such as a deficiency of Vitamin E or magnesium. Consumption of too many animal fats could also inhibit progesterone, so even diet is a consideration in correctly assessing a hormone balance.

When it comes right down to it, slathering on a progesterone cream may not be the answer to a hormone imbalance, especially in the long run. With even the best intentions, it may compromise your health if the dosage is off. To determine if you need progesterone, what the underlying cause may be, and the correct dosage a proper hormone assessment test, and most likely, a set of tests is necessary that would provide valuable information about your overall health.

If you have a clear picture of what your body needs - and testing helps provide that information - then it is easy to assist the body to return to a natural state of balanced health.