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# Live Well

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*WOODSIDE*



## MAKING AN INFORMED DECISION: NATURAL VS SYNTHETIC HORMONES

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Exactly 5 years have passed since 2 major studies revealed that the health risks of taking synthetic hormone replacements outweigh the benefits. The studies – performed by the National Institutes of Health Women’s Initiative and the National Cancer Institute – found that conventional hormone replacement therapy increases rather than lowers the risk of heart disease and stroke and raises the chance of breast cancer.

Since then, many of the estimated 5 to 15 million women taking synthetic hormone replacements have been seeking alternate ways to ease the symptoms of menopause, including night sweats, hot flashes, irritability and low sex drive. Therapies such as acupuncture, herbal supplements, and so-called plant estrogens (phytoestrogens) have become increasingly popular. But the most talked about is one naturopathic physicians have been using for decades: natural or bio-identical hormone replacement therapy.

One of the most common concerns among my patients is the question of hormone replacement. Are

hormones safe? Can they prevent age-related health problems? What types of hormones should I take? What dose should I take? With the constantly expanding selection of hormones to choose from, and the continuing controversy surrounding hormone replacement therapy (HRT), comfortable decisions can be very difficult to make.

### What are hormones?

Many conventional physicians rely on a uniform dose (.625mg) of Premarin (a synthetic estrogen) for all HRT needs. (Premarin incidentally, is made from pregnant mare’s urine, hence the name.) The structure of this molecule is much different from a human estrogen molecule, and therefore can cause many unwanted side effects to the women taking them. They also can increase the risk of breast cancer overtime. Natural estrogens (which are still a prescription item) are derived from Mexican wild yam. The interesting thing about these natural estrogens is that they are identical to human estrogen molecules. This is why they are sometimes termed bio-identical hormones. The body

is unable to recognize a difference between your own hormones and that of natural HRT. It’s common sense that replacing low levels of hormones with their identical counterparts is superior to using horse urine. The goal is to always work with your body, instead of introducing foreign agents that your body has to react to, process, and eliminate. The advantages of natural HRT are that it is individualized, well-tolerated and produces exceptional symptom reversal in most cases. Natural HRT strives to achieve the correct levels of all hormones for optimal health.

A misconception to note is estrogen is not just one hormone but there are three different estrogens manufactured in our bodies: 1) estrone 2) estradiol 3) estriol. This is important to know because they have varying degrees of activity and ratios within our bodies. The ratio among these three estrogens in our bodies is estrone 10%, estradiol 10%, and estriol 80%. The significance of this is the majority of synthetic HRT prescribed to patients are made up of only estradiol. This would explain

the problems women develop while being treated with synthetic hormones . . . the synthetic HRT is introducing 100% estradiol into the body when it is accustomed to only 10%!

Our bodies were made to work with hormones that were balanced and worked together harmoniously. The two major hormones for women are estrogen and progesterone. Our lifestyles and culture create imbalanced hormones, which develop from diet, environment, prescriptions and stress.

### What hormones should I replace?

Sadly, most information in the media is centered solely on estrogen replacement, in spite of the fact that many other health promoting hormones exist. It’s amazing how estrogen and progesterone balance one another. For example: estrogen causes breast stimulation, progesterone protects against fibrocystic breast disease; estrogen causes depression and headaches, progesterone is a natural antidepressant; estrogen prevents the breakdown of bone, progesterone stimulates bone BUILDING; estrogen increases blood clotting, progesterone normalizes blood clotting. So why is natural progesterone not shared by the medical establishment? The word Natural is key. Pharmaceutical companies can’t patent a natural molecule. They must tinker with it first to alter the compound in order to ask for FDA approval to manufacture and distribute. Synthetic HRT and birth control pills are synthetic forms of hormones that are introduced into bodies that then have the burden of processing and eliminating these foreign agents. No wonder the body gets confused, stressed out and finally breaks down in disease.

### How do I know whether to use hormones?

In the same way there are healthy ranges for cholesterol, blood pressure, and blood sugar, there are also ideal levels for hormones. You may want to talk with your doctor about testing your hormone levels. Contrary to conventional thinking, evaluating hormone levels for imbalances through SALIVA produces the most accurate lab results versus the standard blood test. Saliva testing is the most accurate of the two methods since it measures the free, unbound, biologically-active hormone as it travels by passive diffusion from the capillaries into the saliva. Test results will give you an idea if HRT in any form is right for you. A base line test done in your thirties can tell what your hormone levels are at their peak. If you are currently on any HRT, overdosing can be dangerous, periodic monitoring is advisable through yearly testing. Your symptom picture and personal/family medical history will also play a role in the decision to use hormones.

### Where do I get natural HRT?

Oral, suppository, and cream doses of natural estrogen, progesterone, and testosterone are available by prescription only and can be custom made for individuals by a compounding pharmacy. Since the doses are customized, it’s not a one-size-fits-all dose. Every woman has her own hormonal fingerprint. Physicians knowledgeable in the use of natural HRT can help you obtain such a prescription.

If you are exhibiting any of the symptoms listed in the chart on the previous page, contact your doctor or a naturopath to learn more about HRT and how it can benefit you. ::

## Benefits of Hormones

### ESTROGEN

- :: Protection against osteoporosis, Alzheimer’s disease, colon cancer, incontinence and tooth loss
- :: Increases serotonin and endorphin levels
- :: Enhances mental acuity and memory
- :: Relieves menopausal symptoms

### PROGESTERONE

- :: Decreases risk of endometrial cancer
- :: Enhances mood and has calming effect
- :: Involved in PMS reduction
- :: Regulates fluid balance

### TESTOSTERONE

- :: Builds muscle and promotes muscle tone
- :: Increases libido
- :: Helps strengthen bones

### DHEA

- :: Protection from heart disease, osteoporosis, diabetes, lupus, rheumatoid arthritis
- :: Cancer prevention, enhances energy levels, libido, memory, and immunity
- :: Promotes psychological and physical well-being, protects against stress

### MELATONIN

- :: Cancer and heart disease prevention
- :: Promotes sleep
- :: Reported as a powerful antioxidant

## Symptoms of a Possible Hormone Imbalance

- |                 |                    |                      |                    |
|-----------------|--------------------|----------------------|--------------------|
| :: Hot Flashes  | :: Water Retention | :: Low Energy        | :: Dry Skin        |
| :: Migraines    | :: Endometriosis   | :: Prostate Problems | :: Irritability    |
| :: Night Sweats | :: Acne            | :: Low Sex Drive     | :: Weight Gain     |
| :: Hair Loss    | :: Depression      | :: Osteoporosis      | :: Oily Skin       |
| :: Insomnia     | :: Muscle Loss     | :: Impotence         | :: Anxiety         |
| :: Fibroids     | :: Gum Disease     | :: Osteopenia        | :: Vaginal Dryness |