



## Bio-identical Hormone Therapy

### Menopause and the Signs of Menopause

Menopause is the time in a woman's life when the ovarian production of estrogens, progesterone, and testosterone declines. The average age of menopause onset is 51, plus or minus several years. Menopause is medically defined as the time in which a woman ceases to menstruate for the duration of 12 months. Although the definition properly describes the event, the process can begin up to 10 years earlier (called perimenopause).

Long before a woman's menstruation stops, she will have already noticed a change. Her periods become shorter in length and she notices a loss of energy, a decrease in strength, and a loss of libido. Her mood is altered and she may be more agitated, depressed, apathetic, and forgetful. While these are all symptoms of menopause, it is important to know that there is a bigger picture during this time your hormones are changing - you are experiencing the loss of estrogen, progesterone and testosterone.

### Perimenopause Symptoms

Perimenopause is the length of time before and one year after the final menstrual period, during which ovarian hormonal patterns change. The average age at which irregular cycles develop is approximately age 47 but in many cases can start as early as 35 years old. Like the signs of menopause, this is a normal part of a woman's life cycle. Women can experience many of the same signs of menopause and can find relief with bio-identical hormone therapy.

### Treating the Signs of Menopause and Perimenopause Symptoms

There is no way to stop menopause, it's a natural cycle of life. Every woman will go through menopause at some point in her life. However, the difference is how you treat it. Natural bio-identical hormone therapy will help you overcome the symptoms of menopause and perimenopause that occur with this stage in life.

There are many short-term benefits to natural bio-identical hormone therapy. The hot flashes, the night sweats, the irritability, and the loss of energy and strength begin to subside. Your libido is restored and you begin to feel more control over your emotions.

The term "bio-identical hormone therapy" is often used to describe a medication containing estrogen, progesterone, or other hormones that are chemically exact duplicates of hormones produced by women, primarily in the ovaries. Many of these bio-identical hormones are commercially available in several well-tested, FDA-approved, brand-name prescription drugs. (Estrace, Climara, Estring, Evamist, Prometrium)

Concern arises with the bio-identical hormone medications that are "custom-compounded" (custom-mixed) recipes prepared by a pharmacist following an individual prescriber's order for a specific patient. These medications do not have FDA approval because individually mixed recipes have not been tested to prove that the active ingredients are absorbed appropriately or provide predictable levels in blood and tissue. Further, there is no scientific evidence about the effects of these compounded medications on the body—both good and bad. All estrogen products need to be used with caution as there is a risk for blood clotting, likely breast cancer with prolonged use and uterine cancer if used in women with a uterus who do not use a supplemental progesterone product.

Salivary and repeated blood testing of hormone levels used by custom compounders is meaningless for midlife women as their hormone levels vary throughout the day, and from day to day. Saliva testing to determine if a woman has the "right amount" of hormones has not been proven accurate or reliable. Even blood testing of hormone levels has the drawback that levels vary throughout the day as well as from day to day. More important, the desired levels in postmenopausal women have not been established. In addition, an *individual woman's* physical comfort may not even be related to her absolute hormone levels.

### Official Statement from the FDA on Bio-identical Hormones

The FDA respects a healthcare provider's decision that his or her patient should receive a pharmacy-compounded hormone replacement drug, but the FDA also wants to assure that women and their healthcare providers understand the risks and benefits of those drugs. The FDA has seen claims that compounded bio-identical hormone drugs avoid the risks of FDA-approved treatments for the symptoms of menopause, and that these drugs can prevent or reduce the risk of serious illnesses such as heart disease, stroke and breast cancer. The FDA knows of no credible scientific evidence supporting these claims.

### Peri/Menopausal Health is More Than Just Hormone Management

Your primary defense is to eat well and be physically active; this is a lifestyle adjustment for this new phase of your life. Get plenty of fruits, vegetables, beans, and whole grains. Soluble fiber from these foods can help control blood sugar, cholesterol, and blood pressure levels, and your

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appetite, as well. Soy, which contains estrogenlike plant compounds, may help manage menopausal symptoms—though the research is far from definite. Still, most recommend soy because it's a very nutritious food that can act as a meat substitute, displacing a source of saturated fat in your diet.

Exercise will help maintain muscle, which keeps your metabolism from falling. Weight-bearing activity is also the most reliable strategy for preserving and protecting bone. But yes, in addition to this, there are recommended supplements. Omega-3 fatty acids may help maintain your hormonal balance and aid in weight loss. There's also evidence that omega-3s can help control insulin resistance. One gram of fish oil twice daily is recommended. Getting a good night's sleep and reducing caffeine intake are important health measures to round out your day.

To help protect bones, and perhaps to help direct calories to muscle rather than fat, you are recommended to take supplements that give you 1,000 milligrams of calcium and 600 international units of vitamin D daily, *in addition* to what you get from dairy. If you have abdominal weight gain, high blood pressure, high triglycerides, low levels of HDL cholesterol, or constant hunger, it may signify insulin resistance, and some nutritionists recommend chromium picolinate, 400 micrograms twice daily.

When it comes to losing weight, there is no such thing as a diet, there is only proper nutrition. There is no quick fix, no magic pill, no instant remedy, but there is a way. Learning healthy eating habits and living a clean, healthy lifestyle in conjunction with regular exercise is the key. In addition to having balanced hormones, you must eat properly and exercise to lose weight or maintain an ideal weight. Three things must always be in place for weight loss: Eat right, exercise and have balanced hormones.

## The Simple Rules

The rules are simple; in fact, they may sound like something your grandmother might have told you.

- Eat five portion controlled meals a day. So in addition to breakfast, lunch and dinner, have a snack between lunch and dinner, and a small snack before bed.
- During your meals, your plate should be 1/3 protein and 2/3 vegetables (and add a sprinkle of olive oil or almonds for your fat)
- Avoid sugar and sweet snacks. If it says “low fat” or “instant” on the package, put it back.
- Eat all your vegetables and two fruits every day
- Get up from in front of the TV, and go outside and play
- Get plenty of sleep
- Drink lots of water

## Eat

- White meat (chicken, turkey, fish, soy, eggs, and lean pork)
- Colored vegetables (any vegetable that is colored (not white) all the way through)
- Hard fruits (if it crunches when you eat it, it's GOOD FOR YOU!)
- Liquid fat (olive oil, canola oil and fish oil. Nuts are good for you as well)

Diet and exercise go hand and hand. In order to truly transform your body, you must commit to setting up a personalized fitness routine and sticking to it. It's a lifestyle change. Making exercise a daily part of your routine will transform your physical and emotional body. Studies show that people who lead a life filled with exercise live the longest and have the lowest incidence of cancer, heart disease, diabetes, osteoporosis, and mental deterioration! Good nutrition and exercise are “the fountain of youth”.

## FREQUENCY

You should be exercising for one hour everyday. Recently, the recommendation for exercise frequency was increased from 30 minutes three times a week to one hour of cardiovascular exercise 7 days a week. This does not imply that the intensity should be difficult everyday, but that the greatest amounts of health benefits are seen in those people who make exercise a part of their daily lives. Exercise can include any activity that makes you break a sweat, including all sports.

## HOW TO EXERCISE

There are three stages of intensity when working out: Stage 1: not sweating and breathing normal, Stage 2: sweating but breathing normal, and Stage 3: sweating and panting. To get the most out of your exercise regiment, you should be at Stage 2 when doing cardio aerobic activities. This is where you are sweating (feel sweat on the back of your neck, not just your forehead) but breathing normally (you should be able to talk in complete short sentences).

It is helpful to know how exercise burns calories. There are enzymes found on your arteries (called Lipoprotein Lipases) which when activated by heat and exercise feed your muscle fat to burn instead of sugar. This is what is known as the “fat burning stage”. The wonderful benefit of activating these enzymes is that they continue to feed your muscles fat to burn for up to 15 hours AFTER you stop exercising. So,

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## GET THOSE ENZYMES WORKING!

To optimize this effect you simply need to exercise (while sweating) for over 30 minutes, and up to an hour is even better. Over an hour really doesn't increase their activity anymore than that. You should not feel like you want to "drop dead" after a workout, you should feel reenergized and invigorated. If you do feel "wiped out", you are exercising too intensely!

Cardio aerobics are of the greatest benefit when you do your exercising in the morning. This leads to a full day of that "fat-burning" activity. If you do cardio aerobics at night (or after work), when you lay down to sleep, the cooling off of your body deactivates these enzymes quicker. So, be an early riser, and go sweat!

## WALK BEFORE YOU RUN

If you're new to exercise-start walking 30 minutes, three times a week and gradually increase to one hour daily of cardio exercise. Exercise is different for everyone. Some patients can start walking one hour a day and build from there.

MIX IT UP - Varying your workout is key. Change your workout every four weeks. Always doing the same workout will create "muscle memory" so it's important to never let your body get accustomed to the same workout. If you are doing cardio aerobic exercise, try changing your intensity, or try changing to a different exercise or sport. You can return to the same activity after four weeks, because by this time the "muscle memory" has gotten accustomed to your new activity, and your old activity becomes new once more. If lifting weights, vary your routine by trying different exercises or different machines every four weeks. Moving from free weights, to cables, back to free weights is a simple solution to keep the body guessing.

FIND A BUDDY - Studies show that people who workout with a partner, work out twice as often, twice as well, and stay at it twice as long. Treat your workout like a business appointment that you can't reschedule. Carve it into your day. Joining a gym close to your home or workplace is best. People who sign up at a location more than one mile from their house have been shown to give up going sooner. Joining a gym is better than having "a home gym" for most people, because then you are not distracted by the constant activities (and distractions) that you have at home. Society puts everything else first and us last. Making exercise a priority will improve your physical, emotional and mental well being.

Helpful Resources: Body for Life, Body for Life for Women, 8 Minutes in the Morning