

# Physiology of Hormones

by Dr. Sherrill Sellman



Women and hormones equal big business these days. Like animals lured into a snare by a trail of crumbs, women have been cajoled with scientific studies, media advertising, patient handbooks and drug samples to accept Hormone Replacement Therapy as a magic potion. HRT is praised as the cure for hot flashes and all the other symptoms assigned to the menopause pantheon. In addition, it is considered an anti-aging medicine acting as a talisman to ward off osteoporosis, heart disease and even Alzheimers.

Millions of menopausal women flock to their doctors' offices each year seeking relief from such complaints as hot flashes, night sweats, bloating, indigestion, allergies, headaches, insomnia, fatigue, depression, high blood pressure, weight gain, head hair loss facial, hair growth, mood swings, aging skin, irritability, foggy thinking, lack of concentration, anxiety attacks, heart palpitations, bone loss, and heavy bleeding. The common panacea prescribed for all these symptoms is usually HRT. All these presenting symptoms are lumped together into the menopausal pigeon hole, estrogen deficiency is the diagnosis and synthetic estrogen replacement becomes the cure. An obvious and simple solution for hormonal imbalance ! Or so we are led to believe.



But what if these symptoms that most plague forty and fifty year old women are not at all about menopause? What if it's not estrogen deficiency, but rather estrogen excess that is the cause of these discomforts? What if the real physiological problems are, in fact, being ignored, misdiagnosed or misunderstood? And what if the pathological condition of "menopause", the supposed cause of a midlife woman's lament doesn't even exist?

Unfortunately, women have been intentionally led on a merry hormone goose chase. While medicalizing and pathologizing of menopausal women with potent, carcinogenic and dangerous steroid drugs has filled the coffers of the drug companies and doctors alike, the real cause of these health problems has been ignored....and so have safe and effective solutions. Menopause, far from being a stage in a woman's life that leads her into a dark dungeon of discomfort and decline, is actually a time when the abuses of life style, poor diet, environmental toxicities, and stress finally take their toll. Hormonal imbalances are, in fact, symptoms of poor health. If the symptoms are addressed only with various HRT formulations,, the real underlying problems are not just ignored but in all likelihood, worsened. When you add in the possible 120 the side-effects from HRT, you have a frightening recipe for disaster.

## Digestion, Malabsorption and Candida

A healthy digestive and a gastro-intestinal system are the keys to good health. It begins with the first bite. Proper digestion depends on the proper secretion of digestive enzymes and the digestive system's ability to assimilate and absorb foods. Most health problems begin here. No matter what foods are eaten, everything in our diets are composed of proteins, carbohydrates and fat, sugars, and fiber. The essential digestive enzymes (protease, amylase, lipase, disaccharidase and cellulase) are necessary to break them down during digestion. 1

While hypothyroidism is also one of the least understood health conditions by the medical profession, the causes are readily known by alternative medicine. Radiation is probably the greatest environmental cause. This includes both ionizing radiation such as emitted by nuclear reactors and non-ionizing radiation from the electromagnetic fields of common electrical appliances and geopathic stress zones. Another significant cause is estrogen dominance (an excess of estrogen in relation to progesterone). Estrogen dominance interferes with the uptake of thyroid hormones and can result from taking birth control pills, estrogen replacement therapy, or exposure to pesticides, powerful estrogen mimics and other environmental toxins. Stress and nutritional deficiencies such as selenium, glutathione, iodine and zinc also have a key role. And once again an imbalance in microflora of the gut decrease the body's ability to uptake thyroid hormone.

Other thyroid inhibitors include excess intake of unsaturated fats (liquid oils at room temperature), fluoride, heavy metal poisoning, mercury amalgam fillings, low protein diet, soy products, raw cruciferous vegetables (cabbage, cauliflower, broccoli etc), and endurance exercise. The most popular thyroid medication, Synthroid which is an inactive form of the thyroid hormone actually shrinks the thyroid gland, suppresses the pituitary and suppresses cellular respiration. Another side-effect of synthroid is osteoporosis.

We live in a thyroid toxic culture and environment. No wonder it is such a common disorder. However there are very effective natural approaches to help in regulating the thyroid. Natural progesterone balances the thyroid inhibiting effect of estrogen dominance. As does supplementation with thyroid glandular extracts, enzyme therapy, and herbal remedies such as the Auyurvedic herb, gulgulipid.

Dietary recommendations to support thyroid function include getting adequate protein ie organic beef, poultry, eggs, fish, cultured milk products such as kefir and yogurt.

Thyroid healing foods include these high in the B vitamins such as wheat germ, whole grains, nuts, seeds, dark greens, legumes and Brewer's yeast. Other foods include seaweeds, wheat germ oil or natural Vitamin E,

Another great thyroid promoting food is organic, non-hydrogenated coconut oil. Contrary to negative publicity, current research shows that it is incorrect to think that all saturated fatty acids raise cholesterol levels. There are two groups of saturated fats – medium and long-chain. Medium-chain saturates found in non-hydrogenated coconut oil, do not clog arteries nor do they cause heart disease. Instead, medium-chain saturated fats convert into energy, do not store as fat and enable the body to metabolize fat efficiently - all vital thyroid functions. In addition coconut oil acts as an anti-histamine, an anti-diabetic, an anti-infective and even an anti-cancer agent!

Unfortunately most of the standard thyroid tests often fail to pinpoint an underactive thyroid, leading physicians to make erroneous diagnoses. Subclinical conditions abound. However, there are effective self-diagnosis tests. Taking an underarm temperature reading with an oral thermometer first thing in the morning for 5 consecutive days. Leave it under the arm for 5-10 minutes. It is even more effective if you keep your eyes open and have exposure to bright lights for half an hour before taking the test. But remember to say in bed and remain inactive. A low functioning thyroid will show an average temperature of under 97.5 F. Also check the resting pulse. Less than 85 beats per minute plus a low basal temperature may indicate hypothyroidism.

Another simple test is to paint an area on your thigh or belly with a 2 inch in diameter with a 2% tincture of iodine. If the yellowish stain disappears in less than 24 hours, it indicates your body has an iodine deficiency, a cause of hypothyroidism. Continuing to paint different areas of your body every 24 hours until the stain remains a full 24 hours will increase your iodine levels. Seaweeds and Celtic sea salt will rich sources of iodine.

## The Adrenal Glands



The glands which work hand in glove with the thyroid are the adrenal glands, two small prune-shaped glands that sit on top of the kidneys. Although small in size they are very big in function. They are involved in manufacturing 28 different hormones, the digestion of food especially carbohydrates and sugar, the regulation of the body's minerals, producing and maintaining the body's energy levels in conjunction with the thyroid, producing hormones that monitor stress. Progesterone is the primary raw material for producing adrenal gland hormones.

Prolonged stress, whether as a result of emotional, environmental or physical causes is disastrous for the adrenals. Initially it increases the output of the adrenal hormone, cortisol. Cortisol helps to regulate blood sugar, the movement of carbohydrates, proteins and fats in and out of the cells, inflammation and muscle function. Chronic stress causes chronically elevated levels of cortisol resulting in weight gain (especially around

the midsection), blood sugar imbalances, thinning skin, muscle wasting, memory loss, high blood pressure, dizziness, hot flashes, excessive facial hair, and other masculinizing tendencies.

Overworked adrenals will eventually crash leading to adrenal exhaustion and unable to maintain adequate production of adrenal hormones. Symptoms of overtaxed adrenals include extreme fatigue such as in Chronic Fatigue Syndrome, irritability, inability to concentrate, frustration, insomnia, addictions to either sweet or salty foods, allergies, nervousness, depression, PMS sensitivity to cold, diabetes and headaches. Chronic low blood pressure is a key symptom of adrenal exhaustion.

Adrenal exhaustion creates havoc with the endocrine system. Many hormonal imbalances in women of all ages are caused by overworked adrenal glands. Nutrients that have special importance to the adrenal glands are the B vitamins (especially B5), vitamin C, proteins, magnesium, manganese, zinc, potassium, plant enzymes, adrenal extracts, and the amino acids, tyrosine and phenylalanine. Rest is the best when it comes to rebuilding the adrenals. And so is stress reduction. Shedding one's life of those stressful events, people, demands, high pressure jobs as well as addressing unresolved emotional wounds is vital for healing the adrenal glands.

As more and more women awaken from the spell that has been cast upon them, it becomes apparent that menopause is not the enemy of their quality of life. Popping a hormone pill is certainly not the solution. Regaining the knowledge of their female physiology, reducing their hectic lives, honoring the needs of their bodies and returning to the healing power of natural foods and natural medicines, is, indeed, the greatest challenge for women in this new millennium.

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