ARE YOUR HORMONES WREAKING HAVOC WITH YOUR HEALTH?
HERE ARE 4 WAYS TO BRING EVERYTHING BACK INTO BALANCE:
SEE THE SYMPTOM TROUBLESHOOTER ON P. 46 FOR A LIST OF
NATURAL ALTERNATIVES FOR EVERYDAY COMPLAINTS

By Vera Tweed

Any woman who experiences hot flashes, menstrual cramps or PMS knows that something is awry with her hormones, but many other symptoms may be less obvious. Allergies, aches and pains, fatigue, poor sleep, memory lapses, low libido, sugar cravings and stubborn fat that won’t budge despite your best diet and exercise efforts are among these.

Simply put, all or most of what ails you has a hormonal connection. Addressing the situation may seem overwhelming because the interplay of hormones is complex, but the basics are simple: Problems arise when hormones are out of balance, where levels of some are too high and others are too low.

Rather than trying to manipulate individual hormones, you can establish and maintain a balance with the right nutrition and exercise. If that doesn’t do the trick, you can try some specific natural remedies and, for a customized program, see a health professional and get your hormone levels tested.
## Women's Health Symptom Troubleshooter

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<th>Health Benefits &amp; Symptoms</th>
<th>Natural Options to Try</th>
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<td>Carb cravings; blood sugar balance</td>
<td>Chromium: 200–600mcg daily.</td>
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| Hormonal balance | Soy isoflavone supplements: Start with 40mg daily.  
Indole-3-carbinol: 300–500mg daily. |
| Adrenal support | DHEA: 10–25mg daily and monitor your reaction; if symptoms worsen, discontinue immediately. |
| More energy; cardiovascular health for women ages 40 and over | L-carnitine: 500mg daily.  
CoQ10: 100–200mg of a dry form, or approximately one-third this amount in a softgel capsule form, which is more concentrated. |
| Yeast infections | Prebiotics (take per product directions) and yogurt containing live bacteria. Also, avoid sugar. |
| Urinary tract infections | Cranberry juice extract in a pill: 300–400mg twice daily.  
Pure unsweetened cranberry juice: 8–16 oz daily.  
Bioflavonoids: Follow product directions; can be taken in a combination product with vitamin C.  
Note: To prevent UTIs, go to the bathroom after having sex, to eliminate toxins and bacteria from the urinary tract. |

### Menopause symptoms

The North American Menopause Society suggests that for menopausal women, eating whole soy foods may be beneficial in the following daily amounts:

- to reduce cholesterol: 50mg.
- to strengthen blood vessels and possibly improve blood pressure: 40–80mg.
- for bone health: 50mg.
- to reduce hot flashes: 40–80mg.

**Soy isoflavones** are also available as supplements. In foods, it is estimated that 2 grams of soy protein contain approximately 1 gram of isoflavones. However, isoflavone content of specialty soy products, such as protein powders, bars, pastas or snack foods, varies so check the product label.

The herb red clover also contains isoflavones. In clinical studies, some formulations of red clover supplements have been found to reduce hot flashes. Dosages vary, depending on the product.
1. Identify Your Hormonal Triggers

Estrogen and progesterone typically come to mind as the "female" hormones, but insulin and cortisol are just as important. "It really has to be a symphony of hormones, and these four are the major players," says Alicia Stanton, MD, a gynecologist who takes an integrative approach in her Hartford, CT, practice.

In the typical American lifestyle, diets full of sugar and refined carbohydrates combined with stress trigger a cycle that begins with either insulin or cortisol malfunctioning and results in an imbalance between estrogen and progesterone. This is how Stanton explains these hormone-disrupting scenarios:

The sugar-shock trigger: After we eat, food is turned into blood sugar. Insulin is the hormone with the job of transporting this blood sugar to cells, where it is used as energy. If we eat too many starchy, sugary, refined foods, these turn to blood sugar very rapidly, creating an overload. In response, insulin levels spike abnormally high, which drives the sugar out of the blood and into the cells so blood sugar levels nosedive.

"If blood sugar levels are too low, it is a great stress on the brain. This causes cortisol to kick in," says Stanton. The brain needs blood sugar as food, and ultra-low levels of that fuel trigger cortisol as a backup system.

The "fight or flight" hormone, cortisol, produces blood sugar from muscle and bone (which leads to breakdown). But there's another problem: Our bodies use progesterone as a building block to make cortisol, thereby depleting progesterone and disrupting its balance with estrogen.

The stress trigger: "High stress creates a need for higher levels of cortisol," says Stanton. Again, progesterone is depleted and an estrogen-progesterone imbalance occurs.

"As a society," says Stanton, "women are progesterone deficient." However, in a small percentage of cases, low estrogen levels are the culprit.

2. Learn Why Sleep Is Vital

Stanton recommends getting at least eight hours' sleep each night for several reasons. Sleep enables insulin to function better. Also while sleeping, our bodies produce growth hormone, which we need for sustaining energy levels and lean muscle tissue, and for avoiding unnecessary fat gain as we age. Further, our adrenal glands are replenished during sleep.

Adrenal glands produce cortisol, and

WHILE SLEEPING, OUR BODIES PRODUCE GROWTH HORMONE, WHICH WE NEED FOR SUSTAINING ENERGY LEVELS.
if our bodies are producing elevated levels of the hormone over prolonged periods of time, the glands may become exhausted. This leads to fatigue-related cravings, bloating, low libido, sluggish metabolism, dry, brittle hair, constipation and PMS. DHEA helps in some situations but in others can worsen adrenal fatigue. Adequate sleep is always beneficial.

3. Look at Foods and Supplements
To prevent hormone imbalance triggers, Stanton recommends eating lean proteins, unrefined high-fiber carbohydrates such as vegetables, and healthy fats. Skip sugar and refined foods, and eat small meals or snacks every two to three hours to keep blood sugar stable. In times of stress, increase lean protein, B complex and vitamin C, and try progesterone cream and DHEA.

If you're introducing soy foods into your diet, she advises starting with small amounts per day, such as an 8-ounce glass of soy milk, 2 ounces of tofu or one serving of a soy protein powder or nutrition bar. "The American way is to megadose, but it's not the way to go," she cautions. "Japanese women eat small amounts of soy each day throughout their lives."

Stanton also recommends a basic list of supplements and others for specific situations. When adding soy foods or using remedies for individual conditions, if symptoms worsen or fail to improve within two weeks, realize that the remedy is not addressing your situation. Try an alternative one or get tested to determine your personal needs.

DR. STANTON'S BASIC SUPPLEMENT LIST FOR WOMEN
Multivitamin: Choose a good quality product.

B complex or specific B vitamins: 50–100mg of main B vitamins daily.
Vitamin C: 1000–2000mg daily, divided into several doses; up to 5000mg during times of stress. Choose a product that also has bioflavonoids to enhance the action of vitamin C.
Calcium: 1000mg; 1200mg after age 50.
Magnesium glycinate: 400mg twice daily, or magnesium oxide: 600mg twice daily. If diarrhea occurs, reduce dosage to once daily. For other forms, follow product directions.
Fish oil: 3000mg or more; 5000mg when PMS symptoms begin.
Zinc: 25–50mg.
At every age, women need regular exercise. “Consistency helps maintain balanced hormone levels,” says Adam Cox, fitness training director at the Claremont Resort and Spa in Berkeley, CA. One of the benefits of exercise is improved insulin function, which helps pre-empt the whole cycle of hormone imbalance.

Cox stresses the need for strength training and that it’s not going to make you bulky. For maximum benefits, he recommends working your upper and lower body simultaneously. For example, do lunges or squats while holding a lightweight bar or small weights on the back of your shoulders, or lift the bar or weights above your head as you squat. Push-ups work your whole body (beginners can do them against a bar or wall instead of the floor). Pull-ups work the arms and back, which is critical for good posture.

Do strength training two to three times a week, and 20 minutes of cardiovascular exercise at least three times weekly at an intensity level that elevates your heart rate. Classes or videos that target flexibility are a good way to learn some moves.

If you have hot flashes while exercising, Cox suggests working out in front of a fan, as some of his clients do. “Exercise improves body composition and energy level, as well as hormonal control,” Cox says. It can also prevent you from losing 10 pounds of muscle per decade—the average among people who don’t maintain a well-rounded exercise program.

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