

Women's Health

Are women destined to suffer from hormonal symptoms? Is it normal to have PMS, menstrual cramps, headaches or mood swings? Must perimenopause and menopause be a miserable experience of hot flashes and night sweats? Happily, the answer is a resounding "NO!".

But we've been told that such symptoms are normal. Common perhaps, but definitely not normal. Maintaining balance of the two major hormones, estrogen and progesterone is key to achieving the feeling of well-being we're all looking towards achieving throughout the month. Excess estrogen in relation to progesterone is common in this country. The symptoms associated with excess estrogen are:

- Puffiness and bloating
- Rapid weight gain
- Mood swings
- Anxiety or depression
- Insomnia
- Acne
- Abnormal pap smear (cervical dysplasia)
- Gallbladder problems
- Breast tenderness
- Heavy bleeding
- Migraine headaches
- Foggy thinking
- Weepiness
- Red flush of face

The symptoms associated with deficient progesterone are:

- PMS
- Early miscarriage
- Unexplained weight gain
- Anxiety
- Insomnia
- Painful and/or lumpy breasts
- Cyclical headaches
- Infertility

How does this imbalance occur?

There are several causes:

1. Poor diet

- A diet high in caffeine, alcohol, sugar and refined products will definitely worsen hormonal imbalance.
- Caffeine is a diuretic and can cause you to lose many important nutrients including B vitamins, vitamin C, zinc, potassium and magnesium. Deficiencies of these nutrients can cause increased mood swings, fatigue and food cravings. Caffeine is also linked to breast tenderness and fibrocystic breast disease.
- If you want to switch to decaf ensure that it is a water-processed variety as the chemicals used in the regular processing are toxic.
- Alcohol is a simple sugar that is rapidly absorbed into your system. Women who suffer from low blood sugar symptoms are adversely affected by alcohol. Mood swings and anxiety can be aggravated by alcohol consumption. The liver needs to break down the alcohol after it enters the body. Another job of the liver is the breakdown of estrogen. If the liver is busily working to metabolize the alcohol (or other toxins), estrogen levels can become elevated which will lead to a worsening of PMS symptoms.
- Sugar consumption is definitely too high in this country. When the body is overwhelmed by too much sugar it can no longer process it properly which can result in food cravings, PMS symptoms. Sugar can deplete the body of B vitamins and minerals causing nervous tension, anxiety and irritability.

- Sugar substitutes such as Splenda and Nutrasweet are not recommended because of their potential to cause health problems.
- Do eat chicken, turkey, fish and eggs. Protein is very important for the body's repair processes.
- Red meat that is grass-fed and not fed hormones is also fine in moderation. The hormones fed to the cattle are primarily estrogen so consuming too much of this type of beef will raise your estrogen levels.
- Dairy products can also be laden with hormones so I recommend that the dairy products you buy be of the type which do not give hormones to their cows.
- Good fat in the form of olive oil, coconut oil, fresh nuts, olives, avocados, flax seeds and cold-water fish is critical for the formation of good hormones. Hormones are made from fat but healthy fats are required to make healthy hormones. A diet low in good fat or low in fat overall will increase your risk of hormonal symptoms such as PMS, mood swings, irritability, depression, insomnia and menstrual cramps.
- Fiber binds to estrogen and helps remove it from the body in bowel movements so consuming plenty of vegetables, salad and fruit is important.
- And of course a minimum of 8 glasses of pure water is a must to hydrate your system and flush out toxins.

2. Stressful lifestyle

A lifestyle wherein meals are skipped, sleep is reduced and exercise only occasionally occurs will also create an imbalance of hormones. Research now shows us that 8 hours of sleep is quite critical for anti-aging and general repair of the body. Skimping on sleep will imbalance hormones and accelerate the aging process. Eating every 4 hours is important to maintain a constant blood sugar. Allowing blood sugar to dip results in food cravings and a weakening of the adrenal glands whose job it is to maintain hormonal balance throughout life, including during and after menopause. Exercise of a moderate nature 3 to 4 times per week is needed to prevent osteoporosis, increase muscle mass and promote the production of longevity hormones.

3. Environmental Estrogens

Estrogen-like substances mimic estrogen in our bodies and will create the symptoms associated with estrogen excess are found not only in hormone fed beef and dairy products but also in our tap water, pesticides and gas additives.

4. Long term use of birth control pills

Birth control pills contain estrogen of a synthetic nature. Long term use of these will create hormonal imbalance.

Your adrenal glands produce a hormone called DHEA which in turn makes the sex hormones estrogen and testosterone. Fatigued or stressed adrenal glands will result in hormonal symptoms. And adrenal glands which have been under stress for a period of time will result in a difficult menopause if they're not assisted to improve their function.

Symptoms associated with adrenal stress are as follows:

- Fatigue
- Immune system weakness
- Low blood sugar
- Sugar cravings
- Hormone imbalance
- Joint pain and muscle spasms
- Difficulty waking up
- Difficulty sleeping
- Faint feeling when rapidly standing up
- Inflammatory reactions in the body such as arthritis, bursitis, sinusitis, colitis, etc.
- Asthma
- Allergies

Depending on the severity of your symptoms the following changes are recommended: Lifestyle, diet, nutritional and hormonal.

If your symptoms are not very severe you may not need hormones. But if you do need them make sure that your doctor deals in bio-identical (natural) rather than synthetic hormones. There is a tremendous difference and the side effects of certain synthetic hormones is worth avoiding.

Nutritional supplements which can be helpful are as follows:

- **Vitamin A** – several studies have shown it to be effective in reducing the symptoms of PMS – bloating, fluid retention and acne.
- **B complex** – adequate levels of these nutrients can help calm your mood, provide a stable and constant source of energy and lessen the cravings for sugar and chocolate which are often part of PMS.
- **Vitamin C** – helps to decrease the fatigue symptoms that often accompany high levels of PMS – related anxiety and stress which tax the adrenal glands.
- **Vitamin E** – a study revealed that women suffering with anxiety, irritability, mood swings, depression and food cravings found relief by taking vitamin E daily. Breast tenderness also diminished with vitamin E.
- **Magnesium** – this mineral is needed by the body to turn food into fuel. Studies found that magnesium levels are lower in women with PMS during the time of the month when they are more irritable, tired or depressed. It also helps create the beneficial prostaglandins which can help relieve not only menstrual cramps but also fluid retention and emotional symptoms.
- **Essential fatty acids (EFAs)** – researchers have shown EFAs (found in flax seeds, cold water fish like salmon, mackerel, sardines, halibut and trout, fresh nuts and evening primrose oil) to decrease symptoms such as emotional upset, mood swings and breast tenderness in as many as 60 – 70% of women studied. This is most likely because EFAs are necessary for the production of the beneficial prostaglandins that have relaxant properties.
- **Dong Quai** and **Vitex (Chasteberry)** are both herbs noted for their normalizing effects of estrogen and progesterone.

Hormones such as Pregnenolone, DHEA and melatonin can be suggested by your doctor after a thorough evaluation of your hormone status. It is interesting to note that salivary rather than blood testing is considered more accurate when measuring the sex hormones. It is strongly recommend that you work with a doctor before taking any supplementation.

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