Hormones. The mere mention of this word evokes different thoughts from different people. For some, it might mean relief of tormenting hot flashes. For others, it might conjure up dreams of the fountain of youth and an increase in libido. To athletes, it might mean strength, endurance and power: an edge. And, others might think of hormones as a dangerous drug that could have something to do with cancer, stroke and heart attacks. Let’s clear up some misconceptions about hormones so that you may be better able to make the right decision for you about hormone therapy.

What is a hormone? According to the Medical Dictionary, a hormone is a substance produced within the body of an animal and carried by the blood to an organ that it stimulates. In other words, a hormone is like a messenger produced in one part of our body that goes to another part of our body and delivers a message. In this article, I will refer to our sex hormones, the ones that give us our male and female characteristics. For men, it is testosterone; for women, I will talk about estrogen, progesterone and testosterone.

For all practical purposes, there are three different types of treatment options for hormone balancing: natural, or bio-identical hormones; synthetic hormones; and phyto, or plant hormones. There is much confusion about the differences in these, so don’t feel alone if you have been bewildered by all of the information. If it makes you feel any better, many health care practitioners don’t know the difference either!

First, let’s talk about bio-identical hormones, meaning those that are identical in chemical structure to human hormones. They are derived from the molecule diosgenin, which occurs naturally in soybeans and the wild yam. Diosgenin is isolated from these plants and is converted in the lab to all of the human hormones: estradiol, estriol, estrone, progesterone, testosterone, DHEA, and pregnenolone. When taken up into our bloodstreams, these hormones are very physiologically active substances and have a powerful effect on humans. Some of these require a prescription from a medical doctor and some do not.

Second, synthetic hormones are, generally speaking, a version of human hormones with a twist. The molecules are manipulated and changed to make them more powerful, longer acting, and, in the process, patentable. Any substance that occurs in nature is not patentable in the U.S., so with a variation of a molecule, a pharmaceutical company can produce an exclusive product that is protected from competition for 17 years. These all require a prescription from a physician.

Third, many herbs contain constituents that may have some hormone balancing properties by weakly binding to receptor sites without actually altering blood hormone levels. In other words, plants do not contain human hormones, nor can our bodies convert these substances over to a hormone. Herbs like black cohosh, red clover and chasteberry tree, and foods like soy and yam have shown to be very beneficial to women during years of hormone fluctuation. These are all available over the counter without a prescription.

It is possible that the first sex hormone hit the market around 1900: the androgen (male) hormone testosterone, extracted from bull testicles. It was expensive, crude and full of impurities. Drug companies began to synthesize female hormones in the 1940’s and 50’s, starting with very powerful and dangerous estrogens such as diethylstilbesterol (DES), and over time have produced more effective, safer and lower potency estrogens and progestins, mainly for use in birth control. The most well known hormone is Premarin®, which is actually not synthetic, but rather is derived from the concentrated urine of a pregnant mare, thus its name. These non-human hormones are very effective in relieving uncomfortable symptoms of hormone change, but side effects are fairly common, often limiting their use.

Bio-identical hormones have made quite a dash to the forefront of today’s hormone therapy, for men and women alike. Several reasons account for this: baby boomers tend to seek out more natural treatments than their parents, they are more widely available today through compounding pharmacies, and synthetic hormones are questionable in their effectiveness. Bio-identical hormones give natural results and are individualized to you -- or as it is known in the industry, “tailor-made.”

Bio-identical hormones are derived from plants and other natural substances. There are no animal products, no non-human substances, no proprietary hormones, no manufacturing chemicals, and no pharmaceutical degradation of the hormones into artificial substances. Bio-identical hormones are always of a consistent quality, free of impurities and are able to be made in any concentration, where there are no restrictions as to dose. As all hormones are unique to the individual, the bio-identical hormones are the same as nature intended, so they make bio-identical hormones the ultimate in hormone therapy.

So, on your path toward wellness, ask yourself, “Is my body getting enough of the most essential nutrient?” This is what the hormones are about. They are the building blocks of health and vitality. By choosing the right hormones, you can improve your quality of life and longevity.

Sharon Willingham, M.D. is a physician at Asheville Integrative Medicine (AIM), located at 832 Hendersonville Road in Asheville, NC, where research-based health care, including mild HBOT, is offered. She can be reached by phone at 828-252-5545 or through AIM’s website at www.docbiddle.com.

BIO-IDENTICAL, SYNTHETIC AND PLANT HORMONES: WHAT’S RIGHT FOR YOU?

Sort through the hormone hullabaloo with Bill Cheek, RPh.
hormones have the unpleasant possibility of causing serious problems like stroke, blood clots and even an increase in the risk for cancer, whereas natural hormones, while not having the luxury of a well-done long-term study of effectiveness versus risk, seem to be gentler on the human body. Interestingly, several bio-identical hormones are produced by drug companies— Estrace® (estradiol), Prometrium® (progesterone), and Androderm® and Androgel® (testosterone)—so there is growing evidence of safety and efficacy with these hormones.

There is no doubt that when men and women go through andropause and menopause, the aging process speeds up rapidly. There is a wide range of opinions on what to do, if anything, about this. Several viable options are widely available in our country. First, you can simply let nature run its course as it has done for eons, living a healthy lifestyle through common sense and wisdom of our bodies. This would include using naturally occurring herbs and foods. A second option is the use of synthetic hormones, or thirdly, we can replace our hormones with those that look like ours: bio-identical hormones.

Other than alleviating menopause symptoms or as birth control, why would a person even consider hormones, you may ask? Some reasons might be on this list: libido; tissue integrity, including skin or vaginal; bone density, muscle maintenance, energy, motivation, hair, longevity and anti-aging. Also, there is a growing body of evidence, maybe hopeful thinking and maybe reality, which states that maintaining reasonable hormone levels in men and women can slow down more serious degenerative diseases like cardiovascular disease, arthritis, osteoporosis and even cancer. But for now, the best we can do is look at our options and examine our hearts to see what we want to do, making the decision based on the best information we have to date.

As always, good health for the long run depends on good food, plenty of water and rest, balance between work and play, friends and family, a positive attitude and a healthy spirit. Be well!

Bill Cheek, RPh, is the co-owner of Nature's Pharmacy and Compounding Center at 752 Biltmore Avenue in Asheville, North Carolina. He can be reached by calling the pharmacy at 828-251-0094 or through their website at www.naturespharmacy.biz.

**NEW IDEAS BRING WELLNESS TO NEW LEVELS**

Leslie Newman, Psy.D., explores new technologies and therapies that might make life (and good health) a little easier.

New products and technologies to assist you on your path toward wellness emerge on the market daily.

Consumers can find innovative treatments ranging from newly improved technology for heart patients seeking alternatives to bypass surgery to scientific advancements for those living with cancer that promise treatment with no side effects. You’ll also find new options in terms of the care of your biofield (the energy that surrounds your body) from innovators at BioPro Technology™, who recently patented technology to counteract the effects of electro-pollution and relieve symptoms of electro-sensitivity.

The innovative technologies introduced here are available right in our area. Here’s to maintaining and improving your wellness in this ever-changing world!

**IPT: Insulin Potentiation Therapy**

You can’t forget that fateful day—when the world did a 180 degree turn—and since then you’ve started living on the ceiling. Finding out you had cancer was bad enough, but the knowledge of cancer pals next to the scary side effects of available treatments. Lying in bed, you can’t move without the nausea hitting you, not to mention the horror of losing your hair.

But, Insulin Potentiation Therapy, or IPT, offers a way to deliver chemotherapy to cancer patients without these unpleasant side-effects.

**How does IPT work?**

IPT uses insulin as a means of delivering chemotherapy. Cancer cells have a hard protective coating (cell wall), making them extremely difficult to penetrate. That is why, traditionally, to breach the cancer cell’s wall, you need massive amounts of chemotherapy agents that “muscle” their way in. But, with high doses of chemo come high side effects; since chemotherapy is an indiscriminant destroyer; it kills all rapidly metabolizing cells. Cancer is the most rapid metabolizer, meaning it reproduces itself very quickly. Other rapidly-reproducing cells include hair cells and the cells that line the intestines and the mouth, which is why patients receiving conventional chemotherapy have side effects like hair loss, nausea and vomiting.

“With IPT, we use the characteristic of a cancer cell against it,” explains Dr. Joseph Rich of the Center for Environmental and Integrative Medicine, a provider of IPT, in Knoxville, TN. “Cancer cells love glucose, and cancer cells are the fastest metabolizing cells in the body. To differentiate that quickly requires energy, or glucose (sugar). So, if you want to create an inhospitable environment for cancer, you should cut out sugar and make your body’s environment more alkaline. An easy way to do this is to go on a low-carb diet. [In fact, the American Cancer Society cites obesity as a severe risk factor for cancer]. Now, if you already have cancer, why not use the cancer cell’s love of sugar to help fight the disease?”

And that’s exactly what IPT does. In essence, IPT uses cancer’s love of sugar to deliver a very small dose of chemo, directly into the cell, bypassing the hard, protective cell wall. With IPT, doctors induce hypoglycemia, and when the cancer cell is so starved of sugar and gladly opens its doors (glucose receptors), doctors deliver sugar (a fifty percent glucose solution along with chemotherapy), and the cancer cell lets
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