

## Hormone Balancing: Considering The Alternatives

By

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The subject of hormones and hormonal balancing is on the minds of many people these days. In particular, post- or perimenopausal women are taking a new, measured, more sober look at the various options available to address this significant health challenge. While there is much information available on the various strategies for hormone balancing, one must approach each option carefully, and ensure that the information is unbiased, validated and complete.

We are all familiar with the recent negative revelations concerning synthetic and non-human hormone replacement. Despite these revelations, and the sometimes sad and catastrophic consequences accompanying them, some health care providers still elect to use these dangerous substances. A decision regarding hormone therapy is, ultimately, the joint responsibility of the individual and her health care provider. However, it is important to have adequate knowledge of all available options before committing to a course of action.

One must also be aware of the effects of the various therapies on the human body. That requires an understanding of how hormones work in the post-menopausal phase of life. After menopause, the source of reproductive hormones is supposed to be the adrenal glands. Specifically, under normal circumstances the hormone androstenedione is secreted by the adrenals and is then conjugated into the various estrogens and progesterone. However, if the adrenals are compromised by chronic and protracted stress, the body will be unable to synthesize the appropriate levels of hormones. The results are usually a difficult menopause and post-menopause. A growing body of research reveals that chronic adrenal stress correlates directly to the challenges experienced during menopause.

A new wrinkle being touted by both the medical/pharmaceutical community and several well known celebrities (who, by the way, are very well compensated for their endorsements and books on the subject) is so-called "bio-identical" hormone therapy. This is supposed to be the answer that synthetic/non-human hormone therapy was not. However, some important factors concerning this therapy must be considered. First, ANY external hormone source bypasses the body's own control mechanism. The hypothalamus and pituitary and adrenal glands are supposed to provide for and regulate the body's hormonal needs during post-menopause. By replacing their activities with an external hormone source, their ability to regulate those particular hormones is deactivated, ultimately permanently. No matter how precise an external therapy may be, it cannot replace the accuracy of the body. Thus, after using bio-identical hormones for a time, you will become dependent upon the ability of your provider to provide an accurate dose, without error, for the rest of your life.

Second, recent research has disclosed that the absolute value of the reproductive hormones in the body is as important as the balance of those hormones. For many years, the medical endocrinology community has treated its patients on the premise that the ratio of progesterone and the estrogens is the sole critical factor in maintaining safe

hormonal balance. However, more up-to-date research reveals that sufficiently high levels of progesterone can cause the same tissue-proliferative effects that elevated estrogen levels can. These effects, and their associated risk of cancer, are the main reason why hormonal therapies are initiated. Ignoring this information adds additional risk to use of traditional or updated exogenous hormonal balancing therapies.

Third, the medical community largely ignores the importance of proper liver function in maintaining hormonal balance. The liver is literally the body's chemical plant. Every substance that is ingested or absorbed by the body must pass through the liver for processing. With respect to hormone balance, if the liver is not functioning optimally, the unused hormones can be incompletely processed, allowing them to circulate back into the bloodstream, reconstitute into usable hormones, and add to the problem of hormonal imbalance. Given the combination of dietary imbalances, toxic exposure and stress that the vast majority of people experience, very few currently enjoy optimal liver function.

Fourth, the current state of medical hormone therapy is largely based on the relatively simple measures of evaluating serum hormone levels and subjective patient self-reporting. If serum hormone levels are normal and the patient reports feeling better, the medical practitioner assumes that the therapy is working. Not necessarily. In the case of post-menopausal women, the relationship between adequate adrenal and liver function and the onset of adverse menopausal symptoms is crucial to proper hormonal balance. These symptoms are the primary reasons why such women seek medical help. However, the medical community ignores the importance of adrenal gland and liver status when undertaking hormone therapy.

Because most post-menopausal women in this society are estrogen dominant, supplemental progesterone is the predominant prescription for restoring balance. However, progesterone is the primary steroid-based hormone from which all other reproductive and stress hormones are conjugated, including the key stress hormone, cortisol. Research has indicated that a body under prolonged stress, or whose adrenal function is compromised, will literally steal the prehormonal substance pregnenolone (from which progesterone is conjugated) to make cortisol, in the process depriving the body of the material to make all the other reproductive and stress hormones. Since virtually all symptomatic post-menopausal women are adrenally compromised, they will all experience this "pregnenolone steal." They usually report feeling better, but it is difficult, if not impossible (absent saliva hormone assessment), to determine if the improvement is due to relief of cortisol deficit or to restoration of reproductive hormonal balance. As you can see, the combination of adrenal compromise, liver function, and the body's stress response are major complicating factors for maintenance of proper hormonal balance using conventional therapies of any kind.

Finally, this therapy has NOT been subject to long term testing. Women of the early 1960s were wooed by the benefits of the then-wonder therapy of non-human hormone replacement (later updated with synthetic hormones). We now know the regrettable results. While we cannot state unequivocally that this same scenario will be played out with bio-identical hormones, the truth is that we just don't know for sure what will happen. It is right now, literally, a roll of the dice.

What is not a roll of the dice is the natural approach. By helping the body to reconstitute itself through stress management, diet and lifestyle modification, and

targeted nutritional supplementation, one can enjoy this phase of life without concern about the side effects of the other therapies.

What exactly do we mean by that? First, the body's hormonal state must be accurately assessed by salivary testing of both the adrenal and reproductive hormones. While the medical community prefers the use of serum testing for hormonal assessment, this method reports the hormonal levels that have been conjugated by the liver and attached to proteins in the blood. In contrast, salivary testing reports the hormonal levels in contact with the body's tissues at the time the sample is taken. It's like the difference between watching a video tape versus a live report on the nightly news.

Second, once the results have been assessed, a targeted stress management, diet, lifestyle and supplementation protocol can be established which will rebalance the body's systems. This allows the body's own governing mechanisms to take over. Emphasis is placed on the proper functioning of both the adrenals and the liver, whose importance was previously mentioned.

The challenge of this approach is that it takes time. Unlike hormonal replacement, which can show almost instantaneous results, all natural approaches require the body to "entrain" itself to the nutrients being offered. "Entrainment" means that the body's innate wisdom must identify the nutrient, decide what to do with it, and then employ it properly. This process can take up to 90 days to occur.

Whatever protocol one chooses, it is important that the choice be an adequately informed one. If the natural approach is for you, contact us and let us help!

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