

6 THINGS EVERYONE SHOULD KNOW ABOUT HORMONES

A large number of the questions received from readers are about hormonal concerns. Dr Kim discusses why she is passionate about hormonal health, and why she believes in the importance of understanding the impact hormonal imbalances can have on every aspect of your home and professional life.

“Hormones are like music played in a beautiful but sometimes discordant symphony”

This description by New York-based gynaecologist, Dr Eden Fromberg, is one of the most apt analogies I’ve come across. She likens hormones to the musicians in an orchestra, with each having to listen to the others in order to play in harmony. “When hormones play too loud or soft, too fast or slow, and don’t co-ordinate with the others, the sound produced may be jarring to the system.”

Hormone imbalances are common, and many people - men and women – suffer with symptoms that can be quite non-specific and perhaps not serious enough to seek out medical help. Others are diagnosed and treated for something else (commonly depression), and the root cause of the problem may be missed. It is important to address imbalances as there are long-term health consequences from hormone deficiencies in both women and men – including loss of bone mass and an increased risk for chronic diseases such as cardiac disease, dementia and diabetes.



HORMONE IMBALANCES AFFECT BOTH MEN AND WOMEN

Men and women share most of the hormones in the body, including oestrogen and testosterone. What makes us different is that these hormones are in different proportions and our bodies react to the same hormones in different ways.

Signs of low Testosterone

- Irritability
- Fatigue
- Memory issues
- Difficulty finding words
- Drop-off in overall performance and endurance
- Inability to focus
- Depression
- Loss of muscle mass (and difficulty gaining muscle)
- Difficulty losing weight
- Low sex drive
- Reduced bone mass

STRESS HORMONES TAKE FIRST PRIORITY

When your body is in chronic state of survival mode, high cortisol levels in the body affect your immune system, energy levels, digestive health, and make you store fat. Addressing any other

health concern is a challenge in the face of poorly managed stress. Doing the right kind of exercise and optimising your nutritional state are the best places to start, along with some deep breathing exercises, meditation, saunas or red-light therapy.

Chronic stress leads to:

- Irritability
- Frequent infections and illnesses
- Fatigue
- Disorganised thoughts
- Poor sex drive
- Increased tendency to store fat
- Digestive issues

NUTRIENT DEFICIENCIES PLAY AN IMPORTANT ROLE IN HORMONAL HEALTH

Vitamin and mineral deficiencies can lead to poorly functioning hormones. Vitamin D is very important for your immune system, as has been seen during the pandemic. It functions like a hormone and supports your other hormones. In less sunny months everyone in the northern hemisphere is recommended to take a supplement. In addition to frequent infections, vitamin D deficiency leads to low mood, fatigue, depression and bone pain.



SLEEP IS A NON-NEGOTIABLE

Unfortunately, one of the first signs of decreasing hormone levels in women is difficulty sleeping. The consequences of poor quality sleep are exponential and can make any other hormonal symptoms worse. Chronic lack of sleep is linked to memory loss, poor performance at work, and in the longer term, may lead to dementia.

EXCESS BELLY FAT CAN BE A SIGN OF HORMONAL IMBALANCE

One of the first signs of hormonal imbalance is an inability to lose weight, no matter how hard you diet or exercise. A lingering spare inch or two around your middle can be a sign of sustained high cortisol, insulin resistance, oestrogen imbalance, low testosterone or low DHEA.

PERIMENOPAUSE STARTS AROUND 8 TO 10 YEARS BEFORE MENOPAUSE

Perimenopause is the time in a woman’s life when your ovaries produce less oestrogen, progesterone

and testosterone. It can start in your 30s, but you are most likely to start experiencing symptoms in your 40s, at the point that your oestrogen levels start to decline rapidly.

Some people are fortunate enough to have mild symptoms and respond to dietary and lifestyle changes. For others there is a significant impact on your quality of life and the people around you. Hormone replacement therapy can help alleviate short-term symptoms, but there are also important long-term benefits you need to know about: increased bone density, decreased heart disease, and decreased colorectal cancer. Risks are often discussed in the media, but are frequently misrepresented, and are best assessed on an individual basis with your doctor. ■

DO THESE PERIMENOPAUSE SYMPTOMS SOUND FAMILIAR?

- Hot flashes
- Difficulty sleeping
- Breast tenderness
- Mood swings
- Food cravings
- Loss of libido
- Fatigue
- Itching under the skin
- Discomfort during sex
- Irregular periods
- Decreasing fertility
- Memory loss
- Losing your words



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