

FEEL-BETTER SECRETS

Balancing ACT

Get your hormones in sync and you'll look younger, feel better and breeze the menopause, says top naturopath *Nigma Talib*

Hormones are our body's messengers – they give orders. They're like the boss at work telling the cells, their employees, what to do. It takes very little of a hormone to do its job – and this is one reason why imbalances or fluctuations in their levels affect the body so significantly.

From my clinical experience, the more out of balance your hormones are, the quicker you will age. When they are performing well, you look like a grape – everything is plump. However, as the levels fall, everything sort of deflates and you become more like a raisin. But there are ways to keep yourself as grape-like as possible.

GET EVEN

Increase the green. Detoxifying vegetables from the cruciferous family, which include cabbage, cauliflower, broccoli, Brussels sprouts and kale, are particularly good at helping your body excrete oestrogen successfully. The magic ingredients within them are called indoles, which form compounds that bind to oestrogens and carry them out of the system.

Love your liver. Cut down on sugar, fat and alcohol, but also fill your diet with natural liver-supporting foods, such as onions, garlic and turmeric, and herbs like rosemary, thyme, oregano and sage. Avocado is also a food your liver loves. It helps the body produce glutathione, which helps the organ work more effectively. The herb milk thistle is like the superhero of liver support. It converts into glutathione, acts as an antioxidant and an anti-inflammatory, and helps regenerate liver cells. I recommend 200-250 mg of a standardised extract (ideally choose a brand that states it contains 80-85 percent silymarin) three times daily.

Sweat it out. Try to sweat at least three times a week in something like a sauna, steam room or via exercise. The skin is the body's largest organ of elimination and it's believed that regular sweating helps get rid of many toxins, including heavy

metals such as mercury. Heat is also calming to the body, making a regular sauna session a great stress fighter – but it also boosts the skin by opening and unclogging the pores and raising circulation. Try it and just see how much your skin glows afterwards.

Add some isoflavones. Found in foods such as fermented soy, chickpeas, alfalfa and peanuts, isoflavones act like natural oestrogens in your body – in a good way. They will lock into cells' receptors in the same way normal oestrogen does and trick your body into thinking your oestrogen levels are higher than they are. This is a natural and harm-free mimicry that can help counteract some of the natural fall in oestrogen that occurs with age. Don't overdo your isoflavone consumption though – some is good; more may not be better. Just a small portion or two a day is enough to gently support your body.

Eat the rainbow. The more antioxidants you have in your diet, the more protected your body is going to be from those environmental chemicals that you can't control. The more colourful the vegetables in your diet, the more antioxidants it will contain.

CHEMICAL CULPRITS

Absolutely the biggest factor unbalancing our hormones today is chemicals. Every day we're exposed to thousands of them. They enter our lungs via the air, our body via drinking water and the food we eat, or via our skin in the cosmetics and toiletries we use and they even appear in the clothes we wear or the furniture we sit on.

While, of course, not every chemical is harmful and not every one impacts on your hormone levels, there are a number that have been linked to hormonal disruption in the body. One group, known as endocrine disruptors, has been shown to impact on adrenal hormones and testosterone. There are many of these in our environment, but some of them you could be commonly exposed to include:



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Bisphenol-A (BPA): Found in plastic packaging, including water bottles, drink containers, yoghurt pots and microwave packaging, BPA also forms the lining inside tin cans. This is believed to mimic reproductive hormones, including oestrogen.

Dioxins: These are by-products of industry but we mainly encounter them via the food supply as they collect in animal fat. They interfere with the ways that hormones, particularly the reproductive hormones, communicate.

Phthalates: Used to soften plastic, phthalates are commonly found in plastic food containers and plastic wrap. They also appear in beauty products as they are used in fragrance. Again, it is suspected they affect the reproductive hormones – for example, women with the highest levels of phthalates in their system were two and a half more times likely to report disinterest in sex than those with lower levels in a study by the US’s University of Rochester.

Mercury: We are most commonly exposed to mercury via the food we eat, specifically in large oily fish. Mercury has been shown to impact on the endocrine system in five different ways, including changing concentrations of hormones, binding to testosterone and altering levels of the enzymes needed to create hormones such as oestrogen and testosterone. It’s been shown to affect the thyroid, adrenal hormones, as well as the reproductive ones.

Arsenic: Found in drinking water and foods – particularly rice, arsenic is a well-known poison which has been shown to interfere with the genes that control the production of stress hormones, such as cortisol, and also affect oestrogen receptors and the signals they send out.

Now you might say, “But I only use a tiny amount of moisturiser/body lotion/foundation, so how it can it harm me?” or, “But there are laws in place that regulate the use of chemicals that mean we’re only exposed to tiny amounts,” and that is true, but there’s now also emerging evidence that the chemical cocktail we’re exposed to each day might also have a cumulative effect on our hormones. Safety officials are right in their calculations that one chemical in a small dose might not have a harmful effect on your body, but exposing your system to eight or nine chemicals in mini doses together may combine to have a different more harmful effect. As such, attempting to reduce your chemical load is an extremely important step in trying to get control of your hormones and reverse the signs of ageing.

Extracted from ***Reverse the Signs of Ageing*** by Nigma Talib (Vermilion).