

HEALTH & MEDICINE



HEALTH TREND REPORT:

Depression? Anxiety? Memory Problems? Not Sleeping? It could be a hormone imbalance.

By: Bill Beckman, RPh

We all know we won't live forever and that as we age, our bodies start to wear out and our minds can lose clarity. For some women, the years leading up to menopause can feel like the body and mind are wearing out twice as fast for no particularly good reason. When the ovaries' production line begins to slow down, many women experience the classic signs of menopause including hot flashes, night sweats and unwanted weight gain. But in some women, these old faithfuls never present themselves. Instead, symptoms appear such as depression, anxiety, foggy thinking and a declining interest in sex, all of which tend to be written off as a "normal" part of aging. We're finding that many of the women who are battling these symptoms simply have a hormone imbalance that can be corrected.

Feeling blue or not as sharp? It may not all be in your head.

Hormone imbalances can occur at any time in life and depressive moods and irritability are often associated with PMS. However, at the onset of menopause the rhythm of the monthly hormone levels starts to falter. More and more studies indicate that the body's loss of two of the major sex hormones – progesterone and estradiol - may shift the chemical environment enough to make depression and other mood disorders more apparent. When estradiol, one of several estrogen hormones found in the body, and progesterone connect with receptor sites in the brain, it's like a key opening a lock that, in turn, creates a chemical reaction. When there are not enough keys to operate these locks, the areas of the brain that control memory and mood are impacted.

"When I counsel women over 40 complaining of fatigue, depression or sleep problems, I ask them when they last had a physical and a hormone check," said Denise Hamel-Cassidy, co-director of Heritage Family Counseling Center in Hamilton, Mass. "Before considering antidepressants that don't address the real cause of the problem, I recommend they see an endocrinologist or gynecologist who is 'in the know' about bioidentical hormones."

Did your get up and go leave for good?

Fatigue is one of the most common symptoms of hormonal imbalance often caused by a number of things happening simultaneously. A common menopause symptom is hot flashes and night sweats, which can interrupt sleep patterns all night long. This puts stress on the body, which can in turn, impact adrenal function. The adrenal glands try to manage stress by producing cortisol. However, too much cortisol production combined with low levels of our stress management hormone DHEA which can fall during menopause creates an endless cycle of fatigue, no matter what time we go to bed.

When it comes to our sex drive, the onset of menopause can greatly impact desire. Progesterone, testosterone (yes, women need testosterone too), estradiol and another estrogen compound – estriol - are key players in the maintenance of circulation and nerve transmission, so an imbalance of these hormones can easily lead to changes in sexual response.

How to achieve hormone balance

Just as the symptoms of hormone imbalance differ from woman to woman, so do the solutions. Some women have great success using phyto (plant) estrogens, such as Dong Quai and Black Cohosh, optimal nutrition and relaxation exercises. However, many women turn to natural, bio-identical hormones for real relief. While synthetic hormones have been around for over 60 years, they were never designed to achieve hormone balance and their long-term side effects have come under question. As a compounding pharmacy, Custom Medicine Pharmacenter is devoted exclusively to creating prescriptions from scratch to meet each patient's individual needs. In addition to creating the prescriptions, we work with patients to test hormone levels and listen to their needs. Using test results as a guideline, bio-identical hormones can be prescribed as needed to restore balance and tame the symptoms. Once the appropriate combination of hormones has been determined, Custom Medicine will create a customized prescription in any dosage form you and your clinician feel is appropriate – topical creams, capsules, lozenges or sublingual drops.

If your doctor is unfamiliar with bio-identical hormones or needs more information, he or she may contact our pharmacy at 978-524-4800. We can also help you find a practitioner who specializes in midlife and menopause issues. Ask questions and know your options. Together we can design a program that matches your health needs and goals

Bill Beckman, RPh is one of only 3,500 independent, community pharmacists nationwide who practices the art of pharmacy compounding that was the standard for hundreds of years. He owns Custom Medicine Pharmacenter with his wife Mary in Beverly, MA. As a registered pharmacist, he is a member of the Professional Compounding Centers of America. In addition to customizing topical pain relievers, the pharmacy specializes in pediatric medicine, discontinued product formulations, veterinary prescriptions, and bio-identical hormone replacement. Custom Medicine Pharmacenter, located at 25 Cabot Street in Beverly, is open Monday to Friday, 9:30 am - 5:30 pm and by appointment.

The pharmacy can be reached by calling 978-524-4800 or by emailing info@custommedicine.com.

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