

Estrogen Dominance and Hormone Balancing

Lisa's Story

Lisa is a hard-working woman who has dedicated her life to the service of others. A speech therapist who owns her own business, she is constantly busy improving her language therapy techniques as well as managing the finances of a small business. Ever since puberty, however, she has struggled with migraines. These persistent and enduring migraines always seem to be worse at the onset of her period, often leaving her completely debilitated. She has taken the usual litany of migraine medicines such as Imitrex and Topamax, but the medicine often left her feeling dizzy with rebound headaches or fatigued. Frustrated with the migraines which dictated Lisa's ability to live her life, and the Imitrex which left her with undesired side effects, Lisa began to research other more holistic solutions to her migraines. Lisa's battle with migraines had a direct and immediate impact on the life choices she made. She was ready to be the author of her own life, and eradicate the migraine issue at its root.

The Importance of Hormone Balancing

How we feel and our quality of life are very dependent upon the delicate balance of three essential functions:

- 1. Reproductive hormones (the body's masters of ceremony)*
- 2. Adrenal glands (the body's alarm system)*
- 3. Thyroid gland (the body's furnace)*

Each of these powerful components are intertwined, with one dependent upon the other. When one is out of balance, it has a direct and tangible effect on the others. The net result is that your sense of well-being is diminished and your quality of life affected.

In this article, we will address the relationship of two key reproductive hormones- progesterone and estrogen- and the influence of estrogen dominance on our health. We will explain how and why these hormones serve as our body's "masters of ceremony." In future articles we will discuss the thyroid and adrenal glands, and their contribution to our health as a whole.

The Estrogen/Progesterone Relationship

Estrogen and progesterone play essential roles in the body, and understanding these roles is an important step in maintaining and renewing hormonal balance. In addition to the development of female characteristics at puberty and the beginning of the menstrual cycle, estrogen also affects skeletal growth; the deposition of fat, protein and skin; and electrolyte balance.

While estrogen is a developmental catalyst and stimulant, progesterone is a multi-purpose hormonal building block. Progesterone is responsible for converting cholesterol into cortisol, DHEA (Dehydroepiandrosterone), testosterone and estrogen; and maintaining a healthy electrolyte balance and blood pressure level. Progesterone also prevents the uterine lining from shedding during pregnancy, and is therefore crucial for fetus survival. One of progesterone's most important roles, however, is preventing high levels of unopposed estrogen.

Estrogen and progesterone are needed in the system to work as members of a team, and as oppositional forces. It is important that balance is maintained between the two.

18 Estrogen Dominance Symptoms

High levels of estrogen become an issue when they are unopposed by adequate levels of progesterone. An excess of estrogen causes uncontrolled cell growth, leading to a variety of complications. Though there is usually less progesterone than estrogen in the body, the following problems can arise when the relationship becomes exceedingly off-balance.

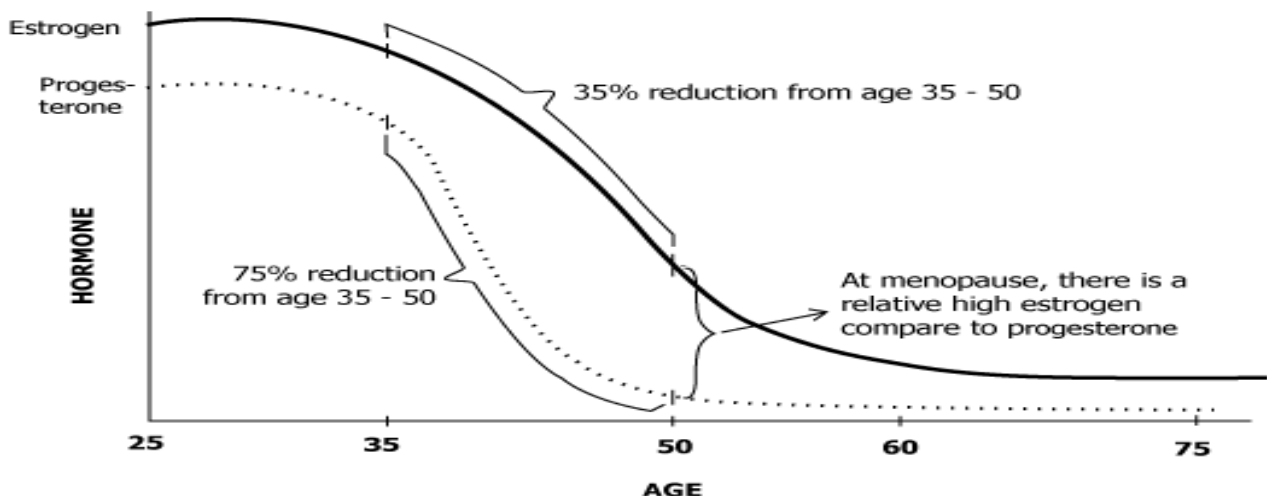
- 1. Excess estrogen is the only known cause of endometrial cancer*
- 2. Increased risk of breast cancer*
- 3. Loss of bone mass*
- 4. Increased risk of autoimmune disorders such as lupus*
- 5. Fibrocystic breasts*
- 6. Uterine fibroids*
- 7. Depression and irritability*
- 8. PMS symptoms such as cramping and bloating*
- 9. Menopausal symptoms such as hot flashes and night sweats*
- 10. Decreased sex drive*
- 11. Increased body hair and thinning of scalp hair*
- 12. Migraine headaches*
- 13. Impaired thyroid function, including Grave's disease*
- 14. Increased body fat*
- 15. Increased blood clotting*
- 15. Impaired blood sugar control*
- 16. Endometriosis*
- 17. Polycystic Ovary Syndrom (PCOS)*
- 18. Low Thyroid Function*

The first step for women to reclaim their quality of life is to examine not just levels of estrogen and progesterone, but the ratio between the two. Often, lab results will report that the levels of estrogen and progesterone are normal, but fail to take into consideration their proportional relationship.

The progesterone/estrogen ratio is affected by a wide range of other factors, including age, diet, steroids, thyroid, and other hormones.

How does estrogen dominance develop?

Estrogen dominance is extremely common among women in industrialized nations and a normal part of the aging process. The image below illustrates the estrogen-progesterone relationship during the



course of a woman's life. Though estrogen is almost always more prevalent in the body than progesterone, we can see that this imbalance is more pronounced between 35-50 years.

Image used courtesy of http://www.drlam.com/articles/Estrogen_Dominance.asp

Besides age, three main sources of estrogen dominance are:

1. *pharmaceutical*: synthetically produced hormones that are prescribed by a doctor.
2. *xenoestrogens*: chemically-based estrogens found in a modernized environment.
3. *phytoestrogens*: naturally-occurring estrogen found in plants and plant derivatives.

All three are capable of mimicking our body's natural estrogen and can drastically alter hormonal balance.

1. *Pharmaceutical (synthetically produced Hormone Replacement and birth control pills, progesterone)*: prescriptions for a hormonal imbalance can increase estrogen dominance and lead to additional complications. Unfortunately, pharmaceutical companies will not advocate for a medicine which they cannot patent, which is why synthetically produced hormones are prescribed more frequently than safer options such as Bio-identical hormones. Synthetic estrogen and progesterone are directly linked to estrogen dominance and it's symptoms.

a. *Synthetically produced Hormone Replacement* is extremely potent, eradicating symptoms of estrogen dominance initially but leaving the body with long-lasting effects. The strength of the synthetic estrogen confuses the body into believing it no longer needs to produce estrogen itself, paradoxically throwing off the estrogen-progesterone balance.

Though not specifically prescribed to treat hormonal imbalance, ***birth control pills*** are a prime example of a pharmaceutical that directly contributes to estrogen dominance. A woman's monthly cycle is dictated by the natural fluctuation of estrogen and progesterone. Birth control pills function by maintaining estrogen at unnaturally high levels to fool the body into believing it is pregnant, thereby preventing another pregnancy from occurring. The synthetic estrogen found in birth control pills contributes to and exacerbates estrogen dominance.

b. *Synthetically produced progesterone* (called progestin). As with synthetically produced estrogen, progestin inhibits your body from making it's own progesterone, leading to many detrimental health complications.

2. *Xenoestrogens*

There are over 70,000 registered chemicals in the U.S. that have toxic hormonal effects. Xenoestrogens are often found in plastics, canned foods, yogurt containers, baby bottles, styrofoam, pesticides and herbicides, paints, lacquers and solvents, detergent, personal care products, ALL artificial scents and air fresheners, perfumes, feminine hygiene products, fuels, industrial chemicals (cadmium, lead, mercury, PCBs, and dioxins), and dairy and meat raised with Rbst (recombinant bovine growth hormone), and even the synthetic hormones prescribed to combat estrogen dominance.

Problematic Xenoestrogens: A Closer Look at B.P.A.

One of the most potent xenoestrogens, B.P.A. (bisphenol A), is most commonly found in plastic bottles and can linings. While it has been claimed by the USFDA that limited exposure to B.P.A. is not

harmful, many recent studies are finding that our actual exposure to this xenoestrogen is exponentially greater than the USFDA concedes. The USFDA has released a strong health advisory for the avoidance of B.P.A. by pregnant and nursing mothers, leading many to wonder if any exposure is safe for children or adults.

3. Phytoestrogens

Phytoestrogens are naturally produced and are generally weak in comparison to xenoestrogens or our body's naturally occurring estrogen. They are found in soy (soybeans, soy milk, tofu, tempeh, textured vegetable protein, roasted soybeans, soy granules, soy protein powders, miso, edamames), the lignans in flax seed products, red clover, black cohosh, chasteberry, and dong quai. If you discover an estrogen dominance, you should avoid eating these foods. However, it is most important to avoid chemically-based estrogen since the overall effect of plant-based estrogen is minimal by comparison.

Estrogen Dominance Testing

Most doctors only test for estrogen and rarely assess progesterone levels nor the relationship between the two, leaving patients without real solutions. With so many different testing options, it is hard to know which are the best. Here is a look at two of the most common tests.

1. Blood Testing

Most estrogen and progesterone are protein-bound, with only 2-5% percent “free” in the body. The “free” estrogen and progesterone are what affect the body and it's functions, while the protein-bound hormones are for the most part inactive. Blood tests measure protein-bound hormones which are inactive, therefore this type of exam is not recommended by many health practitioners.

2. Saliva Testing

Saliva testing measures hormones that are biologically active, or “fractionated.” Saliva tests are inexpensive, done at home and consist of various samples taken at different times during one full day. Since our hormone levels fluctuate during the day, this method is a more accurate representation of the true estrogen-progesterone relationship. Additionally, saliva testing analyzes testosterone levels and the stress hormone cortisol, offering a more comprehensive view of our overall hormonal health.

You can take control of the situation and regain the quality of life and sense of well-being that you once enjoyed. With a thorough evaluation and consultation, appropriate health changes can be made to reclaim your quality of life. Each situation is different, and the approach will vary based on your specific needs. With assistance, you can rebalance your body and return to a better state of health.

How to Correct Hormonal Imbalances

Until recently, doctors prescribed pharmaceutical hormones for menopausal symptoms or estrogen dominance. However, many doctors have since rejected these treatment methods because studies show synthetic hormones often compound a hormonal imbalance and lead to a higher incidence of breast cancer, heart disease, stroke, blood clots and dementia. Additionally, this medicine also makes tumors more difficult to detect. Due to negative side effects and proof that synthetic hormones often increase estrogen dominance, many doctors and women are turning to bio-identical hormone replacement, lifestyle and diet changes. It is crucial that you find a health practitioner who understands how to incorporate a variety of treatments that work for your needs.

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Bio-identical progesterone, Nutrients, and DIM and Calcium D-glucarate

1. Bio-identical hormones are much safer and more sustainable than synthetically produced hormone supplements. Since the bio-identical hormones are natural and have not been chemically altered in a lab, they do not cause detrimental secondary health issues. The bio-identical progesterone and estrogen supplements can be sublingual or transdermal, and have a number of benefits such as symptom relief for migraine headaches, PMS and menopause, improved sleep patterns, and possible protection against breast cancer and endometrial cancer. Sublingual supplements are most effective since they can be quickly and completely absorbed by the body while transdermal creams often get trapped in fat cells beneath the skin.

2. Nutrients such as Magnesium, Zinc and Vitamin B Complex rid your body of phytoestrogen and xenoestrogen and help your body manage stress.

3. DIM (Diindolylmethane) and Calcium D-glucarate are powerful estrogen metabolizers. Estrogen is excreted by both the liver and the large intestine. DIM and Calcium D-glucarate work as a team, stream-lining estrogen excretion in both the liver and the large intestine, respectively.

Lisa's Resolution

After consulting the appropriate health care provider, Lisa removed as many xenoestrogens and phytoestrogens from her home environment and diet. She began taking bio-identical progesterone and nutrient supplements, and soon noted a drastic improvement in her overall health. She has been migraine-free ever since.

Please call to schedule a free consultation and evaluation. At Ann Arbor Holistic Health Clinic we are known for providing professional and compassionate care. We strive to guide people towards a comprehensive and holistic healing strategy. Restoring your body to health will restore the quality of your life.

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