

Women's Health – Hormone Balancing

By Rachel Murray

Hormones are often given a bad reputation and blamed for causing pre-menstrual symptoms (PMS), mood swings, hot flashes or night sweats. While hormones are definitely a major contributor, to these unpleasant symptoms, in westernized societies it is often thought that they are 'normal' and that women just have to suffer through. This is not only untrue, this belief can cause a lot of physical & emotional harm to those women who struggle with one or more of these irritating symptoms.

In many cases hormone replacement therapy (HRT) may be prescribed, and while it is necessary in some extreme cases, synthetic HRT can unfortunately come with a host of side effects and related issues.

There are some natural supplements that have been shown to have great results with symptoms of hormone imbalance, such as a combination of supplemental mushrooms like Chaga, Cordyceps, Lion's Mane, Giant Aangelica, Wilford's cynanchum and Sok-dan.

A key factor to consider is that HRT and even supplementing with natural products often miss an important point as they may not address the root cause of the imbalance, and often just conceal the symptoms.

When looking at our body as a complex collection of systems there are a few organ systems that are key in terms of hormone balance, mainly the adrenals, liver & intestinal systems.

To obtain an optimal balance of our hormones, it is extremely important to support the adrenals, liver and intestinal system. The adrenals need to be supported because they play a vital role in our overall health. Not only do they produce pregnenolone, which is the precursor to 60 steroid hormones including the stress hormone cortisol, and our sex hormones – testosterone, progesterone & estrogen. If the adrenals are not functioning properly, which is often a result of a high stress lifestyle, the synthesis and distribution of these hormones is negatively affected. So, working on supporting and managing our daily stress is the most important step we can take in re-establishing healthy adrenal function. If added support is needed, supplementing with an adrenal complex can be taken. Adrenal support supplements may contain animal or plant materials or a combination of the two such as bovine or porcine adrenal cortex, or herbs like ashwagandha, ginseng and/or rhodiola.

The liver also plays an important role, as it helps to regulate our hormones through their inactivation and elimination. If the liver is not functioning properly, hormones are not efficiently inactivated or removed and can re-enter the circulation and build up in our blood and tissues. This can happen when the liver becomes overloaded through consumption of toxins in our foods, medications or alcohol, and when we struggle with constipation. This imbalance in hormones can not only lead to the symptoms I have mentioned, but can also lead to fibroids, cysts &

cancers. If the liver is determined to need extra support, supplementing with milk thistle, holy basil and/or dandelion root may be helpful.

The intestinal system also plays an important role in the regulation and balance of our hormones. The intestinal system's role is to sort through the substances that it receives and determine whether they are useful nutrients that can be reabsorbed or are harmful waste products that need to be eliminated. Like I briefly mentioned, if the intestines are not functioning properly, as with constipation for example, this not only affects the functioning of the liver, but obviously also affects the functioning of the intestinal system. Constipation, which can be caused by a variety of reasons, such as a low fibre diet, insufficient or unbalanced intestinal bacteria, or processed, chemical laden foods, allows more time for toxic waste to accumulate in the intestines. This constipation not only increases the likelihood that this toxic waste is reabsorbed, but also provides an opportunity for hormones (that the liver has already worked hard to inactivate!) to become reabsorbed.

If leaky gut is also a problem (which is a whole other topic!), this exacerbates the issue, as harmful substances can pass through the intestinal wall more easily and become reabsorbed into the circulation. In order to improve our intestinal function, it's important to ensure that we are well hydrated by avoiding the over consumption of caffeine and drinking plenty of spring or filtered water. During periods of acute constipation, magnesium hydroxide is a suitable choice to stimulate peristalsis (the wave-like motion of the bowel) and re-establish normal motility.

As you can see, hormone imbalances are diverse and complex, however, taking things back to basics and turning the focus on nourishing the body is extremely important. This nourishment needs to come not only with foods, but also with thoughts.

Nourishing the body with natural, whole, unprocessed foods is a great place to start. These foods will not only give our bodies the nutrients that it needs to function optimally, but also ensure that we are not consuming toxic chemicals such as pesticides, preservatives and artificial colours and flavours that are toxic to the body.

A great place to start is to focus on organically & 100% pastured (local if possible) meats & eggs, sustainably caught fish and seafood and organically grown vegetables, fruits, oils, nuts and seeds. Organic, preferably raw and/or fermented dairy products may also be part of a healthy diet if one is not sensitive to them. Focusing on these foods will nourish your body and help prevent the consumption of harmful toxins.

Louise Hay explained in her book "You Can Heal Your Life" that the rise in PMS is related to a combination of a generalized increase in sugar consumption, coupled with the negative bombardment of advertisements that suggest that women are not acceptable the way they are and must primp, prime and change their appearance to be feminine and worthy, which demonstrates the spiritual aspect of hormone imbalance. Therefore, like previously stated, we need to not only support our bodies with nourishing foods and possibly short-term with supportive supplements, but we also need to work on our emotional & mental health in order to fully support balanced hormones.

This may include enrolling a professional to help support healing and recovery from emotional trauma, but should also incorporate daily practices that support self-love. This could include yoga, meditation, doing something that you love, thanking your body for all the amazing things it can do, getting involved in your community or reciting a mantra that really speaks to you.

As a holistic nutritionist, I can't end this without reaffirming that hormone balancing is complex and multifaceted, just like all of the amazing women of whom they are a part of! Hormones are an important component of our overall holistic health that should be addressed with the love and respect that they deserve. If you find that you've tried the above steps and are still struggling with hormonal imbalance, please contact a trusted health care provider and/or a Registered Holistic Nutritionist who can provide you with more guidance.

**Disclaimer – Always contact your primary health care provider before starting any new supplements.*

Resources

Hay, L. (1995). You can heal your life. Carson, CA: Hay House, Inc.

Perrault, D. (2015). Nutritional symptomology: A handbook for CSNN students. Richmond Hill, ON: CSNN Publishing.