

The Trials and Tribulations of *women's hormones*



by **Elizabeth Beetham**

Hormonal Imbalance and the associated Pre-Menstrual Tension (PMT) can be responsible for a whole range of problems including: acne, skin eruptions, anxiety, bloating, breast swelling and tenderness, cramps, depression, food cravings, fainting spells, fatigue, headaches, mood swings, outbursts of anger, insomnia, nervousness, joint pain and water retention.

Don't despair, there are things you can do. First let's look at what we need to eliminate, particularly for the last two weeks of your cycle, as these exacerbate your symptoms:

- Caffeine is a diuretic and also increases nervous tension in the body. Try herbal teas and water instead.
- Chocolate – I know you are craving it but it will only make you feel worse.
- Reduce salt intake – salt can increase water retention.
- Processed foods – they contain too much sugar and saturated fats which will only make you feel horrid.
- Dairy – including cheese, milk, cream and ice-cream. You may have an underlying intolerance to dairy which is putting your body under stress and it is already working hard to keep you in balance.

To help improve your symptoms naturally you need to eat a varied diet with plenty of fresh fruits and vegetables, whole-grain cereals and breads, beans, peas, lentils, nuts and seeds and lean protein particularly chicken, turkey and fish. Make these changes to actually improve your symptoms

- Eat well do not skip meals. A poor diet will exacerbate PMT, particularly fluctuating blood sugar levels so eat small meals regularly. We crave food when we allow our blood sugar levels to drop. Make sure this does not happen.
- Support your nervous system, by taking a good quality Vitamin B complex which can really help reduce the symptoms of bloating, cravings, tiredness and mood swings.
- Lower your saturated fat intake and reduce oestrogen levels in the body which will help you feel less irritable and anxious.
- Make sure you increase your intake of essential fats found in oily fish, linseeds, nuts and unsaturated cooking oils. These provide the Omegas which are required for the production of prostaglandins which are hormone like substances and help control the premenstrual cycle. Evening Primrose Oil can also make a big difference in reducing breast tenderness.

- Boost your magnesium which is important for nerves and provides energy. Magnesium rich foods are whole grains, nuts, pulses, seafood, lean meat, dairy products, bananas and green vegetables.

Now let us take a quick look at the menopause. Firstly let me say that the menopause is not a disease but a natural biological transition; it is the time at which a woman stops ovulating and menstruation ceases, and she is no longer fertile.

The changes that are happening in the body start many years before a woman stops ovulating, when the production of the hormones oestrogen, progesterone and testosterone slows down. This is known as the perimenopausal stage and can start as early as 30; many women experience no symptoms but for others the feelings of anxiety, dry skin, fatigue, bloating, headaches, heart palpitations, hot flushes, insomnia, irritability, decreased libido, loss of concentration and more can be awful.

Oestrogen is essential for reproduction but it also acts on many non reproductive organs and systems in the body. Cells in the vagina, bladder, breasts, skin, bones, arteries, heart, liver and brain all contain oestrogen receptors and need this hormone. Oestrogen keeps the skin smooth and moist and the body's internal thermostat operating properly – hence when the levels drop sharply hot flushes are experienced. Your doctor may recommend hormone replacement therapy (HRT) to control severe symptoms but although this can be effective, there is increasing evidence that it can increase the risk of breast cancer. The decision to take HRT must be considered carefully and with consultation with your doctor.

I believe in a natural approach to the menopause and encourage women to view this stage in their lives as liberating and exciting. It is important to focus on the positive aspects rather than feeling that this is a disease. Coenzyme Q10 can be beneficial as it supports the immune system, reduces fatigue, supports the adrenal glands and can improve overall physical and mental processes. Also choose foods with oestrogen-like compounds called phytoestrogens (plant oestrogens) found in soybeans, tofu, miso, flaxseeds, pomegranates, and dates. With a good diet, exercise and nutritional supplements most symptoms of the menopause can be minimised or eliminated.

Women have to live with their hormones but that does not mean we have to suffer them! Please contact me if you want further advice.

Live with joy and health.

**Elizabeth Beetham BSc
Holistic Nutritionist, Natural
Health Journalist and
Wellbeing Expert shares her
knowledge to help you cope
with hormonal imbalances**

We know that from puberty until menopause women's hormones have a very powerful and often difficult affect on our lives. How problematic the whole management of our monthly cycle can be is really hard for most men to grasp. There is nothing as awful as when your logical brain is saying one thing and your emotional and physical body is saying another. Whether it's the big ugly spot which is hard to conceal or the frayed nerves and the emotional roller coaster, hormonal changes can really be hell!

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