HORMONE SECRETS TO WEIGHT LOSS

DEREK EVANS
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Introduction

Every woman has been there before: you are going about your normal day, and suddenly hot tears begin to leak out of your eyes for no apparent reason. Other days this may be replaced by a fit of rage or about of moroseness. A young girl who has just begun menstruating may speak with her mother about this, who will reply with some version of “It’s your hormones going crazy. Don’t worry; it’s natural.”

This basic piece of information stays with women throughout their lives, repeated by physicians we know and trust. As women grow older, they are led to believe that these extreme shifts in mood are standard. Doctors would have you believe that this shift in mood and personality is just a natural part of growing older, but this is not true. In fact, these drastic changes in mood and behavior often do not coincide with menstruation, pregnancy, or menopause.

In conjunction with this, an equally cruel trick is being played on women past puberty. After having a child or beginning menopause, and in some cases just out of the blue, many women report putting on weight, which again doctors say is perfectly normal. And sometimes it is, but just as often it is not. Thus, women are left feeling guilty and frustrated regarding weight that they cannot seem to lose or continue to put on no matter how much they exercise or how well they eat.

So if this is not a natural occurrence, then what is it? Why are women feeling crabby, depressed, and fat, completely lacking a sex drive, or suffering from any other number of symptoms associated with weight gain? Well, factor in the societal expectations for women to have a full time job, raise a family, exercise, keep house, have sex 3-5 times a week, and always be happy plus aging, pregnancy, and/or menopause. You may very well end up with a hormonally imbalanced woman who feels like she’s crazy and is no longer healthy.

The good news about this is that hormonal imbalances can be righted. Women who go to their doctors complaining of extreme stress, lack of sleep, depression, non-stop weight gain, or any other number of symptoms are often given medication that only treats the symptoms of the problem and not the root cause. But by using a natural and holistic approach, women can get their life back. This is achieved partly by taking supplements, herbal remedies, and sometimes bioidentical hormones. In addition to this, women need to evaluate and change their lifestyle accordingly, including the way they eat, sleep, and exercise, in order to obtain the happy and healthy life that is rightfully theirs.
Don’t allow your life to be ruled by your hormonal imbalance. With the proper approach and guidance, you can drop the weight that won’t go away no matter what you do and rid yourself of the negative cloud hanging over your head. Allow this book to be that guidance, seek out a holistic medical professional, and get started. You do not have to feel this way. Life can still hold all of the joys you expected it to; you just have to take the first step to getting back to your natural state.
Chapter 1: What are Hormones?

Hormones act as chemical messengers that influence physiological functions. These chemicals are regulated by the brain and secreted by the various endocrine glands into the bloodstream, at which point they travel to the body’s organs and tissues. The main endocrine glands are the adrenal, pineal, pituitary, thymus, and thyroid glands, as well as the pancreas and hypothalamus.

Additionally, women produce hormones (namely estrogen, testosterone, and progesterone) in their ovaries. All in all, there are over sixteen major hormones raging through your body which affect a huge range of functions, including mood, growth, and the reproductive system.¹

Hormones are a natural and necessary part of the body, so what could go wrong? As it turns out, the answer is a lot. A slight increase or decrease in any hormone can quickly throw the body and mind into chaos, resulting in a confused person who may feel like their body is out of their control or simply doesn’t feel like herself.

This is why it is so important to understand your various hormones: if something feels wrong, you’ll be able to identify which hormone is acting up and put your body back into balance.
Most people are extremely familiar with at least some of the major hormones (i.e. estrogen, testosterone, melatonin, insulin), but there are actually a multitude of hormones responsible for both day-to-day maintenance and keeping you alive.

For example;

- Aldosterone helps to regulate blood pressure.
- Glucagon keeps you from feeling exhausted by maintaining blood sugar levels.
- Insulin allows the body to absorb glucose from the bloodstream and thus stay energized, as well as playing a role in metabolism.
- Leptin keeps your body weight from fluctuating like crazy with every meal by sending signals to let you know you are full and as well as regulating energy over the long term.
- Melatonin is essentially for a good night’s sleep.
- Oxytocin is essential to delivering a baby via a natural birth. It is also the hormone responsible for breastfeeding.
- Prostaglandins are a vital part of the healing process. When a physical injury or another such problem occurs, the prostaglandin hormone is created at the site of the injury and initiates blood clotting, swelling, and pain, which triggers the rest of the body to begin healing itself.
- Vitamin D is gathered from sunlight and fat and helps the bones as well as moderates calcium levels. Unlike other vitamins, your body can produce this on its own from sunlight.
However, the three main hormones for women that this book is concerned with are thyroid, cortisol, and estrogen.

- **Thyroid hormones**, like estrogen, are varied and affect a number of processes within the body. The two hormones discharged by the thyroid are thyroxine and triiodothyronine. Along with others, these hormones regulate the body’s metabolism (and thus weight), growth, body temperature, muscle strength, heart rate, and the speed at which your body replaces dead cells.²

- **Cortisol** is controlled by three different glands and acts to control stress, blood pressure, and blood sugar levels, helps to form memories, and aids the thyroid in regulating the metabolism. Cortisol also is a main player in fostering pregnancy by helping the fetus to grow.³

- **Estrogen** actually makes up a group of hormones that includes estradiol, estriol, and estrone. These hormones are produced by the ovaries and take turns on the hormone main stage during the childbearing years, pregnancy, and post-menopause, respectively. Their main functions are to control the reproductive system, including the sex drive, and female characteristics, such as breast size.⁴ Estrogen is balanced out by its counterpart progesterone, which will be covered in a later chapter.

While many of the body’s hormones are listed here, there are in fact far more. Knowing that there is such a wide range of hormones that control a staggering amount of activity within the body, it is no longer any wonder that a slight change in the production and secretion of any hormone could cause extreme distress and changes in a woman. Imagine a hormonal imbalance in regards to Leptin; it would cause drastic changes in weight with the woman being none the wiser as to how she had gained so much fat.

Let us take this scenario a step forward. If a woman experienced a drop in Leptin and then gained a significant amount of weight, she may go on a diet, and begin rigorous exercise in addition to her already busy schedule. However, because the problem is hormonal and not due to eating or exercise habits, the change in lifestyle actually causes harm. The woman in question has cut the majority of protein and carbohydrates out of her diet, and her body is suffering because of the strain of exercise without due fuel.
This causes the woman to become depressed and so she sees a doctor. At the end of this vicious road, the woman ends up in a holistic health office only to find out that she is being medicated for depression, hasn’t had sex in three months, is exhausted all the time, and is still overweight, only to find out that she isn’t depressed or overeating, she has a hormonal imbalance.

Being aware of your hormones and actively taking a hand in regulating them can help you to have a happy and healthy life. If you find you are gaining some weight and you don’t know why or if your mentality has taken a foggy and unexpected downturn, consider that a hormone imbalance may be what’s wrong. Consult a holistic medical professional to determine what can be done to bring your body back into balance and you life back where you want it.
Chapter 2: High and/or Low Cortisol

As stated in the last chapter, cortisol is a hormone that serves a multitude of purposes within the body. It is produced by the adrenal glands and regulates hunger, stress, blood pressure and sugar levels, control inflammation, and takes part in fetus development during pregnancy, in addition to taking part in the creation of memories and the regularity of sleep patterns. The way cortisol achieves this is by releasing glucose into the body which then immediately supplies energy to the muscles.

A sudden influx of glucose due to cortisol is usually a reaction to high amounts of exercise and stress, and is a key part of waking up in the morning. In the same vein, cortisol selects the necessary nutrition from consumed food and uses it for energy. The incredible aspect of this process is that cortisol can select just the right amount and type of nutrients in order to sustain the body in whatever activity it is performing and then store any surplus of nutrients in the liver for later use. Thus, cortisol plays a huge role in personal fitness, sustaining energy for and then supplying energy to the body.

But perhaps the most important feature of this incredibly vital hormone is that cortisol also releases glucose as a reaction to stress and thus is often dubbed the “stress hormone.” This is because it takes a part in the flight-or-fight syndrome and so is produced when an individual is under high levels of stress.
However, a chemical imbalance can occur when an individual is simply under too much stress. For example, if a woman is facing huge hurdles at work, her in-laws are coming to visit that weekend, and her child is sick, chances are she is extremely stressed out. This is fine in the short run, but if the stress continues for a long period of time, the adrenal glands will fall behind and the cortisol hormone will begin to run significantly low.

This, in turn, will cause a lack of glucose, which turns exercise into an exhausting nightmare and potentially presenting a deadly problem if the woman is faced with a real emergency in which she needs to utilize her fight-or-flight syndrome. One would hope that such stress levels would naturally decrease, allowing the amount of cortisol produced to increase again, but this is not always the case.

It is utterly possible for a woman to experience high and low levels of cortisol, sometimes both within a very short time period. In the case of either, weight and diet can become a significant problem, whether that is because too much glucose is being stored as fat or the brain is receiving signals that you’re hungry, even when you’re body does not need additional nutrition. Experiencing any extreme of cortisol is sure to make you pack on the pounds. The reason for this is because when you remain in a state of anxiety, the cortisol in your body will want to retain all of the incoming glucose for immediate fight-or-flight fuel.

So what does the cortisol use with all of the extra glucose that isn’t being put to immediate use? It stores the glucose as fat behind the abdomen, causing you to gain weight. However, the last thing the body needs in this state is to be put on a new diet or given a rigorous exercise regimen. Instead, below are explanations of high and low cortisol levels for you to examine along with possible holistic and natural remedies. As always, individuals should go over possible recovery plans with a holistic doctor before application.

As stated in the previous example, high cortisol levels result in side effects ranging from unpleasant to potentially chronic. If an individual is overly stressed, also known as hyperaroused, with no outlet or time to calm down then the individual may experience unexpected weight gain (particularly in the abdomen), non-existent or ineffective sleep, lack of libido, depression, anxiety, accelerated aging, an insatiable craving for sweets, and a lowered immune system. Particularly in the case of the last symptom, a high level of cortisol could
cause someone to become ill more often or more seriously than is average. This can present an unusually dangerous risk to those whose immune systems are already weak, for example, those with low levels of white blood cells as in the case of HIV and cancer.

Rather than seeing a doctor to treat any of the many symptoms of high cortisol, consider the holistic approach, which will allow you to avoid the further clashing of hormones between your body’s natural chemistry and the medications put into it. If you are experiencing high levels of cortisol, try this regimen to get your body back on track. It is split into four areas of focus that are detailed below.

- **Exercise:** You have probably gained weight over the course of your time with high cortisol levels. However, even if your brain wants you to hit the gym to lose the weight, you must resist the urge, at least for the most part. Your body is exhausted and simply doesn’t have the physiological resources to work out. Additionally, forcing your body to work so hard when it is not properly equipped for the strain could lead to serious injury. So instead, limit your workouts to about 3 or 4 a week and don’t do anything strenuous. Take long walks and try taking a class such as yoga or Pilates, which focuses on core strength and stretching in a calm, slow-paced environment. You will be able to get back to your old regimen when your body and mind have recovered.

- **Nutrition:** Your body is exhausted from staying in a state of hyperawareness and tension. Now it’s time to consume foods that will lower your cortisol production and give your body the energy that it’s quickly running out of. Pack in the protein with non-fatty meats and omega-3 fatty acids, such as those found in fish. The point here is to stock the body with healthy fats. In addition to abundant fruits and vegetables, consume starches that will help you to lower levels of inflammation being blown up by cortisol. Avoid stress-inducing drinks, such as caffeine and alcohol. Add vitamins and fish oil to your morning meal in order to lower cortisol levels at the start of your day. And as always, drink plenty of water.

- **Lifestyle:** It can be incredibly difficult to get a good night’s sleep experiencing high levels of cortisol, which makes it imperative that you actually do so. Experiment with what works best for you. Try going to bed at 10, which will give you some time to toss and turn and hopefully still get in a few hours before you need to wake up. If that doesn’t work, try giving yourself less time in bed, forcing your brain to sleep because you know you have less time to get the proper rest you need (though certainly do not make this less than 6 hours) and then as your sleep improves, add hours on. Make things easier on yourself by turning off all electronic devices. The screen glare reduces your natural influx
of melatonin, making it harder for you to sleep. Remember that although it may be incredibly difficult now, getting a good shuteye will get easier. Practicing meditation may help to ease your transition into sleep.

Furthermore, in general, cortisol does not act up on its own. In order to have high levels of it, you need to have a triggering event, like an accident or incident that causes the cortisol to be produced. To maintain those levels, you would need to continue staying stressed for a long period of time. Although is a hard task to do, evaluate your life. Find the points of stress and try to at least temporarily cut them out. For example, if you are drowning in stress because you simply have too much on your plate, then delegate your activities. If you are stressed due to a personal relationship, consider either speaking with that individual or with a licensed therapist who can advise you as to lessening your contact with that individual or help you with coping skills until things get better. Be sure to tell your therapist that you are taking a holistic approach to hormonal imbalance.

In contrast to high cortisol levels, low amounts of cortisol usually only occur after a long period of extreme stress. After all, no one has ever become so relaxed and peaceful that they’ve made themselves sick. Thus, low cortisol levels are reactionary and only occur when the body can no longer handle the high levels of stress and crashes. Thus, it will come as no shock when the symptoms involve extreme fatigue, becoming hyperemotional, weakness, dizziness, and lack of appetite, sudden weight loss, and depression among others. If low levels persist without treatment, the lack of cortisol may manifest symptoms similar to Addison’s disease or be a product of Addison’s disease itself, which will damage the adrenal glands that secrete cortisol.

If you are suffering from this, then you will have already gone through an extended period of high cortisol levels. In this case, it is best to get rid of any medications already prescribed to you (unless told otherwise by your healthcare physician) in order to rid your body of any mixed messages it may be receiving. Think of your hormonal imbalance as an equation in which you are trying to get both sides of the equation to equal the same value. Ridding your body of unnecessary medication allows you to downsize that equation considerably.
After having done this, take steps to bump your cortisol levels back up. Here are a few suggestions to discuss with your doctor that should get your cortisol levels back up and you are feeling much better.

- **Nutrition:** Don’t skip meals. When you don’t sufficiently supply your body with fuel in a timely manner, cortisol starts storing the food you do give it for the long term, forcing your body to work harder to get through the day. So make sure you eat breakfast, lunch, and dinner with snacks in between to keep your cortisol levels balanced. Try to stay away from refined sugars; substitute them for a healthy sweet snack before bed, like a piece of fruit. Just like when cortisol levels are high, avoid coffee and alcohol, instead supplementing juice, water, and non-caffeinated herbal tea. Speaking of herbals, use herbs such as ginseng and ashwaganda to improve focus and your immune system. Also, make sure you are getting plenty of stress-reducing vitamins and magnesium to help out your adrenal glands. And if you are getting a severe dose of accelerated aging as a result of low cortisol levels, ask your doctor about bioidenticals, which mirror our own hormones and can boost adrenal function.

- **Exercise:** Since you want to increase your cortisol release, take part in a few short mid-to-high intensity workouts per week. This is helpful because exercising stimulates the release of cortisol, which supplies the muscles with glucose and extra energy needed for exercise. And when you’re not exercising you should be relaxing. Be sure to speak with your holistic doctor if you suffer from any diseases or infections.

- **Lifestyle:** Since your adrenal glands are most likely struggling due to prolonged stress, it’s best to give your body the rest it needs. Assure that you are getting at least 8 hours of sleep every night. If you are still suffering from extreme amounts of stress, follow the same guidelines as high levels of cortisol and take something off of your proverbial plate.

While it is always helpful to take a holistic approach to curing hormonal imbalances, women should always check to be sure the excessive or lack of cortisol can only be labeled as such. Please note that a high level of cortisol may also be an indicator of Cushing disease, Ectopic Cushing syndrome, or a tumor related to the adrenal gland. As stated before, a low level of cortisol may be a sign of already developed Addison disease or hypopituitarism. As always, a holistic approach is recommended for curing hormonal imbalances, but women should be positive of the root cause of their symptoms before moving forward with solutions.
Chapter 3: Low Progesterone and Progesterone Resistance

Pretty much every woman has heard of progesterone before and many of us revolve at least part of our lives around it. In short, progesterone is a hormone produced primarily by the ovaries that causes the endometrium to prepare for a fertilized egg during the second half of the menstruation cycle. Although, if a woman does not become pregnant, the progesterone sends the woman into menstruation.

Hence, if a woman has severely irregular period, her progesterone is probably to blame. If a woman does become pregnant though, progesterone will suppress further ovulation during pregnancy and then prepares milk glands for breastfeeding post pregnancy. In short, the reason why so many of us have heard of this hormone is because it’s a main ingredient of birth control.

Progesterone has further use in the body, including preventing blood clots and assisting cortisol in using fat as fuel. It is also essential for a calm and happy disposition as progesterone acts as an anti-depressant and keeps the brain safe from trauma. In addition to this, progesterone helps regulate normal sleeping patterns, aids in preventing cancer and autoimmune diseases, and keeps away migraines. These are only a limited of the benefits of properly balanced progesterone levels, making it a vital ingredient to a calm personality.
However, as one of the main hormones ruling the reproductive system, it is almost impossible to look at progesterone separate from its ruling partner, estrogen. The latter will be discussed in the next chapter, but allow it to suffice to say here that progesterone is key to offsetting the negative effects of estrogen. Like in our example of an equation previously, estrogen and progesterone are on opposite sides of the equation and it is crucial that they balance each other out. For example, estrogen is obviously an indispensable part of the female anatomy. However, if a woman has too much estrogen it can lead to breast or ureteral cancer. Progesterone works to keep this from becoming a reality.

So how does this relate to weight? Let’s take a look at progesterone in relation to PMS. During the last two weeks of the menstruation cycle, estrogen levels decrease as progesterone levels increase. This brings on feelings of PMS, which as the majority of women know often involve food cravings. So this hormone change sets off a chain reaction that disturbs the other hormones in your body including a drop in blood sugar and thus insulin, causing women to often crave sugar-filled and fatty foods, otherwise known as comfort foods. If the woman is having particularly low levels of blood sugar, high levels of progesterone, and then is under any kind of stress (kicking off the cortisol and actually upping the secretion of progesterone), she has a perfect recipe for gaining weight.

But what causes the extreme levels of PMS? Surely it’s not natural? Well actually, it’s due to confusion in the body. Although this differs for every woman (and scientists are not sure why that is) it seems that in some individuals, the high levels of progesterone actually cause aggravated PMS. It works like this: just before your period, progesterone works as both a hormone and a neurotransmitter, specifically in regards to the GABA receptor, which is responsible for keeping the brain and body calm. However, some women’s GABA receptor becomes immune to the progesterone and does not recognize it, which means that the GABA receptor is not activated and women experience extreme amounts of irritability, anxiety, and aggression. As every woman knows, those three factors are common symptoms of PMS.

On the opposite side of the coin, low progesterone can cause significant problems. Most commonly starting during perimenopause (the period just before menopause), symptoms include breast tenderness, anxiety, and weight gain. A lack of progesterone in younger women can result in difficulty getting pregnant. If a woman with low levels of progesterone does manage to get pregnant, she may not be able to fulfill her pregnancy to term since
progesterone is responsible for supporting the uterus. As with high levels of progesterone, lower amounts may also account for irregular periods, abdominal pain, and spotting. Additionally, estrogen will run rampant with progesterone to balance it out, leading to symptoms that will be discussed in the next chapter.

How does a woman wind up with so little progesterone? This substantial dip accompanied by a rise in estrogen can be brought on by poor diet, lack of exercise, and stress. As mentioned before, the natural decrease in progesterone due to menopause can bring on many of these symptoms and stress added to this can potentially make the situation worse.

Additionally, weakly performing ovaries may result in lower levels of progesterone. And of course, if any other glands are not working properly, chances are it will create a domino effect and in turn have negative results on the production of progesterone. Thus, it is important for women to evaluate both lifestyle and hormonal factors when addressing low levels of progesterone.

Here are some solution suggestions for those suffering from low progesterone. As always, every woman is different and so one solution will not fix every problem. Speak with a medical professional to tailor a holistic plan that is right for you. It is entirely possible to fix this problem in a natural way, without the aid of disturbing medications that further promote physiological complications. Below you will find a mere list of suggestions to discuss with your doctor.

- **Nutrition:** Pack in the vitamins! As with most hormonal problems, vitamins are key to getting yourself balanced and in this case you are going to want to pack in the magnesium, zinc, and vitamins B6 and C. Also, avoid anything that might raise your estrogen levels; this will make it easier for the estrogen and progesterone to balance themselves out. Herbs such as chasteberry and black cohosh can be especially helpful in raising progesterone levels. Explore different spices and foods to find what’s high in progesterone that works best for your diet.

- **Exercise:** In this case, it’s really just important that you are exercising multiple times a week in low-stress environments, doing low-stress workouts. Remember that stress can easily lead to low progesterone, so be mindful of how you exercise.
• **Lifestyle:** Again, just make sure you are staying low on the stress. Try de-stressing activities, such as getting a massage or spending time in nature where it’s quiet. Also, try using a progesterone cream to bring up your levels, but be sure to speak with a doctor to ensure that you do not overuse it and up with excessive progesterone.

Now take a look at what can be done about that horrible PMS. Try a varied approach with a combination of these suggestions because every woman is different and there is no one cure-all. And even after progesterone levels are back up, continue some of these practices so that your time of the month does not have such a negative impact on your day-to-day life.

• **Nutrition:** When craving high-sugar and fatty foods try replacing them with healthier options such as fruit and smoked salmon, which is naturally high in healthy fats. Be sure to start your day with a big healthy breakfast and pack yourself healthy snacks. A few suggested foods: dark leafy greens, bananas, and lean white meat. And if you need something sugary sweet, try dark chocolate.

• **Exercise:** If you are sweating with cramps then there are two ways to go. The first is to be gentle on your body and just stretch using yoga or to go swimming, which will help support your angry body. The second option, which works for some women, is to get moving. Go take a dance class or do an intense abs workout. You’d be surprised but sometimes high-intensity can actually bring relief.

• **Lifestyle:** Remember those B6 vitamins and chasteberry you’re supposed to be taking for low progesterone? Well they can work for PMS too, easing the negative mood and irritability. You also will want to pack in the magnesium and take calcium to improve depression and fatigue.

Lastly, let’s have a quick word about birth control. Many women find that birth control eases their symptoms, but always be aware that birth control in the form of the pill is usually made up of an estrogen/progesterone combination. Thus, depending on your chemical makeup and perhaps already existing hormonal imbalance, birth control may or may not be the right answer for you. While this may sound extremely wishy-washy, there is simply no way to determine what’s best for you without going to see a licensed medical professional. Consult one and share your desire for a holistic approach. PMS and low progesterone does not have to make your life so difficult. Explore these natural approaches and get back to feeling like you around the clock.
Chapter 4: Excess/Low Estrogen

Estrogen is, without a doubt, the most well known hormone that rules the female anatomy. Whenever a woman feels crazy during her period or is experiencing hot flashes during menopause, she is often angrily mumbling something about estrogen under her breath. So what exactly is this crazy hormone that seems to control so much of our chemistry? In short, estrogen is what makes us women.

Estrogen is produced by the ovaries and fat tissue and is responsible for the reproductive system and female characteristics such as breasts and hips. It also plays a role in maintaining bone mass. Estrogen is also responsible for keeping us happy, both sexually (thank estrogen for your libido!) and mentally, as estrogen produces serotonin. However as mentioned in the second chapter, there are three different types of estrogen that take care of these various jobs: estradiol, estriol, and estrone.

Like all other hormones, if estrogen levels are even slightly increased or decreased, there are major hormonal consequences. So what does this have to do with weight? Well if estrogen levels rise, then progesterone levels plummet and suddenly, if you are over 35, you have Estrogen Dominance Syndrome. Normally, estrogen and progesterone work together to regulate fluid and sodium levels.
However, if estrogen levels are high and/or the woman suffers from EDS, the body begins to retain water, which is what makes women feel bloated during PMS and menstruation. While water retention does not cause women to gain a significant amount of weight, it can make you feel as though you are much bigger than you actually are.

Weight gain is also a natural result of excess estrogen. Women who experience high levels of estrogen tend to carry a lot of weight in their hips and abdomen. Unfortunately, weight gain is not the most severe consequence of elevated estrogen. Women may experience high blood pressure, depression, endometriosis, exacerbated PMS, and a number of cancers among other symptoms.39

Perhaps the most notorious cancer among women is breast cancer, which mainly affects women who are over the age of 5040, but can occur in younger women as well. Estrogen is responsible for dividing cells and thus contributes to a woman’s risk of getting cancer when it divides too many cells, which may then turn into potentially malignant lumps.

Obviously not all women over 50 with excess estrogen are going to get cancer, although they are typically more susceptible to it. Thus it is important for women to perform self-breast exams and visit their doctor regularly for checkups.

Effects of low estrogen levels are not quite as lethal but remain daunting. Women with low amounts of estrogen may experience hot flashes, night sweats, anxiety, vaginal dryness, thinning hair, difficulty concentrating, and any other symptoms that are commonly associated with menopause. This is because as women approach menopause, their estrogen levels naturally drop, causing them to cease ovulating.41

So what is causing these estrogen fluctuations? Since estrogen and progesterone work as a team, an excess of one often means a depletion of the other. Causes of excess estrogen may be poor diet, environmental factors, and poor liver function.
Low estrogen levels may be brought on by excessive exercise, eating disorders, diet, and the onset of menopause, among other factors. One of the most intriguing among them though is gluten sensitivity. Some women experience a drastic change in estrogen levels after consuming gluten. Women should explore abstaining from gluten, testing their estrogen levels before and after two gluten-free weeks.

An area of major concern in terms of estrogen levels is fertility. High amounts of estrogen may thicken the uterus so that the “window” for sperm to enter is too small, thus keeping the woman from getting pregnant. On the other hand, low amounts of estrogen will mean the walls of the uterus are not thick enough, and thus may not be able to support a fetus to the end of term. Women who are trying for a child should consult a medical professional to determine their current hormone levels and then increase estrogen, preferably before becoming pregnant.

As always, there are natural paths you can take to cure your hormonal imbalance. Work with your doctor to find which combination of methods works best for you after determining if you have excess or not an enough estrogen. Here are some suggestions as to lowering your estrogen level.

- **Nutrition:** Eat more fiber! When women consume too little fiber each day, estrogen levels soar. Eat lots of organic fruits and vegetables to avoid putting toxins in your body and get a good source of organic protein that isn’t fatty. Limit your dairy intake and cut out caffeine, alcohol, and sugary and fatty foods.

- **Exercise:** Try a lot of mid-intensity workouts that build strength. Think of gymnasts and weightlifters: they usually have smaller breasts and very little fat. That is because all of the exercise suppresses their estrogen.

- **Lifestyle:** Start expanding your organic shopping to every product that comes into contact with your body. Xenoestrogens are toxins that appear to be estrogens, so when the estrogen receptors in the body see a xenoestrogen, they ignore the actual estrogen your body is producing, thus causing a buildup of estrogen. In addition to buying organic products and avoiding the many toxins hiding in them, take vitamins and supplements recommended by your doctor, such as DIM and zinc. Lastly, treat your liver to a detox. It is the liver’s responsibility to get rid of excess estrogen, and when it can’t function properly, estrogen accumulates.
If excess estrogen isn’t your problem, then take a look at the tips below for correcting low levels of estrogen.

- **Nutrition:** Just as low amounts of fiber will reap high estrogen, too much fiber will kill your estrogen. So now it’s time to bump it back up with grains and legumes. Try colorful fruits like strawberries and pears and eat a lot of vegetables, such as artichoke, broccoli, and carrots. Additionally, if you have very little body fat, it may be ok to eat some more healthy fats, since estrogen is produced in part by fat cells.

- **Exercise:** Again, stick to the reverse of high estrogen. Try stretching, yoga, walking, and other low-intensity workouts to raise estrogen levels.

- **Lifestyle:** Speak with your doctor about supplements since there is still much debate concerning which ones actually work. Also discuss the bioidentical hormones, which mimic estrogen and encourage the body to produce more. Although, the jury is still out concerning how bioidenticals may be taken, so again, consult your doctor before beginning either of these remedies.

Lastly, let us have a final word regarding estrogen and weight. As stated before, estrogen is partially made from fat cells. Thus, if you are overweight, it will be helpful to shed some pounds in order to lower estrogen levels.

In order to help yourself with this, eat more fiber; not only because a high-fiber diet naturally decreases estrogen but also because fiber helps you to stay full. Thus, if you feel full for a long period of time after every meal, you will not be tempted to eat as much. It may feel impossible, but with the help of a physician and a holistic approach, there is every possibility that you will be able to lose weight and achieve the hormonal balance that will allow you to live your naturally healthy and happy life.
Chapter 5: Excess Androgens

Androgens are usually associated with men as they are responsible for masculine features, namely facial hair, strength and voice deepening. However, it is, also, present in women just as estrogen is present in men. For women, the adrenal glands and ovaries produce androgen hormones, which the body uses to maintain bones and then produce estrogen after menopause. Pre-menopause, androgen plays a role in keeping the libido going.

While some women do experience what are commonly labeled as male characteristics, it is not normal and requires an immediate consultation with a doctor. When the body makes too much of the androgen hormone, it’s actually most likely an overproduction of testosterone and we all know how that works out for men. Think about it for a minute and you can probably visualize the results for women. Yes, that’s right; women suffering from an excess of androgens, also known as virilization, may experience a decrease of head hair and an increase in facial hair (called hirsutism), a deepening voice, abnormal periods, and breast shrinkage among other symptoms. The reason for an urgent consultation is not because of the symptoms, however, but the very serious consequences that can incur from a buildup of androgen in the body.

So why do some women have an extreme amount of androgen running through their system? Well, the answers are varied, but it can sometimes be an indicator of an underlying problem, such as a poorly functioning ovarian or adrenal gland. In either of these cases it is possible to develop Polycystic Ovarian Syndrome (PCOS). PCOS presents a major problem in terms of weight. Many women suffering from this condition report symptoms such as gaining a significant amount of weight and struggling with obesity.

In addition to gaining weight, women suffer headaches, pelvic pain, and sleep issues, in addition to the symptoms discussed above regarding virilization. It comes as no surprise then that if you become stressed as a result of these symptoms (who wouldn’t?), then your cortisol will kick in and then the dominos will really start falling, since high levels of cortisol over long periods of time cause fat to be stored behind the abdomen.
The reason why PCOS makes women gain so much weight is because women suffering from the condition are often insulin resistant. This means that if the ovaries are not accepting insulin, it all just gets blocked up, which is unfortunate since the body uses insulin to break down sugars. Additionally, the buildup of insulin causes the ovaries to produce more testosterone, which exacerbates the problem.\textsuperscript{55} If you are already heavy to begin with, your weight may be the cause for your PCOS, since, again, high levels of insulin cause the production of testosterone.\textsuperscript{56} Furthermore, PCOS can lead to other complications, such as sleep apnea, diabetes, heart disease, and endometrial cancer.\textsuperscript{57}

Women need to be mindful of the dangers of PCOS in connection to pregnancy. While it is possible to become pregnant when afflicted by PCOS, you may require hormonal treatments, procedures, or other supplements. Once pregnant, the chances of miscarriage and having a preterm birth are higher. There are further complications and so if you are afflicted with PCOS, you should begin speaking with your doctor about pregnancy as soon as you decide to have a baby.

To fight excess androgen, try these tips, experimenting to find what works best for you. Further action may need to be taken depending on how high your androgen levels are and if there is an underlying cause such as an ovarian tumor. Consult your physician to decide the best course of action. Until then, peruse these suggestions and take anything that looks interesting in to your meeting.

- **Nutrition:** Cut out the caffeine, alcohol, and, if you are a smoker, cigarettes, as well as cutting down on the sugar and carbohydrates that come from non-whole foods. The reason for this is to try and control your insulin levels and therefore, testosterone. In order to help your body get rid of androgen, eat rice and switch out dairy for soy products.\textsuperscript{58}

- **Exercise:** You’ll definitely need to get in some daily movement. This is to try and reduce dangerous weight that may pack on as a result of PCOS and weight that could bring on PCOS. Speak to your physician about the best modes of exercise for your current weight and strength level as to not strain your body. Then be sure to fuel your body for the exertion with plenty of water and the proper diet.

- **Lifestyle:** Again, DIM should reduce androgen levels. Herbal supplements and teas should also help.\textsuperscript{59} Get the most sleep you can as stress can exacerbate the problem and bring on high waves of cortisol.
If you suspect that you may have high levels of androgen hormones, consult your doctor immediately. Too much androgen can pose serious health risks if ignored or unnoticed. If you are suffering from weight problems, don’t stress out. There are ways to lose weight even in the presence of PCOS. It’s simply a matter of finding the perfect combination of nutrition, exercise, and supplements that is perfectly tailored to your chemistry.
Chapter 6: Low Thyroid

Thyroid hormones are aptly named as they are secreted from the thyroid. However, they are actually made up of two different hormones called triiodothyronine (T3) and thyroxine (T4). The thyroid plays a large role in controlling the metabolism, muscle strength, speed of digestion, heart rate, body temperature, and is responsible for replacing dying cells. While our cells are constantly dying and being replaced our bodies rely on thyroid hormones to stay alive, someone who is experiencing low thyroid hormones has hypothyroidism.

When the thyroid is struggling, it is quick to manifest itself in the form of weight issues. This is because thyroid plays such a huge role in the regulation of the body’s metabolism. If the thyroid activity is too low then the basal metabolic rate (BMR) slows down so that it cannot burn food into fuel as quickly as your body needs you to eat and/or needs to use fuel. An example of this would be a construction worker.

A woman who does that kind of work will not have enough energy to do her work because her body is not burning food fast enough. This will most likely cause the person to gain weight because their food is not being converted. Additionally, keep in mind that if your diet is low on fiber, you will also not feel full along with the symptoms of low thyroid activity. Those symptoms are fatigue, difficulty sleeping and focusing, constant chilliness, depression, irritability, dry skin and hair, heavy periods, and joint/muscle pain, among many others.
Because hypothyroidism can lead to extreme weight gain, not recognizing or attending to low thyroid hormone levels can have serious consequences. Among those are diabetes and obesity as a result of weight gain. Of course if left untreated, depression can also get to a, if not chronic, then certainly a debilitating level. However, by keeping a tight watch on thyroid hormone levels and vigilantly following your regimen agreed upon by you and your doctor, you can be healthy for the rest of your life, which should not be shortened by hypothyroidism if you are committed to your treatment plan.

Low levels of thyroid hormones can occur due to multiple factors. One of which is already present disease or disorders, such as autoimmune disease, congenital hypothyroidism, or thyroiditis. Any medical procedures that involve exposure to the thyroid may also be to blame. Some issues have a deeper root cause: since the thyroid is controlled by the pituitary gland, problems with the latter may then affect the former. The most commonplace cause, however, is too much or too little iodine. This chemical element is essential to the thyroid producing hormones and so a diet with too much iodine may push your burgeoning hypothyroidism over the edge or simply encourage it.63

Interestingly, a correlation is suspected between low thyroid hormones and gluten intolerance. Although there is currently only a small amount of scientific data concerning the topic, it is believed by many that those whose have thyroid diseases are also gluten intolerant. Those who suffer from issues such as hypothyroidism reported that after cutting gluten out of their diet, their symptoms improved. This may be because Celiac’s Disease and hypothyroidism share
many of the same symptoms. Thus, it is advised for those with low levels of thyroid hormone to try going gluten free for two weeks to see if there is any significant improvement in your well-being as a result.

The natural road to recovery, or in some cases happy coping, is one that will take a good amount of work. For some people it may not be entirely possible if the low levels of thyroid are due to an autoimmune disease or some other factor that can’t be rid of permanently. If this is not the case for you though, and you are simply suffering from low thyroid hormone levels, then speak with your doctor and try some of these tips for getting your levels back up.

- **Nutrition**: Surprisingly enough, you can help your thyroid by increasing your salt intake. Your thyroid requires iodine to produce hormones, which you can get from iodized table salt. If your diet prevents you from having salt, try another good source of iodine such as seafood, yogurt, or strawberries.

- **Exercise**: Since joint and muscle pain is a symptom of hypothyroidism, try doing low-intensity workouts that are just enough to get your heart rate up. Try walking, yoga, or Pilates to get the exercise you need without overexerting yourself, especially if your body is having trouble turning food into fuel.

- **Lifestyle**: Speak with your physician about taking thyroxine supplements. If you are too low on thyroid, this pill may help your body to receive the messages it needs from the absent hormones and keep your body from shutting down. Make sure you are always getting all of the vitamins and get tested for Celiac’s Disease. You can also self-test for a gluten intolerance by abstaining from all gluten for at least two weeks.

If you research low thyroid hormones, chances are you’ll see an overwhelming amount of testimonials and databases on the multiple diseases and complications involving the thyroid. And while these issues can make life a little more complicated, it is certainly not unmanageable. The best part is that hypothyroidism can be taken care of in a completely holistic and natural way, even if your main symptom is weight gain. There are different paths you can take to address this, but it is important to remember not to become too eager on your road to recovery. Often the brain is more excitable than the body and so it’s important not to push yourself farther than your body can handle. Eventually you’ll get there; maintaining your thyroid hormone levels will become a part of your daily routine that you don’t even think about and you can spend your time actually living your life.
Chapter 7: Hormone Imbalance Combinations

After reading the previous chapters, you’ve probably noticed that all of the various glands and hormones are intimately tied together. The thyroid is controlled by the pituitary gland, the ovaries work in harmony with the adrenal glands, and those are only two of the many combinations of co-existing and co-working glands. Since the hormones produced by these glands are responsible for the operation of the body, it does not take much to cause a domino-effect hormonal imbalance.

If you are feeling a range of symptoms that do not fit into one particular hormone class, it is possible that you are experiencing a combination of hormone imbalances. If a woman is struggling with her weight and having issues such as being unable to lose or even gaining weight despite a healthy diet and exercising, in addition to a host of other symptoms such as fatigue, constant hunger, and depression, it would be logical for woman who is not educated regarding hormones to see a doctor and seek out a prescription.

The problem with this approach is that your doctor, if they are not a holistic one, will probably tell you to exercise, cut a few foods out of your diet, and prescribe you an anti-depressant. However, this may only serve to make you even hungrier and the anti-depressant could give you further issues, such as trouble thinking clearly. So if you are experiencing problems with your weight and your intuition says that something is clearly off, seek out a holistic doctor and get your hormone levels tested.

The most important element in finding your way back to hormonal balance and a healthy weight is to identify the root cause of your symptoms. Treating symptoms will only result in long-term frustration and any supplements or medications you take to counteract them may only make the problem worse. The underlying reason for your symptoms will most likely be a malfunctioning gland that is either not producing enough of one hormone, is producing too much, or (in the case of estrogen and progesterone in the ovaries) is producing disproportionate amounts of hormones. Once you discover which gland is giving you trouble, you’ll be able to take steps towards helping that gland back to full functioning and relieve your body from the stress of making up for what the gland is lacking.
When it comes to weight gain, there are three hormones that are most commonly out of sorts. Those are the stress hormones, sex hormones, and thyroid hormones. Often problems with one of these three hormones leads to issues with another. A perfect example of this would be a combined imbalance of stress and sex hormones.

Say hypothetically that you are extremely stressed out and your body has been packing in the glucose, causing you to gain weight. Then you try to increase exercise, activating even more cortisol hormones to run through your system. This extreme amount of cortisol will then throw off your estrogen/progesterone balance, causing irregular periods and killing your libido.

Doesn’t sound like any kind of fun, does it? Combinations of stress and sex, stress and thyroid, and sex and thyroid hormonal imbalances are common in women of all ages and can cause significant weight gain. The good news is that they are not unbeatable. However, to conquer your hormonal imbalances, you’ll first need to take a variety of factors into account that will need to be discussed with your doctor. Among those chief factors are age.

As we all know, the rules of the game change dramatically once you hit your mid-thirties (remember that your chances of breast cancer go up if you have a child after thirty-five) and after menopause. Here are a few of the differing factors for each stage of life during and after your childbearing years.
• **Before Late-Thirties:** These are your prime baby-making years. Whether you decide to have a child or not, many women end up on some form of birth control, which will automatically change you estrogen/progesterone chemistry. Combine this with the fact that your thyroid gland slows down around your late teens/early twenties (a.k.a. your metabolism has slowed down) and the natural stress that comes from trying to find your place in the world, women may have only one or a combination of the three hormonal imbalances. However, the most common complaint of women at this age is one of the main reasons for birth control: PMS. Depending upon the severity of the hormone imbalance, this could cause young women to struggle with their weight. It is also possible for women to suffer hormone imbalances because they exercise so much, as in the case with gymnasts.

• **Perimenopause:** Although women in their late-thirties are probably not thinking about menopause, their body is preparing to start the process. This means that ovulation is slowing down, causing the body to produce less estrogen and progesterone. Women may also be putting on more weight at this time because of changes in hormone levels regarding the thyroid. If a woman is stressed, the cortisol in her blood may block the thyroid from producing hormones, which means the hormones can’t control the metabolism.

• **Menopause:** Ah, menopause. That joyful time when a woman’s hormones go absolutely nuts. Well, at least that is the case for some women. Hormonal imbalances at this time are usually related to uneven levels of estrogen and progesterone, usually in that progesterone drops, causing ESD. In terms of weight gain, if a woman is experiencing extremely high levels of estrogen, the excess may in turn cause the thyroid to severely limit the amount of hormones it secretes, creating a perfect storm for weight gain.

While these problems are less than ideal, they can be dealt with in a natural way. Many doctors may tell you that your problems are due to aging and are naturally occurring phenomenon in your body. While that may have some truth to it (after all, menopause does mean that your progesterone will all but disappear), that doesn’t mean you have to suffer undue consequences for your biology.

Below are some tips on steps you can take to manage your weight and regain hormonal balance in a healthy and natural way. Be sure to talk these options over with your doctor to find the right remedy course for you.
• **Cortisol/Estrogen/Progesterone:** If you are suffering from extreme stress and your sex hormones are imbalanced, this is probably making you gain weight (it’s the combination of cortisol packing in glucose behind your abdomen, the cortisol sending your sex hormones into chaos, and the resulting cravings of sugary/high fat foods during PMS or suffering from PCOS). To settle this, you’ll first have to calm down so that your cortisol levels will lower and stop disturbing your sex hormones. After you have balanced your cortisol production, work to balance your sex hormones. All of this can be done with a combination of good sleep, healthy diet, low-intensity exercise (mid-to-high-intensity will activate cortisol), and then supplements for either estrogen or progesterone.

• **Cortisol/Thyroid:** You need your thyroid in order for your metabolism to function, so as with before, you’ll first need to treat your cortisol levels in order to allow thyroid hormones to function properly again. Do this with a good diet, lots of sleep, and low-intensity workouts. It may help to get a massage or go to a low-stimulation environment. If thyroid levels do not self-correct themselves, refer to the suggestions provided in Chapter 6 with your doctor. Only after you have established a somewhat stress-free lifestyle should you increase your workout regimen in order to lose weight. It is important not to accelerate this process in order to not place undue strain on the body.

• **Thyroid/Estrogen/Progesterone:** Most likely occurring during menopause, women will need to consult their doctor in order to decide how to level out their estrogen and progesterone. Some options to consider are progesterone cream and bioidenticals, which mirror estrogen. If raising the levels of either of the sex hormones is not an option, consider taking thyroid supplements in order to get the hormones needed to convert food to fuel. Consult the respective chapters for further tips on how to get the thyroid or sex hormones active, particularly if you are in your late thirties or younger. Unless otherwise stated by your doctor, it should be fine to continue or even intensify your current fitness regimen. As always, do yourself a favor by cutting out refined sugars, coffee, and most alcohol.

Always keep in mind that these are not the only possible hormonal imbalance combinations. While these are significant ones in terms of weight, there can be various underlying causes. For this reason, women should always seek out professional medical help to determine the cause of their symptoms, as there is always a chance that it is not a hormonal imbalance at all. If it is however, rest assured that you are armed with the tools to get your body and your life back on track.
Conclusion

Living day-to-day life as a woman can be a tricky path to navigate. Growing up, almost no one mentions hormonal imbalances and the monthly to daily pains that all women experience are accounted as just the normal ebb and flow of life. This does not have to be the case. If you have gained, lost, or cannot lose weight for no apparent reason and something in your brain is hinting that it’s not normal, trust your instincts and see a physician who can help you find a natural remedy.

Seeing a non-holistic physician can often lead to frustration and disappointment. While well-meaning and knowledgeable in their fields, many doctors will attribute the symptoms to an incorrect cause. The prescribing of medications that do not address the true underlying reason for symptoms will only serve to further confuse the body and throw hormones into further disorder. This is why it is extremely vital to be informed and seek out a doctor whose interests align with your own: so you can get back to being your natural self as quickly as possible.

Over the course of this book, you have gone over the ruling hormones in the female body and how to balance them. Now that you are equipped with a deeper understanding of these interdependent hormones, you should be able to spot the symptoms of an imbalance, whether that is fatigue, hair loss, depression, chronic stress, or joint pain. Use the suggestions to make a healthier life for yourself; one with a balanced diet rich in whatever mineral or vitamin your body specifically needs, with abundant sleep, minimal contact with environmental toxins, good exercise, and low amounts of stress. Vitamins, supplements, bioidenticals, spices, and herbs can help you to achieve your fullest life and healthiest weight no matter what age you are or stage of life you are in.

Maintaining a healthy weight should not be so difficult and it doesn’t have to be. Determine the cause of your troubles, whether that is a low functioning thyroid, high levels of cortisol, or a combination of hormone imbalances. Once you have found the true cause of your weight problem, you will be able to craft a short-term plan to get you balanced and then a long-term plan to stay there, consisting of the most important elements of well-being: diet, exercise, and lifestyle. There is a healthier and happier way to live. Consult a doctor today and get your hormones, weight, and life balanced exactly as you were meant to be.

Derek Evans


Today’s dietician