



HORMONES

Gemma Hurditch from College of Naturopathic Medicine shows you how to balance your hormones through diet

Hormones play a vital role for health. They communicate messages which tell our bodies how to develop and how to keep bodily processes on track. Hormones influence our metabolism, libido, weight and even the way we handle stress. Given the importance of our hormones, and the havoc that can result if they get

out of balance, it pays to ensure that we utilise our diet and lifestyle to support them for optimal health and vitality.

There are about 50 different hormones circulating in the human body and they all have an important function. We're shining a spotlight on just four of the major hormones that can have big repercussions for us if they get out of kilter.

Cortisol

Stress is often the biggest alterable factor affecting our hormones, so make stress reduction a priority. Cortisol is a particularly influential hormone when it comes to stress. When stress levels and cortisol are in a good balance, the rest of our hormones are often harmonious too, so here are some top nutritional tips to help balance cortisol:

- Don't consume excessive sugar on a regular basis.
- Favour a diet with a low GL (glycaemic load) and keep sweet treats to a minimum. There are plenty of online tools to help you choose low GL.
- Take probiotics and pre/probiotic foods such

as sauerkraut, kimchi, kombucha, and foods with soluble fibre such as oats and artichokes.

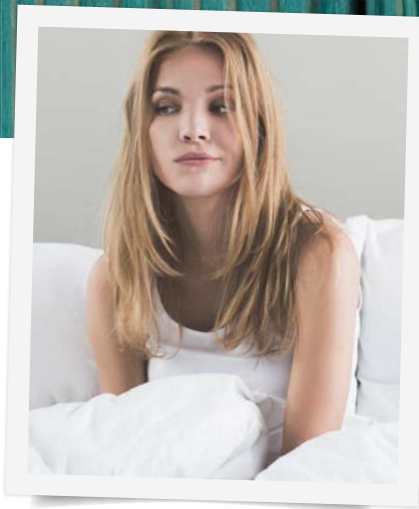
- Drink plenty of water and green tea.
- Increase magnesium intake. Magnesium is known as the relaxation mineral, because it relaxes muscles and nerves and promotes a feeling of calm, necessary for maintaining hormonal balance. Magnesium is found in nuts, seeds and legumes. Magnesium levels are also high in cooked spinach – cooking actually improves the bio-availability of the mineral. Cooking can reduce vitamin content though, so be sure to eat a balance of raw and cooked leafy greens.



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Sex hormones

Sex hormones don't just give us our male or female characteristics, they also influence many other things including mood, bone health and immunity. Issues such as premenstrual syndrome (PMS), acne and hair in unusual places can occur when we have an imbalance.



Oestrogen

In the world of hormonal imbalance, it is often oestrogen that is accused of being in excess. Oestrogen is linked to weight gain, bloating, period irregularities and tender breasts. It may also cause reduced libido in both men and women.

Beware xeno-oestrogens!

Various modern-day pollutants act as 'xeno-oestrogens'; these mimic the effects of oestrogen and disrupt our endocrine system, which is our vital hormone messenger system co-ordinating our bodily processes. Xeno-oestrogens are implicated in various diseases including cancers of the breast, lung, pancreas and brain.

To reduce exposure to xeno-oestrogens, stay away from plastics and styrene packaging, avoid parabens in skin care, reduce intake of fungicides and insecticides on foods by choosing seasonal and organic produce. Chlorine, nail varnish, non-natural perfumes and heavy duty cleaning products all contain xeno-oestrogens, so investigate natural alternatives and reduce use wherever possible.

Eat plenty of (preferably organic) cruciferous vegetables such as broccoli, cauliflower and kale, flaxseed, probiotics and fibre from vegetables, wholegrains and psyllium husks, to help normalise oestrogen levels.

Phyto-oestrogens

These are plant oestrogens that can mimic the effect of oestrogen in a much weaker way than oestrogen itself, which is believed to be health promoting. Soy is a particularly rich source. If you partake of soy, make sure you are eating GMO free, organic soy that has been traditionally prepared such as tofu, tempeh, miso and natto or soy beans (edamame) and homemade soy bean products. A modest consumption of these is fine, but steer clear of anything made with soy protein isolate (SPI) or highly processed products like textured vegetable protein (TVP) and imitation meat products. The manufacturing process is highly chemical and the refined product is no longer a natural food.

Other sources of phyto-oestrogens include lignans found in flaxseeds (linseeds) and sesame seeds, wholegrain and cruciferous vegetables. These may be useful to improve bone health and reduce cardiovascular risk in later life.



Progesterone

Insufficient progesterone is linked to difficulties with fertility and conception, anxiety, and in fact many of the symptoms that also occur with an imbalance of oestrogen. This is because the two hormones work in concert with one another and it is their balance that influences us more than the effect of one hormone alone.

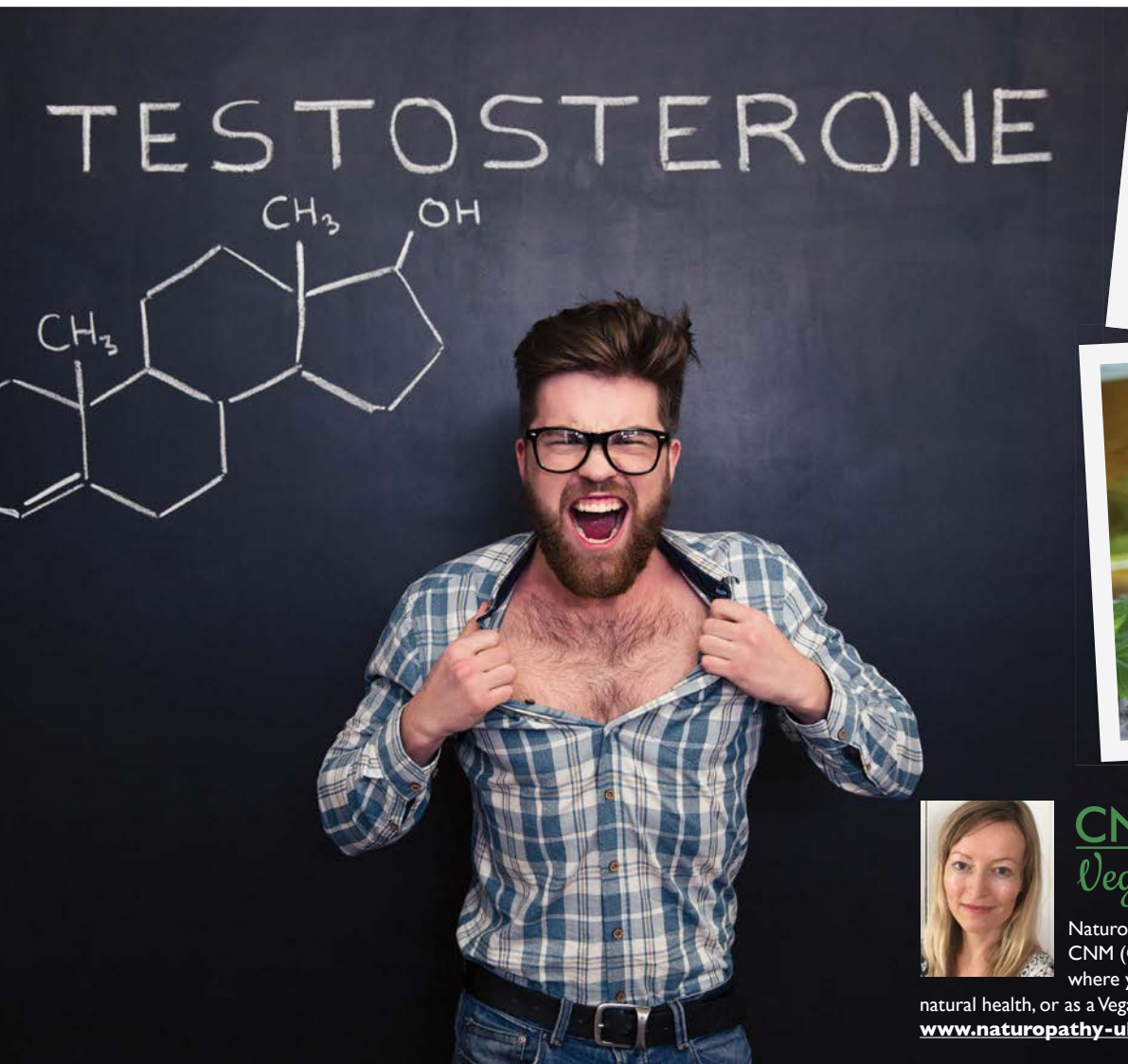
Progesterone can often be too low in relation to oestrogen. While progesterone itself isn't found in foods, there are a number of nutrients that can support its natural production. Vitamin C is a great one, as it helps not only to boost progesterone, but it supports our immune system and adrenals as well, both of which suffer when we are under stress, which in turn is a common cause of lowered progesterone! Try eating more red peppers, kiwi fruit, strawberries, citrus and papaya.

Vitamin E, found in foods such as nuts, seeds and their oils, wheat germ, avocado and mango, raises the progesterone levels of some women by increasing blood flow to the ovaries.

You can also try increasing your intake of L-arginine, an amino acid, as this will improve blood flow. Arginine-rich vegan foods include peanuts, nuts, seeds and cacao. Pumpkin and cashew nuts are particularly good choices as they also contain good levels of zinc. Zinc promotes progesterone through its effect on the pituitary gland.

Supplementing with vitamin B6 can also increase progesterone levels, but it's best done under a naturopath's supervision as the dose is quite high. »

Balance your hormones



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Testosterone

Too high

Testosterone can be acted upon in the body by enzymes that turn it into a much more potent form known as DHT. High DHT can cause symptoms such as male pattern baldness in both men and women. Testosterone imbalance is linked to polycystic ovarian syndrome, acne, hirsutism and prostate issues.

Spearmint tea and green tea, plus the herbal tonics featuring reishi mushroom, liquorice and white peony can also be useful in balancing the symptoms of excessive testosterone. Using herbal tonics is something best advised by your naturopath or herbalist.

Too low

If testosterone levels are low, typical symptoms can include the loss of libido, and erectile dysfunction. Once again, the amino acid arginine is advised for improved blood flow, (peanuts, nuts, seeds, cacao) plus zinc (pumpkin and cashews). Vitamin D is also vital for improving

testosterone; get advice about taking a vitamin D supplement, as D can frequently be lacking in the plant-based diet.

Food can make an amazing impact on the healthy functioning of our body. In tandem with beneficial lifestyle techniques, such as stress reduction, we can help balance our hormones and enjoy an enhanced sense of wellbeing. ♥

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