Supporting Successful New Year's Resolutions

Welcome to 2012! With every new year comes a sense of rebirth, of starting over and of course, change. Your patients are likely working towards their New Year's resolutions, and statistically a great number of those are likely to be related to improving their health and/or losing weight. Some other resolutions may include kicking bad habits such as smoking or that glass of wine every night and while some good old fashioned self control is needed for these endeavors, there are ways you can support these positive changes in your patients through identification and treatment of their hormone imbalances.

There are many ways in which adrenal fatigue can manifest as an inability to make the right decisions. Most patients with low cortisol levels feel as though they are simply at the end of their rope and any departure from their routine (which has likely become very simple) is just too much for them to handle. Furthermore, because cortisol is a glucocorticoid and one of its jobs in the body is to maintain blood sugar levels between meals, when the levels are lower than they should be it can lead to low blood sugar, foggy brain and sugar cravings which are likely to sabotage your patients best intentions.

In addition to testing cortisol levels, it's important to keep in mind that reproductive hormones are very closely tied to neurochemistry including modulating serotonin, dopamine, histamine and other neurotransmitters. A hormonal shift may create and can certainly exacerbate any neurotransmitter imbalance. Estrogen dominance, a state where there is a greater influence of estrogen than progesterone on the body, is alarmingly common in women of all ages. In perimenopausal women, their progesterone levels fall many years before the decline in estrogen levels creating a state of relative estrogen dominance. One of the many actions that progesterone has on the body is to calm electrical activity in the brain. The primary mechanism for this is through the metabolite allopregnnolone which activates the same GABA-A receptor as Valium, Xanax and alcohol. Without the relaxing effect of progesterone, many women find themselves with new-found anxiety or insomnia and may self medicate with one of the above mentioned substances. Furthermore, estradiol exacerbates the situation by enhancing the excitatory neurotransmitters dopamine, and histamine. The combination of increased excitation and diminished inhibition of electrical stimulation is often enough to push many women over the edge and into the wine bottle or worse. Although women in the peri-menopausal years is often where we see this phenomenon, please remember that there are many younger women and even adolescents with inadequate progesterone levels that may predispose them to reach for an exogenous source to relax them, or shut down some of their overactive neurotransmitter activity.

As in many situations, too much estradiol (relative to progesterone) causes significant problems, but too little estradiol can also wreak havoc on brain chemistry. Estradiol inhibits the enzyme monamine oxidase (MAO) which is responsible for breaking down serotonin, dopamine and histamine and estradiol enhances the serotonin receptor function in the female brain. As estradiol levels fall to below optimal levels (as with anovulation or menopause), many women can suffer from anxiety and depression due to diminished serotonin, histamine and/or dopamine levels. There are a number of substances that enhance dopamine and/or serotonin activity in the brain including food, sugar, nicotine, alcohol, opioid pain medications and marijuana.

Evaluating and treating hormone deficiencies and imbalances is an important part of a comprehensive and holistic support for those New Year's resolutions as well as in treating the underlying conditions of anxiety and depression.

Further Reading...

Alcohol intoxication increases allopregnanolone levels in female adolescent humans. Torres J, Ortega E. Neuropsychopharmacology 28, 1207- 1209. 2003.

Gender differences in generalized anxiety disorder: results from the National Epidemiologic Survey on Alcohol and Related Conditions (NESARC). VesgaLopez O et al. J Clin Psychiatry. Oct; 69(10):1606- 16. 2008.

Increase in prefrontal cortex serotonin 2A receptors following estrogen treatment in postmenopausal women. Kugaya A et al. Am J Psychiatry; 160:1522- 1524. 2003.

Hormone Imbalance in Female Patients Causes Alcoholism and Drug Addiction. Sponaugle M. www.floridadetox.com

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Limited to 40 seats for advanced practitioners in hormone balancing…we encourage you to check out the website (www.labrix.com) for further details about the schedule and workshop location.